

The challenges of Leadership

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I could simply say “I agree” with the previous speakers and sit down. But as Dorothy Parker once said after a long row of speakers had preceded her, “Everything has been said, but not everybody has said it”.

I’ll be honest with you. For the last few days, the Conference of Presidents has been traveling in Bulgaria, Romania, and now in Israel, and frankly I have had little time to prepare. I tried to write down my comments as we traveled. I don’t know how many of you are familiar with the roads in Romania, but I now have no clue what I wrote...

I approach this report as an optimist. It has been said that there is a fine line between a pessimist and an optimist: the optimist says ‘this is the best of all possible worlds’ and the pessimist agrees. I’m not saying that this is the best of all possible worlds, but I think this report puts forward an optimistic approach with which we can confront the world.

There is a story of three men who used to meet every morning in Tel-Aviv and discuss the news of the day over coffee. After twenty years, one of them declared: “From now on, I am going to be an optimist.”

The other two were astonished and asked him: “What happened that all of a sudden you decided to be an optimist?”

“I made a decision, and from now on I’m an optimist.”

“You know, you don’t look so good.”

“You think it’s easy being an optimist?” he replied.

It's not easy being an optimist when you are aware of the realities of the world, but I believe that the report forces us to undertake an activity that we engage in all too rarely: thinking. People tend to react to the moment, an event, a story, a report, or to external events. We generally don't have the luxury for the kind of introspection and contemplation that allows us to anticipate events. We react to what is happening to us rather than trying to shape what will happen. I found that this report, at the very least, challenges us to do some long-range thinking.

To Debate and Come Up with Better Ideas

"Prophecy," as an old Chinese proverb goes, "is very difficult, especially about the future." I don't think it's very easy to accurately anticipate what is going to occur. We can try to enumerate the prospects and determine the best possible course of action for each potential scenario. In this regard, the report lays out certain concepts and ideas that in my estimation warrant careful consideration. Although I don't agree with some of the recommendations, I agree with most of them. The bottom line is not whether you agree or not. The challenge is to get us to debate, to discuss, and to come up with better ideas. We rarely think long-term. The report compels us to think about what our obligation is to our grandchildren and their grandchildren, over the kind of world we'll be leaving behind to them.

In my opinion, you have to differentiate between universal and particular challenges. I don't believe you can generalize. Every country and community is unique, as each one has different circumstances, cultures, and issues, and this variety leads to disparate perceptions and evaluations. That said, the report offers certain fundamental concepts and ideas that each community can

adapt to its own particular needs, so that this is indeed a valuable exercise. I would therefore like to express my admiration for all those involved.

As was mentioned, the experts from the JPPI guided us into some serious long-range planning: As part of an exercise conducted in New York, we contemplated how we would respond, God forbid, to a warning of a terrorist attack against the Jewish community. What we discovered was that we had zero capacity to cope with this sort of situation. As a result, we embarked on a three-year effort to address this need. Today American Jewry has a fully operational system that enables us to instantaneously notify the leadership of all the Jewish communities across America of a prospective danger or false alarm, which is often as costly as the real thing. Our organization, Scan, has merited the recognition of the highest levels at the DHS (Department of Homeland Security) and the FBI. We have provided a vital service to our community and law enforcement authorities at every level. No other American group has taken such an initiative. In our estimation, this one experience underscored the value of looking ahead and anticipating.

Winston Churchill said that “The further back you look, the further ahead you can see”. Our sages said the same thing a thousand years earlier, as they understood that only those who learn the lessons of the past are prepared to meet the challenges of the future. Too often we ignore the past. We dwell on the *tzores* [tribulations] and tragedies, but we don’t learn the lessons. There is a famous line from the movies that goes, “You want the truth. You can’t handle the truth!” As much as we may have learnt and think we learnt, I am not sure that our generation is immune to the same kind of delusions and illusions that clouded the vision of previous generations, a weakness for which they paid such a heavy price.

I think that the lessons which can be learned from this report focus, first and foremost, on the question of preparing for future generations. This means reaching out to our youth; not with the *tzores*, but with the miracles and joys of being a Jew. This includes Israeli children as well. Alongside the history and contemporary realities of Israel, we must teach them about the relevance of Judaism.

It is incumbent upon us to reach out to university students in an unprecedented fashion by supporting groups like WUJS, Hillel, and others who are working on campus. Likewise, local communities have no less than a *locus parentis* responsibility to the students. The nearest Jewish community to each campus throughout the world ought to be reaching out to the students in order to make them feel welcome in the community. There are times, like holidays, when students feel especially isolated and vulnerable. They should be invited to synagogues, Seders, and community celebrations. We also have to assist those facing up to anti-Israel opinion, which on many campuses is indeed the prevalent view, by enlisting Jewish faculty and placing community resources at their disposal.

The previous speakers have already talked about the importance of Jewish education, and I agree with much of their sentiments. However, I want to add a few words about the importance of the language of our people, Hebrew. If more of the Diaspora's leaders were fluent in Hebrew, this would certainly enhance the rapport with their Israeli counterparts. I also believe that Jewish education should not be directed solely at the campus and our youth, but we must cater to adults as well. There is a generation of adults who don't know much about their heritage. How are they going to serve as an inspiration to their children if they are ignorant? I advocate the smorgasbord approach in which we offer a wide array of subjects

and activities so that everybody in the Jewish community can find something that they can relate to, regardless of how strange some of the topics occasionally seem to us. Once we get them to identify with the community, we will be able to expose them to all that Judaism has to offer.

To Reach Out Christians and Moderate Muslims

Jewish communities have to reach out to new and varied audiences. As in the past, we have to build coalitions with other groups, such as Christians and ethnicities, albeit with different paradigms. For instance, in Romania and Bulgaria we saw the impact that a united Jewish community could have in all that concerns reaching out to countries with which we have little in common. All those who participated in this past week's mission can attest to its remarkable significance and impact. Notwithstanding the credit ascribed to the "Jewish lobby" and the obsession many people have with it, we have got to ratchet up our political involvement. More specifically, it is imperative that we raise a generation that is more politically involved and sophisticated because in all likelihood the challenges they are going to face will be considerably greater than those of our own generation. Today, many members of the next generation are uninformed and uninvolved – many feel increasingly distant from our communal agenda. We took them for granted for too long.

Alternatively, Jewish leadership has to start focusing on moderate Muslims. A program is already underway to reach out to moderate Muslim countries and Muslims in our own country. It's not easy finding them, but the obligation to engage moderates is as crucial as the effort to isolate extremists. If we are serious about the war on terrorism, then we have to strengthen those who are the first victims of this war.

The paper didn't put enough of an emphasis on the press. We have to sensitize and energize the Jewish and Israeli media into doing more in all that concerns building bridges between Israel and Diaspora communities. In addition, if we are really serious about reaching out to people, then we have to go to where they are: in front of television and computer screens. When it comes to the electronic media, we are still stuck in the 18th century. The only way we can construct a meaningful and effective international Jewish network is by uniting the isolated efforts. Many individuals are endeavoring to create a Jewish network, but unless they cooperate they are doomed to fail. If we manage to integrate these elements under the same roof, then perhaps we can even establish an international Jewish channel with quality programming that will attract Jewish audiences from around the world, link them together, and constitute a major source of Jewish education and identity.

There are certain issues that transcend national boundaries, and the war on terrorism is one of them. This war will define the 21st century, but most of us have yet to fully grasp the true challenge it represents. Too often, American Jews don't get it and European Jews don't want to get it. Reports indicate that at least a third of French Jewry now seems to understand the threat terrorism poses, while Dutch Jews caught on quickly following the murder of van Gogh.¹ But the fact is that overall, as a community, we have yet to come to terms with the true meaning of this challenge: what it will take to defeat international terrorism; or the consequences of failure, Heaven forbid, on future generations. This is an issue that

1 Theo van Gogh (the great grandson of the acclaimed artist's brother) was a Dutch film director, whose film about the discrimination of Muslim women stirred the ire of many members of Holland's Islamist community

should, must, rally all of us together regardless of what language we speak, where we live, or the challenges that beset our specific countries. It is incumbent upon all of us to consider our common stake in the outcome of this war and reestablish our priorities in an effort to devise a meaningful plan of action.

Jewish leaders can formulate a legislative agenda that addresses matters like money laundering and transferring funds to terrorists. Together we can help initiate measures against countries that sponsor terrorism and hold them responsible for their actions. Moreover, we can encourage our representatives to talk about the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Although these are not uniquely Jewish issues, I believe that they will have a profound influence on our future. We also have to galvanize the discourse on the process which was launched at Durban to de-legitimize Israel and the Jewish people, especially the implications of the divestment and boycott campaigns that are aimed at all of us. Of course, the dangerous resurgence of anti-Semitism – in both its new and old manifestations – in so many places also demands our attention.

Poverty – A Global Problem of the Jewish People

We have got to work together to meet the needs of world Jewry. This can be accomplished by collaborating on a common agenda that identifies overarching needs. For example, poverty is becoming a global problem for the Jewish people. The percentage of senior citizens in our community continues to rise. As we witnessed on our recent visit, East Europe is home to a Jewish population with special needs. In addition, both Israel and the American Jewish community have indigent members of their own, and the cutbacks in public assistance have made it more difficult to satisfy their basic needs. How will the Jewish communities share their resources and

develop new ones to meet these demands? What measures should be taken to ensure that we are prepared to rush to the aid of endangered Jewish communities at a moment's notice? We have done it in the past, most recently in Iran where we proved that we can take on the worst dictatorship in the world and save thirteen Jewish lives.

Part of our problem is that we have succeeded. For the most part, the issues that united us in the past – Soviet Jewry, Syrian Jewry, Ethiopian Jewry, Yemenite Jewry, etc. – have already been resolved. These issues were ‘no brainers’ that were easy to rally around and stand together in common cause. We must now look for ways to turn the more contentious and complicated issues into matters of common concern, so that we may stand united instead of allowing them to drive us apart. For example, we should talk about quality of life in Israel and the Diaspora, and what can be done to improve it. What's more, we have to talk about Jerusalem “*ke'ir shechubra la yachdav*” (the city that was unified). Jerusalem's future is obviously a topic of utmost concern. We must inspire future generations to come by extolling its history, moral imperative, and the significance of *Yerushalayim shel ma'ala* and *Yerushalayim shel mata* (the heavenly and temporal Jerusalem).

Jewish leaders have to improve their capacity to work together more effectively. Relations are better than most say, as there is indeed considerable cooperation and communication. But the contentious exchanges in the media indicate that much remains to be done.

We have to find ways to respond to the call for more money. It's not that the resources do not exist within our community, but more money is being donated to non-Jewish causes. Vast fortunes are being given to museums, universities, and other institutions. It is largely our own fault, for we have not reached out and created a

framework that is more attractive to large philanthropists. We have to welcome them with open arms and make them feel that they can and should establish a viable and fulfilling relationship with us, instead of turning to causes outside the community.

More must be done to get different people involved. We have to bolster our current efforts and develop new leaders. This takes initiative and often courage too, for it is not easy bringing aboard young people, or other newcomers, who may be viewed as a threat to our community's traditional structures. As the report suggests, these efforts at renewal and innovation admittedly force us to abandon some of our old ways of doing things.

Mr. Hoffman already mentioned the proposal calling for the establishment of a "Second House." I disagree with the specific format laid forth in the report. "It may now be time," the report states, "to further institutionalize the values of Israel's ambition to be the democratic state of the Jewish people as a whole, and not only of its citizens. To begin with, Israel should grant formal consultative status to a global Jewish body – based on existing organizations such as the Jewish Agency and the World Jewish Congress – that would be involved in any Israeli decision-making processes that bear relevance to the Jewish people and their future."

Israel and the Diaspora Are Not Equal

I agree with the report and President Katzav that some sort of structure should be set up for fostering dialogue and meaningful consultations. However, the proposed House should not, in my opinion, be conferred with any legislative duties whatsoever. Israel and the Diaspora are not equal. We are voluntary communities, whereas Israel is an independent state. We cannot be equal partners, nor can we institute a "Second House" to the Knesset. Just from a

logistical standpoint, it would be nearly impossible to set up such a body. Who would be elected? How would they be elected? If you thought the Iraqi elections were tough, try and hold elections like this in the Jewish community. Furthermore, in countries where the accusation of dual loyalty remains a challenge, the Second House will most certainly be used against us.

Instead, we ought to try and construct a meaningful international forum that would also allow people from outside the formal structure of the community to take part. A construct is needed that would bring the best minds to bear on the vital issues raised in this report. The input of our intellectuals would enable us to develop serious approaches for meeting the challenges that lay ahead.

Naturally, there is not enough time for me to address all the issues and concerns raised in the report, but one basic fact is clear. It is the unique combination of Israel – an independent state with all its resources, including the IDF, the Air Force, and the ability to provide safe haven – working together with the Diaspora communities, particularly American Jewry, which enabled us to save Soviet Jews, Syrian Jews, Ethiopian Jews, and others in dire circumstances. Diaspora Jewry can and must play an important role and share responsibility with Israel. As noted in a recent assessment of the Israeli National Security Council, the Diaspora is a vital part of the country's strategic assets. It is not just our political clout, but our work in *hasbara*²/advocacy, the money we give, our critical involvement in initiatives like the twinning programs³, investment

2 *Hasbara* is a Hebrew term that roughly means explaining the country's policies to the international community

3 Financial assistance that was given to Argentinean Jews seeking to leave the country in the wake of the financial crisis that began in 1999

in Israeli businesses, and our support for institutions of every shape and kind. It is this unique combination that has made the “miracles” possible. In fact, the leaders of virtually every country that we meet with are jealous of the fact that Israel possesses this incredible asset, the Diaspora.

The Israeli government’s consideration for the needs and concerns of Diaspora communities must be improved, but these cannot become determinant factors in the formulation of Israeli policy. Although the report correctly asserts that the Israeli government often fails to adequately take into account the impact its decisions have on the Diaspora, this does not logically lead to the conclusion that our needs should be a determinant factor. A state has to make decisions that are predicated on all its interests and an in-depth analysis of the full range of relevant factors. In Israel’s case, this should include the welfare of Jewish communities throughout the world.

Globalization is obviously a major worldwide phenomenon, which influences the Jewish world as well. We have to confront this reality, for globalization presents both opportunities and dangers. To meet the challenges of this dynamic new era, we have to maintain our uniqueness – the self-determination of individual Jewish communities – while fostering a high level of cooperation and even integration between Israel and the Diaspora.

Unity, Not Homogeneity

Above all, my speech is a plea for Jewish unity, not homogeneity. The whole of the Jewish people is far more than the sum of its parts. We are cognizant of the fact that we share a single faith and fate. The Jewish people have learned this time and again throughout our long history. Consequently, we have to set our priorities in a manner

that enables us to protect all Jews wherever they may be. When one part of our nation is endangered, all of us are at risk.

It is not enough to address anti-Semitism and the threats or incitement of Islamist fundamentalism. We also have to look at the positive and pave the way towards a creative Jewish future, one that extols the beauty and significance of our heritage, history, and traditions, and allows us to learn the lessons of the past so that we may build a better future for all our children.

When Moses passed the leadership mantle on to Joshua, he ordered his successor to be “*chazak ve’amatz*,” strong and courageous. In essence, Moses instructed Joshua to resolutely stick by his convictions and display the courage to act on them. Many leaders have strong convictions but lack courage, while others have courage but no convictions. A true Jewish leader must possess both of these virtues. A Jewish leader must be able to discern the challenges, admit failures, recognize opportunities, and act, even when it isn’t comfortable or easy. This report forces us to do all the above. The time has come to draw on our convictions and muster up the courage to act.

Remarks of Yehezkel Dror

The danger of an inter-generational rupture within the ranks of the Jewish nation is a most serious problem that has yet to command the attention it deserves. The older generation, which experienced and took part in the seminal events that shaped the face of the world, must find a way to relate to a generation for whom these same events are mere pages in a history book.

Allow me, then, to introduce three ideas that will be highlighted in the upcoming report:

- a. The establishment of a mandatory quota whereby 35% of all the leaders of Jewish organizations must be no more than 35 years of age.
- b. An academy for young Jewish leadership should be established on an international scale.
- c. How do we present our traditional values to the young “net” generation in a creative and enticing manner? Levinas embarked on this sort of an effort in France, but more time is needed to determine whether his labors have borne fruit. We must acknowledge the fact that our problems won’t be solved by continuing ‘with more of the same,’ even if we upload it onto the internet.