

U.S. JEWISH PHILANTHROPY FACES NEW CHALLENGE

American organizations that solicit charitable funds for local and overseas Jewish causes are confronted with two major trends: a) an increasing percentage of contributions is allocated to local needs, and less to Israel; and b) donors are beginning to designate their philanthropic funds for specific Israel causes and projects, at the expense of klal Yisrael purposes.

Focusing on the latter challenge, Dr. John Ruskay, senior vice-president of the Joint United Jewish Appeal-Federation Campaign in New York, calls for a greater understanding of the local Federation's role in servicing Jewish groups that do not benefit from direct donations, and that would be in great trouble if not for centralized Federation allotments. The rationale for this traditional approach is the talmudic maxim: "All Jews are responsible for one another" (Shavuot 39a) — whether in the United States, Israel, or other countries (through the Joint Distribution Committee — recipient of Federation and United Jewish Appeal funding). His comments are excerpts from an address delivered in New York City in 1996.

In response to his presentation, Dr. Paula Hyman, Professor of Modern Jewish History at Yale University, raises questions about Federation priorities and encourages direct contributions to Jewish causes both in America and Israel — while advocating a balanced pattern of philanthropy. The article is a shortened version of her remarks, addressed to Dr. Ruskay's audience.

THE RATIONALE FOR CENTRALIZED FUNDING

John Ruskay

What logic, values, and imperatives can we assert in defense of the communal endeavor as against the growing inclination of donors to indulge their own preferences, to underwrite their own understandings, values and tastes?

After citing a list of local Federation-assisted welfare, educational, recreational, family services, and joint synagogue-Federation projects and agencies — "The existence of such agencies depends critically on a [united] campaign. The communities served by [them] simply do not have the resources to support them" — Ruskay turns to Federation funds directed to overseas "rescue and resettlement."

Half of our overseas funds are now used in the former Soviet Union where JDC is feeding 70,000 Russian Jews and where we support 135 Jewish schools; we helped 18,000 Russians attend summer camp last summer; and our funds continue the miraculous work of helping Russian Jews make their way to freedom. Just a decade ago, we celebrated when 4,000 to 5,000 Soviet Jews were rescued each year. This year, over 60,000 Russian Jews will be assisted and guided in their journey to leave and establish new lives in Israel, here, or elsewhere — yet this ongoing saga is rarely covered in the general or Jewish media.

[Ruskay's focus on Israel inevitably included Yossi Beilin's provocative statement that the Jewish state no longer required American Jewish philanthropy.]

Even beyond Beilin's fundamental error in assuming that a rising GNP puts an end to the need for philanthropy, there is for us the matter of Diaspora-Israel relations. Do we, as a North American Jewish community, want to continue to participate philanthropically in the rescue and resettlement of Jews from the former Soviet Union, or do we say instead that each part of the people Israel is responsible only for its own? Do we, the Jews of North America, accept as irreversible the present drift in Diaspora-Israel relations, or will we create a fabric of relationships between ourselves and Israelis in philanthropy, in culture, in matters of the environment, in economic development, perhaps above all, in fostering pluralism and tolerance among Jews and among Jewish and Arab Israelis?

Beyond the need for dollars to support tangible services and institutions in Israel, is it not time for some influential Israeli opinion leaders to speak up on behalf of international Jewish philanthropy as an expression of Jewish peoplehood, as an expression of collective responsibility — and then proceed to consider ways in which both the people and State of Israel might now, from its newly strengthened position, provide support for the American Jewish community? *Kol Yisrael areivim zeh ba'zeh* cuts both ways, does it not?

A UNITED CAMPAIGN VS. DESIGNATED PRIVATE DONATIONS

Our work and our agenda are being challenged on at least four fronts:

First, the conditions that fostered the explosive growth of the Federation system post-1967 — communities requiring rescue, widespread anti-Semitism, and particularly "Israel at risk" — have changed, and for the better. We are, in a sense, suffering from our success: the old slogans no longer suffice.

Second, support for a vulnerable Israel in chronic crisis engendered widespread consensus that was easily communicated and was reinforced daily in the media. The present agenda is more nuanced and diffuse. This represents a prodigious communications challenge.

Third, the world of general American philanthropy has opened its doors to America's Jews and welcomed us warmly. Whether this reflects a new level of acceptance that warrants celebration or a decision to come to where the money is, the fact remains that whether one peruses programs at Lincoln Center or views the names on new wings of major museums, universities, and hospitals, Jewish checkbooks are very much in evidence. Competition is intense for the Jewish philanthropic dollar.

Finally, and to my way of thinking most troubling, are emerging trends in Jewish philanthropy. A number of Jewish philanthropists are beginning to question whether to continue providing regular significant support for the total community, for our common communal enterprise. They prefer to direct their major giving to those institutions with which they feel a closer personal association.

In one sense, their insistence on personal agendas is to be welcomed. Developing more focused philanthropic agendas, reflecting individual concerns and values, can strengthen Jewish life here and in Israel. This is not an "either-or" choice. But if we cannot make a persuasive case for the collective endeavor, the new trend will have exceedingly harmful consequences.

Let me be more specific here. If these emerging trends were to become the norm, the institutions with which I have been associated personally and professionally for decades will thrive. I refer, as examples, to the Heschel School, the 92nd Street Y, the Jewish Museum, the Jewish Theological Seminary, Congregation B'nai Jeshurun — and similar institutions located in or with access to the most affluent Jewish communities in history.

While these institutions will thrive, others — community centers that serve the Russian emigré community; programs for the addicted, for the Russian and Orthodox communities; the work of agencies that combat poverty among the poorest in our community — will wither. If designated private donations are accompanied by reductions to annual community giving, or token communal funds are allocated for Columbia Hillel and the new NYU Hillel — who will provide core support for college programs at Queens College, Brooklyn College, and the New York state schools now being flooded with students from the emerging Russian emigré communities? What agency will serve college students from lower socioeconomic sectors of New York? *Who, in short, will tend to the infrastructure of programs that serve the total community if our most generous supporters shift to a kind of boutique philanthropy?*

There will be those who turn away from us because they resent the arrogance that infected the Federation world during our heady post-'67 growth, or because they find the structures and methods by which funds are raised and allocated too cumbersome, or too this or too that, or because they have long since become disenchanted with the Jewish Agency, the primary institutional context for the Diaspora-Israel relationship. All these negative appraisals may have been

tolerable when Israel was at risk. But Israel is no longer at risk, and failures that were tolerated in a time of emergency become unacceptable during more ordinary times. So we have our own homework to do and our own reforms to press. □

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NEEDED: A BALANCED VIEW OF CHARITABLE GIVING

Paula Hyman

As an engaged American Jew, and a student of Jewish history, I concur by and large with John's assessment of the problems confronting American Jewish philanthropy. My contribution to this discussion, however, will be most useful if I offer some qualifying remarks from the perspective of an outsider to the inner workings of the Federation, who is personally attracted to targeted giving, although I do participate in my local community's campaign (New Haven, Conn.).

The mobilizing symbols that activated Jewish giving in the past generation have lost their saliency because the problems that they addressed appear to have been solved. All that we have heard [however] points to the need for the Federations to combat vigorously the conventional wisdom that the traditional recipients of Jewish philanthropy no longer need us. There are still Jews in both the United States and Israel beset by the classic problems of poverty and adjustment to a new society, and eager for assistance. Most American Jews know very little about them. We would all benefit from a well-constructed public relations campaign to make visible the vulnerable Jews who are being served by Federation and its constituent agencies.

Still, many of us who are concerned with the issue of Jewish continuity hope that efforts in our families, synagogues, and schools will produce a natural sense of Jewish identity, an American version of that which emerged among east-European Jews, both traditional and secular. The best example of that sort of identity which I can give is a remark of my twelve-year-old younger daughter, a remark that I occasionally present to my students at Yale as a demonstration that being a Jew is not exactly parallel to being a Presbyterian. My daughter complained that she couldn't write an essay (for a non-Jewish teacher at her Solomon Schechter day-school) on what being a Jew meant to her because, she stated in one definitive sentence, "I am a Jew like I am a girl." I wish that I knew what in the combination of day-school, summer camp (which she disliked), many visits to Israel, and family culture accounted for her identity formation, but, like my sociologist friends, I do not. As much as we know