



Elkane

מוסד ון ליר בירושלים

THE VAN LEER JERUSALEM FOUNDATION

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Dear Josh,

When I first decided to send out a circular letter about our own microcosmos, it was not only in order to serve a political purpose, but also to satisfy my own urgent need to remain in touch with you. To remain in touch on these issues, and unlike our usual universal world of abstruse ideas and their physical embodiment in publications. Yet, I did not dare to hope that this would become a real exchange. Almost all of you reacted in warm personal notes and letters, and for this I am deeply grateful.

Since my last letter the major events dominating our thoughts here were Brezhnev's not coming, Kissinger's yes coming, the Agranat judiciary commission looking into the so-called 'fiasco' of the first days of the October War, the growing economic crisis (or is it a crisis?) and the various large-scale imaginative attempts to deal with it.

Let me say a few words about this last first. I am no economist and I cannot give you an in-depth analysis about inflation, the desirability of partial unemployment or the success of devaluation. But I can describe a few realities to you. When returning from the Center last summer we decided, for purely educational reasons for the children, not to have any help at home. Judith is doing, in addition to her full-time work, all the household and I am doing all the cooking (not any more only on occasions when distinguished guests like yourselves come for dinner), dish washing, etc. Now, this was a nice principle. As it turns out, had we not so decided for these reasons, we could not have afforded help anyhow, for financial reasons. Families like ourselves do not buy butter. A pound of meat (yes, I do remember, it's half a kilo) costs around IL 20. My net monthly salary as a full-time teacher at the university is IL 2,200. Thus, I can buy 110 lbs of meat a month and nothing else. So, you see in comparison, one could say that a pound of meat is \$ 20. We use our car as little as possible: a gallon is IL 8.-. Travel abroad, only when it is absolutely necessary, since the taxes are exorbitant. Both for personal finances and for national considerations, buying imported goods is almost out of the question. One entertains much less and if one does, we try to dig out the good old austerity-type recipes of making a liver-spread out of yeast, etc. Most people try to shop at the open markets (much nicer, anyhow) which is much cheaper. Schools and government offices (in Jerusalem!)

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did not start heating till late December and even then only for a couple of hours a day.

Now all this is not a complaint but rather an attempt to describe a state of affairs which, to my knowledge, is under-played in the foreign press and to some extent overshadowed by the repeated and disastrous large-scale financial scandals shattering our economy. When one reads about them one does get the impression of an idle, over-rich country well on its way to Levantinization. This diagnosis is wrong. What is happening is that we are facing a very ancient historical problem, much as the seventeenth century did when England opted for independent institutions with their own norms like science, finances, etc., while France opted for these social institutions with the sole *raison d'etre* to serve the political sphere. Israel, unfortunately, opted for the second. I sometimes feel that I wish that the main figures in these various mismanagements scandals were thieves or embezzlers themselves, so one could deal with the situation by simple criminal procedures. But, most of them are not; they do not get rich, they do what they do for weighty political ideals and they continue a system whose past great master is Sapir, our previous Finance Minister, who, at the same time, built Israel's economy. Our hope is, and for my part, also my belief that on this issue, the present government of Rabin with the unassuming low key and surprisingly energetic Minister of Finance, Rabinowitz, are dealing properly. But we are far, far from seeing a solution as yet.

Just a few words on the Agranat Commission. It was appointed last November as a judiciary committee to look into the preparedness of the Israeli army and the management of the war in its first few days. The reasons for setting it up, in addition to the usual political overtones of wishing to get rid of some politicians or to support some others, was the gnawing suspicion in the public that not only were we caught unawares, but that we may have been unprepared in a very deep sense. If so, who is responsible? The members of the Committee were Chief Justice Agranat, President of the Supreme Court; Chief Justice Landau, ex-Chief-of-Staff, the archaeologist, Professor Yadin, ex-Chief-of-Staff Laskov and Dr. Nebenzahl, The State Comptroller. From such a high-powered committee, people were expecting wonders. A year has gone by and the morale in Israel is still not as it should be. Having been caught unawares certainly quelled the hubris of the Six-Day War and that is very good. But, to have created a public image that the October War was an all-out defeat for Israel, is not only untrue, but demoralizing and in a curious way weakening the moderate political elements in the country. By now many tactical, administrative, mostly confidential recommendations of the first part of the Agranat Report (issued last summer) have been implemented, the morale in the army is very high and the mood in the country is much better. What people expected from the second half of the Report, beyond dismissal of some further officers (after the first half, Chief of Staff, David Elazar resigned) was a thorough analysis of political responsibility. In the political world heads of politicians were being chopped off in their expectations. The charismatic, now-silent figure of Dayan, was still in the middle; some hoped for his total rehabilitation and for a new campaign to put him at the head of the government, others, many, many others, hoped that he would be discredited for good. Whether wisely or in a very cowardly fashion (I think the first) the Agranat Commission chose not to deal with the political responsibility

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at all. In an 1800-page report, out of which some 60 were published, seemingly only recommendations on efficiency, good management, division of labour, and of responsibilities between ministers, chiefs-of-staff, etc., were outlined for the future. The furore is slowly subsiding and our heads may be cleaner for the future.

A good friend who visited here a few weeks ago, and who is very concerned about the fate of Israel has warned us that in the world, and especially in the U.S., Israel lost the image of the gallant, struggling, democratic outpost of the West, only to be replaced, not by a contrary or bad image, but rather by a bland, non-image. I admit that my personal lessons from my personal history (Second World War, concentration camp, Stalinist Yugoslavia, Israeli War of Independence and the following wars) have taught me not to pay too much attention to world opinion or to the image of my country. I am not saying this cynically or arrogantly, but rather sadly. Yet, on the other hand, I also have to admit that having a bland image has horrified me. Perhaps, in a modest way, what was said above, may correct this image somewhat.

And, into all this, Henry is coming once again. Since I happen to believe that at least Sadat if not the others, is interested in modernizing and developing his own country, and that his hatred for Israel is, to a great extent a function of lost territories, there is some hope for the present round of negotiations. Kissinger will need lots of imagination and maneuvering though, in order to instil some mutual confidence between Sadat and Rabin, a confidence which seemingly does exist between him and Sadat and between him and Rabin. It is an absolutely necessary condition for such a confidence to be created that Sadat must give some political written openly admitted concession or declaration in return for territories. Without this, all the effort will have been in vain. The feeling here is that the Kissinger policy may have reached a point of decision and that we are being put to face the hard reality. If this is indeed so, and the many senators and others close to the Administration visiting here, seem to carry that message, then we have reached a point of decision whether we dare endanger our security - which may mean our survival - for the sake of a slim hope of peace and security safeguarded by American promises. Again, I personally happen to believe that we must take the risk because otherwise, on the long run, we may lose security, whatever borders we have. Yet, I have enough empathy for those who don't share this view.

The step-by-step method advocated by Kissinger and Rabin is in itself of great stabilizing value. Incidentally, it was here, in the building of the Van Leer Jerusalem Foundation, that Rabin, at a time when he did not fill any official position, in a lecture, outlined in great detail his policy of "a piece of land for a piece of peace". I believe in that.

Kissinger is coming, and I have rambled enough. Once more, I am grateful for your responses and with very warm regards.

Your

Thank for your Middle East thoughts!
Love to all four.
Yehuda

Yehuda