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Two ideas 'whose time has come'

By JOEL ROTEMAN, Assistant Editor

Project Renewal and the Living Experiment in Israel program are two concepts "whose time has arrived", according to Dr. Eliezer Jaffe Professor of Social Work and chairman of Admissions at Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Both Project Renewal—the effort to upgrade Israel's 160 slum neighborhoods through a unique Israel-Diaspora responsa—and the Living Experiment, which is designed to encourage families, with local community help, to try living in Israel—are Dr. Jaffe's pet concepts.

As director of welfare services for the city of Jerusalem, Dr. Jaffe proposed the original "twinning idea" of Project Renewal—marrying the needs of a slum neighborhood to the aid and guidance of a US Jewish community.

"We began the first tours of United Jewish Appeal people through the slum areas," Dr. Jaffe, an ex-Cleveland who made Aliyah 20 years ago, told *The Chronicle*. The "we" he referred to were the social workers from Hebrew University.

"The whole concept of Project Renewal required personal involvement—this could not be hit-and-run philanthropy.

"Believe me, Renewal is not a fund-raising gimmick. Anyone who subscribes to the theory that since there was no war in Israel, this was pulled, is terribly naive."

There are four main ingredients to the uniqueness that is Project Renewal, Jaffe emphasized:

1. "All funds raised (what's promised here is matched by the Israel Government) go to a closed Jewish Agency account. It doesn't go to any existing programs. That



DR. ELIEZER JAFFE

Not "hit-run" philanthropy.

means there is a good chance of accountability. The funds don't get released until the next three ingredients are present.

2. "There must be an integrated renewal plan, from the bottom up, with input from the neighborhoods themselves. Housing, manpower, social services, etc. all must be included in the plan.

"It's definitely not a case of every minority making Shabbat for themselves," Dr. Jaffe added.

3. "No plan for renewal can be approved by the funding agencies (Federations and Israel Government) unless the residents 'on the ground' are involved in the planning.

"This is revolutionary for Israel, which has always been paternalistic to its communities and settlements."

4. This ingredient Dr. Jaffe calls the "greening of the Diaspora". This is the "twinning mechanism" whereby a specific slum neighborhood is matched to a local Federation. (Pittsburgh's "twin" is the slum neighborhood of Tirat HaCarmel).

"This ingredient might be the most important of all, because it involves US community leaders with Israelis at a grassroots level."

The importance of the grassroots contact apparently disturbs some. Israel's Labor Party, Dr. Jaffe revealed, has a party platform draft, "Under Shimon Peres' signature", calling for less contact between Diaspora and local people, but urging instead contacts only between Federation leaders and publicly elected officials.

"I'll fight that", Jaffe told *The Chronicle*.

Turning to his other pet concept, Dr. Jaffe remarked, "You know, ideas often come of age and I think Jack Meyers is onto something whose time is ripe."

Jaffe is referring to the Living Experiment in Israel and its chief local promoter, Jack Meyers, who heads the Israel Programs Committee.

"Until now, there had been no previous Aliyah program for families. Individuals had to declare themselves as olim before the Government began to help them.

"Also, the whole onus for Aliyah was on Israel, not on Federations or the home community."

Jaffe described Federations feelings about Aliyah as "somewhat schizophrenic. They were afraid they might lose good leadership people; they were afraid how it would look to American Gentiles promoting citizenship in a foreign country; olim were often considered odd-ball. They also maybe felt a little guilt. Another maybe: giving money to Israel ended their involvement; with Aliyah, there is much more involvement.

"Jack Meyers is way ahead of everybody in conceptualization on the Living Experiment Pittsburgh Plan."

"Federation cannot lose in providing aid to families willing to try living a year in Israel, not as tourists, but as a family experiment," Jaffe added.

First of all, Federation will be providing a service to its community. Secondly, he pointed out, those who return from living a year in Israel will be better involved and committed.

Thirdly, those who do decide on Aliyah will be better prepared.

Latest "wrinkle" added to the Living Experiment idea is an Israel-based Committee comprised of Jewish Agency members, Americans And Canadians in Israel (AACI) and "some outsiders".

"Each candidate for Israel living will be asked to draw up his own plan—who he is, what he's done—and must get approval of his local Federation committee."

While the local committee will help with the funding, both committees, local and in Israel, must okay the plan.

"No one will stay in absorption centers," Dr. Jaffe said. "All will be in rental housing, just like Israelis."

"What's best about the Living Experiment is that it gives you a chance to try out your hidden dreams."

Dr. Jaffe is a co-founder of Zahavi, the Israel Association of Large Families. He and his Rivka, a public health nurse and social worker, are parents of four children.