

A few weeks ago, Fredi Brown shared with some of us a poem by a non-Jewish Harvard student who visited Israel under the auspices of a group of Israeli students at Harvard, with the support of the Harvard Hillel. The author, Oliver Marjot, is a sophomore concentrating in medieval history from whose piece, "To My New Found Love," I would like to read a few sections.

I came to you, Israel, wanting to hate you.

To be confirmed in my reasonable European certainty of your arrogant oppression, lounging along the Mediterranean coast, facing West in Your careless American wealth.

I wanted to appreciate your history, but tut over the arrogant folly of your present.

I wanted to cross my arms smugly and shake my head over you, and to leave you to fight your unjust wars.

I didn't realize that you were broken as well as wealthy, fragile as well as strong. I didn't realize that you suffer from a thousand voices clamoring in your head, and that some of those voices care about justice and democracy and that some of them love their neighbors.

I didn't realize that a thousand enemies press on your borders, hoarding instruments of death, as chaos and darkness and madness consume everywhere you look.

I didn't realize.

I didn't expect to fall in love with you.

Your beauty caught me like a hook.

Seeing you, I see what Solomon saw when he wrote his Beloved.

I see the homeland that Jesus loved.

The lush green of you Galilee, the stark strength of your desert, the bold whiteness of your Judaeian hills.

I love the strength of your soldiers, the warmth of your sun, the joy of your songs, the peace off your kibbutzim.

I am not ashamed to say it. I love you.

This poem so poignantly captures the history we share, the emotions we feel, the beliefs we carry. This poem embodies our commitment to a nation with flaws and with unbounding beauty, to a homeland with a precious history and a dynamic future, to a love that expresses itself in practical Zionism.

But, our dedication, devotion and passion are being challenged by outside forces every minute, every day. Anti-Zionism increasingly manifests itself by the “thousand enemies on our borders, the hoarding of instruments of death, as chaos and darkness and madness consume everywhere we look.” Anti-Israel sentiment gains through evermore vocal, ever more clamoring voices expressing support for the BDS movement. And, anti-Semitism rears its ugly head not only as an expression of hate against Jews but as a symptom of an anti-Israel movement. The line between anti-Zionism and Anti-Semitism gets thinner every day. Last year, pro-Gaza protestors marching on a major avenue in Berlin chanted, “Jews, Jews, cowardly swine.” Demonstrators in France chanted “ Hamas, Hamas. Jews to the gas!”

The reality of these trends was brought home to me in February when, following our Hadassah mission to Israel, my husband and I joined a Jewish Agency

solidarity mission to Paris. We spent hours with Jewish families both in Paris and its surroundings. With shock, alarm, and dismay we were told about some of the same behaviors, patterns and signs which occurred in the 1930's manifesting themselves again- the shattered glass, the hurling rocks, the sense of vulnerability and isolation that pervades and permeates so many Jewish communities around the world. As we stood with a group of young French Jewish college students at the WW II Memorial Museum in Paris, the tragic sense they had that it could happen again morphed into a fear that it would happen again, and to them.

To say "we cannot let it happen again" is what drives so many of us to devote ourselves to find strategies, interventions and solutions that will secure a safe and meaningful future for our people. To "never have it happen again" is Hadassah's abiding purpose - to ensure the continuity of our people in Israel, America, and around the world.

It is the reason that we at Hadassah speak out and lobby on issues having to do with the security of Israel (such as the Iran agreement), Anti-Semitism and BDS.

It is for this reason, that we so preciously guard our seat at tables in the White House, the State Department and the United Nations when leaders of Jewish organizations gather for discussion with the President, Secretary of State and the US Ambassador to the UN. Over the past half a year our U.N. Volunteer team has participated on panels directed towards human rights, women's empowerment and Israel's security. A new educational program about Hadassah's role at the UN will soon be made available to regions and chapters to be presented to your membership. In addition, over the past half year, we have discussed with the U.N. the possibility of applying the techniques of Curriculum Watch to the UN schools around the world. Led by Sandra Alfonsi, Curriculum Watch as you know is intended to root out bias, inaccuracy and omission in educational content found in textbooks. If the history of our people disappears from textbooks, how will future generations interpret the Holocaust, WWII and the Israel-Palestinian conflict? An expanded Curriculum Watch program will increasingly take errors and omissions to publishers and state legislators to get corrected and revised textbooks distributed to schools in individual states.

As you know, through our E-Mail Action Network and National Action Center Hadassah engages members in advocacy for Israel. A recent advocacy alert, with

an embedded video by Marcie, on the Iranian nuclear deal sent to Hadassah's full membership, resulted in thousands of letters sent by members of Hadassah to Congress. Hadassah is still the only Jewish organization in America to have membership in every Congressional district. Through our National Action Center, Hadassah urged the White House and Congress to stand with the people of France against terror. Through the work of the PRAZE division, in collaboration with the Israel Action Network, we have developed "How to Talk About Israel," an updated guide to effective pro-Israel advocacy with sections on how to talk about BDS, how to present the issues and the arguments on the topic and how to counter verbal attacks on the issue. And, we have convened a small group of Jewish Women's organizations to collectively approach the female college and university presidents to speak against BDS on their campuses.

We are dramatically strengthening our networks to reach into communities throughout the country so that our mobilization efforts are broad and deep. The 50 State Advocacy Network- led by Penny Brandon- has been training Hadassah leaders, has identified captains to support our state representatives and has provided ongoing information regarding the issues both of an existential nature to Israel as well as our domestic agenda. Our "Day in the District," program being

ramped up this summer, empowers members to advocate directly with their legislators in their home communities. Visits will take place in districts during the Congressional recess in August and September. Our I2I program - Influentials to Israel - has been restructured to ensure more organized visits to HMO by Congressional reps, and better follow up in local communities to engage our members in meetings, briefings and lobbying activities. And, I am personally delighted to report that, we have established a renewed relationship with AIPAC where their trips to Israel will more regularly include visits to HMO, will involve joint meetings between AIPAC and Hadassah in our communities when legislators return home, and will include briefings on issues where we have a shared point of view on the American – Israeli relationship.

But it is not enough to speak about and for the causes we believe in and the future we dream of. As our candidates last night pointed out- We need to educate about Zionism and create situations whereby people can personally experience Israel and commit themselves to it – the only homeland and safe haven for those still fleeing oppression from Europe, South America and other parts of the world.

Our "Defining Zionism" programs are reaching hundreds of viewers each time they are offered and thereby bringing to our members and the larger community the opportunity to hear diverse views about Israel. And, our much expanded and better coordinated Speakers Bureau across our departments allows us, through the visits of HMO doctors and the presentation of outside experts, to bring current information to an ever increasing number of chapter meetings held around the country.

As the Speakers Bureau & Defining Zionism bring Israel to Hadassah, so will our new missions bring Hadassah to Israel.

Oliver Marjot's words are testimony to the powerfully transformative role that organized visits to Israel can have. We are now focusing heavily on providing specialized and targeted missions so that we can introduce and expose current and future generations to the land and people of Israel. And, we are planning a pilot for selected individuals to attend Israel as a leadership development effort. Critical to, and inherent in all the missions will be pre- and post-activities centered around Zionist education, development, membership and fundraising prepared by our divisions in consultation with mission organizers.

Our support of HMO and our application of its research and clinical advancements to programs in the US is the most central manifestation of our practical Zionism. But, preserving our past and guaranteeing the future of our people undergirds our continued support for Youth Aliyah and our continued programmatic ties with Young Judaea. I remember nearly three years ago when Simon Klarfeld and I talked about how wonderful it would be to have our more senior members share with Young Judaeans their observations and experiences during WWII and the transformation of Palestine into the state of Israel. Later in this meeting you will hear from Young Judaea about the oral history program that young Judaeans and Hadassah members are undertaking together. In this program women who have personally lived through the evolution of our homeland will pass on to the current generation the history and spirit of Zionism.

Recently, a group of us- made up primarily of the volunteers and the professionals in the Member & Unit Services division- met with all the directors of our offices around the country to discuss the strategies that have and have not worked in their communities to attract and engage younger women. Working from best practices, rather than from report findings and recommendations, we will identify

over the summer the most successful ways to reach this target population and to replicate them. We realize the concentrated effort it will take to again address this challenge but we hope that by analyzing different models we will have some basis for moving forward. We know that the engagement needs to be focused, project based, hands on, time bound and with an opportunity for impact. And we have things in fact to draw from- advocacy programs, impact projects like those of the HLF.

And as you will hear later, we are launching the second class of our HLF fellows, allowing us to expand the number of those who can serve as representatives of the values we hold and the priorities we espouse. We are proud that some of the first class impact projects intersect and reinforce our own domestic agenda. One example is a group of fellows who is working on developing an app with doctors at Mt. Sinai Hospital in New York that will track data on physical and emotional symptoms of human trafficking for physicians to identify when such individuals enter their emergency rooms.

Through the creation of a new external advisory council - made up of women from around the country who are prominent in their professional fields- we hope to

learn more about what attracts and retains other women of their stature. We thank you for the tremendous response in recommending names of which we received way over 100. Our volunteers will be choosing members of the council who can provide us with the greatest potential from which we can learn. We see this as one more doorway through which to open new relationships, new ideas and hopefully new contacts. We also see this as the source for the spokes people for a new and invigorated Hadassah.

Each time Marcie and I speak to you we describe how much this organization has accomplished and each time we acknowledge how many challenges we face that still need to be met. This is an organization shaped by its history and defined by hope. It is an organization that mobilizes around responsible action and practical Zionism. But, this is an organization that still struggles with itself.

You will hear another sobering report from the Finance division later this morning, with the message that you have heard over and over before and that is that we are in long-term financial jeopardy. We continue to draw down from unrestricted funds in our reserves because we are not raising the money we need to cover our commitments and thereby we continue to mortgage our future. Later on, Roni

and I will share with you what we believe is a reasonably phased process to reduce the cash flow deficit while investing in ourselves and to help build our future.

The Development division will report to you on many new strategies they are implementing to increase revenue. They will, for example, describe our expanding direct mail program, the second round of telemarketing and a new effort in which we engaged Blackbaud - a well-known fundraising data analytics organization - to identify potential new donors both within our entire membership as well as outside our own family. These individuals will be personally approached based on their giving interests and their past contributions to us and other institution.

But, the Development Division cannot do it alone. We need every one of you to serve as an Ambassador for the organization, to provide us with names, and to beat the pavements for Hadassah. And to anyone who says our product is tarnished and therefore unsellable, I suggest to you that our product is in transition to a better and more viable organization.

In order to help us better utilize the limited funds we have, we must adhere to priorities that were formulated through an extensive process of review by the Executive Committee based on the input of volunteer and staff representatives of all divisions. The process entailed a comprehensive analysis of every activity we currently undertake and those in planning and ranked according to high, medium and low. Organizational priorities were determined based on the highest identified items which fell into three groupings - Israel/Zionism, HMO/Health and Domestic Advocacy- and were shared with you at the last board meeting in Newark. While the weather curtailed the amount of time devoted to the discussion in February, many parts of the organization have embraced and are already using the priorities to frame their activities especially for 2016. What is so critical about the priorities is that they allow us to apply our limited resources judiciously and appropriately to those areas of strengths that can yield the greatest potential impact and the greatest return on investment.

Accompanying this - under the committed leadership of Laurie Werner - the annual planning process is entering its third year. It provides us with a framework to collectively determine those tactics needed to translate our priorities into action. Through the blueprint training, led by the Member and Unit Services

division, local plans are now more in sync with national directions, so that we can move forward in a unified manner, both horizontally across divisions and vertically through Hadassah's lifeline - our regions, chapters and units. And, in order to make the process more robust and relevant, our treasurer and finance division staff will for the first time, sit in on the planning process to help identify ways in which to maximize the funds we have against the plans we make.

We are also creating a structure that will be more flexible and supportive of the priorities we want to implement. Over the past six months, the Super South HUB has been growing as an effective infrastructure for regions to be more successful in reaching annual fundraising, membership, and programmatic goals. The HUB not only provides marketing, financial, program and event expertise to support leaders and members, but it provides with an opportunity to better analyze the value of doing business in a more streamlined, coordinated and consolidated way.

There may be other structural configurations that can also help to make the work on the local level easier and more mission directed. With data from updated Unit profiles, both volunteers and staff in the Member & Unit Services division are examining other alternatives that might be relevant for different parts of the

country so that you, our leaders, are reinforced in doing what you do best for this organization- to lead, to organize, to advocate and to build.

It is no shocker to anyone that we still need to communicate better. Externally, our new branding campaign has given us a real image boost and greater credibility as an organization that is more vibrant and modern. Internally, we have been able to create greater consistency and more targeted and powerful messaging through "The Power of Women Who Do," "The Power of Women for Israel," "The Power of Women Who Heal," and "The Power of Women Who Advocate." Our website has been dramatically upgraded and streamlined with its functionality enhanced and with greater adaptability to your communities. We have increased member engagement with on-line educational programs and the extensive use of social media to support an on-going conversation with a new and wider audience. And we are proud to announce that "My Hadassah"- our intranet portal- has been launched with a range of capabilities which we hope will provide you with the services and information you need to undertake the jobs you do with greater ease and more satisfaction.

Although we are engaging more, one of the most recurring themes we continue to hear is the issue of involvement- the need to establish a common sense of purpose and revived and reinvigorated participation- the need for every member to feel part of a whole rather than disassociated from the overall organization.

Our branding campaign cannot be an add-on to our mission. It cannot float abstractly above our activities but it needs to be internalized, realized and reflected in everything we do. It can be the driver that reflects and unifies us around our priorities. But it cannot substitute for a collective sense of belonging that remains our immediate and continued challenge- that remains the place in which we must invest in ourselves the most.

The dream that guides our every move and every moment- the need to inspire, ignite and re-engage our organization and still remains unfulfilled.

But, from Henrietta Szold to now we have always been motivated by dreams deferred that guide our future. For, as we know, it is no disgrace not to reach all your dreams but it is a disgrace not to have dreams at all.

And so, I would like to conclude my remarks with a poem by Richard McWilliam which captures our work at hand and the foreshadows the theme of next year's convention-

What is a dream? What is a dream?

A dream is a goal

An inspiration

A dream is where Hope lives

A dream is something to chase when life drags us down

A dream is a song in the wilderness

Good flowering from the mud of evil

That is a dream

Get yourself a dream

Touch G-d and pray

And never, ever let your dream get away.

As always, I would like to thank Marcie for making my personal dream come true- to work with her during her tenure and with so many of you over this three year period. Thank you all again.