

December 26, 1974

Dr. Yehuda Elkana
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Dear Yehuda, dear Yehudit,

Your note addressed to me at home must have crossed my official communication about our having to cancel our plans about coming to Israel next month. My mother also just called me - which pleased us very much since we did not have her new telephone number in Jerusalem - and mentioned that she had just talked to you. We are really so grateful to you both for your personal consideration and for all of the arrangements you have been making about our visit that your letter could have no other result but make us feel very, very guilty. But I am afraid it just really is impossible for us to go through with our original plan - not for any single reason but just the accumulation of a vast number of other small obligations and difficulties. As a matter of fact, just at the moment things are going very well at home although we had some horrendous problems with housekeepers and so forth but we are discovering that with all of the things that we are involved in that we really cannot deviate from a pretty constrained pattern of life and that gives us just too little margin to be able to do even something so delightful as the trip that we had been planning. I hope we will have a chance to explain this to you and that it does not leave a residue of resentment. Believe me, I know that you have gone to such a great deal of trouble in order to help make this possible.

One of my concerns is to have enough time to write my chapter for the book which I am afraid is going to be vastly overdue in any case and could not possibly have been ready in time for our trip. It is not bashfulness about not having it ready but just looking for the time that is the consideration here.

I have Yehudit's letter asking about the enzyme and I have passed that on to Dusko to see what might be possible there.

As to scientific matters, we also have Yehudit's manuscript which is certainly a good small paper but our collective judgment here was unanimously that it was so completely overtaken by the more recent findings that there would be little point in publishing it as a separate note. We are just at the point of finishing a good first draft of the comprehensive

paper and Ron Harris will be sending this very shortly to you for your own approval as, needless to say, you should be one of the principal co-authors. I think when you see it you will understand what we mean about the futility of sending out a small bite in the form of that separate note. As you will see from the manuscript, although in many respects the work has gone very, very well, we still do not have definite proof of an inter-specific transfer between E. coli and B. subtilis. But there are several very promising lines that may put the lie to that statement even by the hour.

One other line of work that I have gotten started with a new post-doctoral fellow, Betty Cohen, who has been out of scientific work for 10 years and is just coming back in, is to see if we can find better experimental material than we have been using until now in the laboratory. The main idea is to look in nature for those organisms whose rates of growth, compatibility with the variety of media, amenability to our other experimental procedures have already been selected for before we decided on pursuing a given line of organism rather than accepting what has been given to us in the past. Considering how much time we waste waiting for the subtilis plates to grow up and our problems in dealing with contaminants and so on and so forth, I think you can see what we are driving at. We already have a number of very promising candidates - not yet taxonomically identified - and if you have other specimens that you would like us to look at from this standpoint, we would of course be interested to see them. One of the desiderata is a very rapid rate of growth of the organism on simple defined media.

Yehuda was commenting that he has heard so little from me; perhaps I have to make the reciprocal statement. What was the outcome of your grant application for instance? What are your facilities for doing research? I almost do not want to ask you about the general situation that prevails in Israel at the present time although I know that you are likely to be less gloomy about it than we are. Well, I really am going to try to stay in better touch with all of you and certainly we think of you all the time with the greatest fondness.

Thank you especially for seeing my mother and for the arrangements that you are encouraging her to make, all of which sound very positive indeed. I hope she will have had a chance to show you some of the pictures of Annie and the rest of the family that we have been sending her from time to time.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr