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מוסד ון ליר בירושלים

THE VAN LEER JERUSALEM FOUNDATION

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Dear Josh :

The times are difficult and the mood in Israel is, to say the least, very serious. All of us, in addition to our usual work - academic or otherwise - are trying our best to do something and to be helpful either in advisory capacities and participating in committee work, or simply participating in the civil guard and walking the streets of Jerusalem. Needless to say, in our family the division of labour is as usual : advise and cook, while Yehudit is on guard with a rifle. This last is very straightforward and simply helpful. The other activity, advising etc. is very often rather frustrating. In any case, the burden of overwork is such that very few of us, and this is true for me too, do not have the time any more for leisurely reports and conversational letters with our friends abroad. As a result, together with a few friends, I decided to try to write a personal circular letter more or less once a month and to make an attempt at an honest description of what is happening here, what is bothering us and to share our troubles with you. Before I start this, let me strike an optimistic note; whatever the mood in the cities and whatever one reads in the newspapers, the best for the morale is to go on a lecture tour for soldiers in the Sinai or in the Golan Heights, or to visit some of the border kibbutzim or border towns where, in addition to their usual load of work, every man has to guard at least three times a week for 4-6 hours. Every such visit is a revival for the spirit.

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Events are moving at a hectic speed. Yet, in spite of the embarrassing richness of ideas, proposals and counter-proposals streaming out of Cairo, Jerusalem, Moscow and Washington, the recent events in the U.N. and in UNESCO are uppermost in our minds. True, when it comes to the U.N. it is very difficult to shock us. Yet the last events in the U.N. General Assembly and at UNESCO came as a surprise even to the most cynical among us. You followed the events in the newspapers and some of you even signed declarations and wrote personal letters. What I am not so sure about is to what extent it is clear abroad that what happened by the fact that the General Assembly gave the reception it did to Arafat is much beyond a simple recognition of the Palestinians as a "principal party" in the Middle East dispute. Of course they are a "principal party" and many of us - and I used to be one of them - thought that we had to talk to them sooner or later. This debate had almost ended in Israel. It is now crystal clear to us that two peoples are fighting for the same homeland more or less in the same borders. We, or at least the reasonable among us - and I dare to hope that we are a majority - do recognize and always did that the Palestinians are a nation with the rights of a nation. Unfortunately the Palestinians consider Israel as a curious brand of religious and racist fanaticism and not as a nation with similar rights.

What happened at UNESCO in Paris at the same time was even worse psychologically speaking. As you probably know, Israel was excluded from all of UNESCO's regional groupings and denied any UNESCO assistance until we stop the archaeological excavations in Jerusalem. These were, of course, phony issues. UNESCO's own experts have repeatedly legitimized in their reports Israel's archaeological work. The issue really was to vote Israel out of existence. UNESCO, by letting the Arabs succeed on this issue, became thoroughly politicized and corrupt. I do hope - I know this sounds awful, but I still do hope - that by this very action UNESCO sabotaged its own mandate. On the other hand, I think and fear that this is a preparation for next year's attempt for Israel's expulsion from the U.N. I wonder how meaningful is the slowly mounting crescendo of the protest against political manipulation by a majority on

issues contrary to decency, or even the charter of the institutions. We would like to think that the Arabs have gone too far this time and that it will boomerang.

As I told you, this is still uppermost in our minds and already Brezhnev's visit to Cairo is nearing and even the Iranian Chief of Staff is spending a whole week in Cairo; I am afraid not in order to visit night clubs. Whether we can weather the storm here it all depends on whom you ask. I personally do not doubt for a second, with all conditionals and academic-style quibbles and doubts, all in all I trust our present government and I fully endorse the present very severe economic reshuffling and austerity measures. It lessens the waste and the number of calories but it raises the morale and cleans up the many irregularities and even scandals which penetrated the fast-growing unjustified economic euphoria after the Six Day War.

In my next letter I shall give you a down to earth description of daily economic realities in Israel.

With warm regards.

Your

Yehuda

I think you should like to
receive these circulars. Please comment
on it if you find the time and
send me how to continue!

continue?