

Golda Meir Honors Malben

(The Joint Distribution Committee released this text of remarks made by Israel Prime Minister Golda Meir at a luncheon meeting in Natanya, Israeli, honoring the 20th anniversary of Malben, the JDC health and welfare program on behalf of aged, ill and handicapped immigrants in Israel.)

"I am very thankful that I was asked to come here today. There are many things that I would like to share with you, but I am afraid that some of you will say that I am old and only old people reminisce...

"My first real meeting with the JDC was in 1948 after the second World War. I had been here for 27 years but I knew well what the Joint did in Europe. Because of JDC, many Jews are alive today and many Jews are here in Israel today. I began to think of the JDC as one of the most important, vital elements in Jewish life.

"In January 1948, I was sent to the United States on a mission -- to see how far the American Jews would support us. I was not asking them to come and fight, I was asking them to make it possible for us to defend ourselves. I was told by somebody not to go to Chicago, where a national conference of Jewish leaders was taking place. It was not a Zionist meeting I was told, but a conference of federations and welfare councils. They were not interested in Palestine, I was told, they were not interest-

ed in the Jewish state. But I decided that since they were Jews, I would try it. I didn't know any of the people. But I shall never forget that meeting -- the warmth, the enthusiasm, the interest, and the response.

"I came for a simple thing: to get \$25 million in cash, in two or three weeks very simple. How were we going to do it? I said we would ask the communities that are in the UMA campaign to go to the banks, get loans, and as the money came in, repay the loans. But my friends in JDC said: "That's fine, but what is going to happen to our responsibilities elsewhere?" I said that all I know is that we must have \$25 million in cash. We argued a bit about it and then I said: "Let's ask for \$50 million. Then you can have your \$25 million and I'll have my \$25 million."

"They were very nice people. They didn't laugh at me. They agreed, and to everybody's surprise we made it. I remember the long journeys around the country with Bill (William Rosewald, JDC Vice-Chairman) and with Eddie (Edward M. M. Warburg, JDC Honorary Chairman) and with other people and we made it. Not only did we make it in January, but we made it again in May after the State was established.

"Today, on the occasion of JDC/Malben's birthday, I would like to note that there are several criteria by which a decent society can be judged. One of them is: how does the society care for its children? But that is comparatively easy. Everybody realizes that the young generation is an investment in the future.

"There is still another criterion: How does a society treat its old people? This is not an investment in the future. The old people can no longer do very much for the society....I think that had not the JDC come in and done what it has done through Malben for the aged, sick and handicapped, all the good things that we have accomplished here in Israel would be of no value.

"We have built this land....There are forests that we planted on what were barren hills before. We are proud of our young people. We are proud of all our people as they stand up to the most serious and tragic circumstances. Ours was a people that by all the rules should have been depressed and broken, both in body and in spirit.

"I remember when the children from Tehran came in, little children with their little bundles, not too clean, scared, and who, for a long time, had no faith in those who took care of them....I saw the people in the Cyprus detention camp. I will never forget those miserable tents and the miserable conditions and I will never forget the head of the camp, Morris Laub from JDC, and with him Leitner, who came from Israel. I wondered how they can live and how can they manage it? We saw the numbers on the arms of the people and we wondered can we accomplish miracles? We asked ourselves: can these people who have gone through hell really live again?

"The fact is that these people who were broken in spirit and in body, these children who had lost faith in everything and in everybody, have grown up to be devoted to their country, to have ideals and are prepared to give up their lives for these ideals. I cannot imagine a contribution to Israel that is greater, that is more human, that has helped more to create us and to form us into a decent society than the JDC/Malben programs.

"As I said, a society or a people that does not care for

its aged, that has no respect for them, that robs them of their dignity in their old age, is not a decent human society. I know that with all our understanding and will all our desire to help, it was beyond our ability to care for them adequately. I dread to think what Israel would be like today if so many of the old people had not been given a dignified, decent, happy home by JDC/Malben.

"On your 20th birthday, I want to wish those who are 90 and over, and those who are not yet 90 -- till 120. In this lovely JDC/Malben Home in Natanya I don't see

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To The Jewish Community



Hal Loew



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