

RABBI NORMAN LAMM
THE JEWISH CENTER
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NEW YORK, N. Y. 10024
SCHUYLER 4-3511

February 17, 1971

Dr. Jack Goldman
12 Great Marsh Road
Westport, Connecticut

Dear Jack:

I am writing to you and to a few other select individuals from among leaders in the American Jewish community and in industry and scholarship. It is my hope that you will contribute your prestige and influence to a proposal to solve a grievous problem in the State of Israel.

During my recent stay in Israel there took place the unfortunate Ashkelon car-race affair. This was only the latest of the many incidents that have plagued the State in the area of Sabbath observance. It is hard to convey the sense of animosity, of contempt, and of social disruption caused by this and similar conflicts.

Under the present six-day-a-week situation, non-observant Jews have only Saturdays available for travel, entertainment, artistic events, sports, etc. To be denied the right to pursue their interests on this one free day of the week is something they understandably consider intolerable. Yet to permit the open and public desecration of the Sabbath is to invite the de-Judaization of the Land of Israel. Furthermore, observant Jews find the situation even more onerous, because their religious convictions prevent them from participating in public events even in a limited measure.

It has occurred to a number of people that the only equitable solution is the five-day week. Eventually this system will have to come to Israel. But economists maintain that this cannot be instituted in the foreseeable future.

February 17, 1971

It therefore occurred to me that a way out of this problem is the restoration of Rosh Hodesh (the first day of each Hebrew month) as an official day of rest in Israel. This will add from seven to nine days (instead of approximately fifty as in the five-day week) to the current number of official days-off. During this time there can be scheduled many of the "events" now scheduled for Saturdays, for want of any other time. Religious and secular Jews will both benefit, the escalation of tempers and tensions will be avoided, and an ancient Jewish tradition reestablished -- at not too great a cost to the economy. In addition, these extra days of rest will make aliyah more palatable to Western Jews who, accustomed to the five-day week, find that the Israeli system is unduly harsh.

The enclosed copy of an article on the subject will explain the plan in some more detail although, necessarily, some important particulars could not be included in it.

The Rosh Hodesh Plan was officially introduced to the Knesset last month by Mr. Zevulun Hammer, M.K., after he consulted with a number of leading economists in the country. It was then assigned for study to the Labor Committee of the Knesset. Earlier, I had discussed the idea with a number of prominent M.K.'s of the Labor parties who seemed quite sympathetic.

However, the Minister of Labor has opposed the proposal because of his reluctance to add these seven-to-nine days off to the labor calendar. Members of his party will probably feel bound to follow his decision regardless of their personal convictions on the matter. So far, appeals to him to change his mind have failed.

The sponsors of the bill have therefore asked that prominent individuals in the U.S.A., who are concerned by the perennial religious conflicts in Israel, bring their influence to bear on the Prime Minister and other leading officials, asking them to intervene personally.

I am therefore turning to you in your personal capacity, asking you to associate yourself with those of us who are anxious to prevent these internecine struggles from jeopardizing the relationship of American Jews to Israel and to Judaism as well. We must convince the Government that the ultimate cost to Israel

Dr. Jack Goldman

-3-

February 17, 1971

of one Ashkelon affair, or other such hate-ridden controversy, is far more than nine work-days in a country where the population works six days out of seven.

Because the Knesset Labor Committee is preparing to debate the bill in the very near future, it is urgent that you respond at once, permitting me to include your name amongst other Jewish leaders -- from all groups, organizations, and persuasions -- in the telegram to Mrs. Golda Meir. You will find enclosed a copy of the text.

Please be kind enough to sign the enclosed blank and return it to me immediately.

With all my thanks in advance,

Cordially yours,



RABBI NORMAN LAMM

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Enclosures