

A Jew's Frustration

San Francisco is the "farthest away," the Westernmost Jewish community of size in the world.

As this sad, fateful week began, many Jews all over the world felt—among other emotions—a too-familiar sense of loneliness and frustration. Again Jews somewhere were fighting for their lives, and again, most of us could, at best, only help indirectly from a distance.

And San Francisco was at the greatest distance of all. About 8,000 miles from the Middle East and a few thousand miles from the centers of political action in this country. There are electronic media of communication and jet planes — but man's sense of space is not entirely obliterated by these technical aids. We are a long way, and somehow that always adds a shade more frustration to the question: "What can we do?"



Raab

The anxiety of distance was reflected in the faces of the people who gathered together early last Sunday morning at the JCRC to discuss a local communal response to the new Middle East crises. That meeting itself was an initial expression of solidarity. At that and subsequent meetings, there were the current leaders of our grass-roots organizations: the Jewish Welfare Federation, the Board of Rabbis of Northern California, local synagogue leaders, American Jewish Committee, American Jewish Congress, Anti-Defamation League, B'nai B'rith, Bonds for Israel, Hadassah, ORT, National Council of Jewish Women, Jewish War Veterans, Zionist Organization of America. And they were all asking: "What can we do?"

That wasn't a new question for them and they knew some of the preliminary answers already. What they had to do, they had to do together. Never again the shameful, tragic organizational fragmentation of the 1930s. And they already knew the difference between "motion" and "action." Action is a word which means "getting something done." Motion just means visible movement, self-exercise, belly-dancing. Motion, in itself, is not an action; some motion can be inaction; some motion can even be anti-action. Sometimes action requires furious motion: sometimes it does not. Picketing, for example, is sometimes action, sometimes pure belly-dancing.

Just getting the grassroots San Francisco community together in one place at one time is sometimes a necessary piece of action. It was true in 1967, when the community came together to express solidarity and to urge the U.S. government not to falter in supporting its natural interest in the Middle East. Several years ago, the San Francisco Jewish community came together again during the Leningrad trials, and in conjunction with similar meetings throughout the country, had some immediate effect on the outcome of the trials. So, last Sunday, it was determined that it was time again to hold such a community meeting.

But, while necessary and sometimes effective, these kinds of group action still leave the action gap that is caused by distance. There is not enough personal involvement to dissipate the frustration. Sometimes it is necessary to live with such frustration, to understand that some remote political action is the most important and effective job one can do.

But in a situation like this week's, there was not even that personal satisfaction. The political problems lie ahead. There will be much to do. But as this week unfolded, the possibility of direct action seemed severely limited, and the frustration in San Francisco was deep.

But there is one equalizer of distance, one piece of *action* in which every citizen can participate. That is, to give more money to the emergency appeals than we can "afford" to give. There's certainly enough motion in such a gift: For most people, the amount of sheer energy and of sacrifice involved in acquiring those gift funds is ten thousand times the energy and sacrifice required in walking a picket line. And it is more than motion, it is action: it gets something done; the structure of Israel could well collapse without it.

As the week began, that was where the action was for us in San Francisco.