

# RUSSIAN MIGRATION TO ISRAEL

## The Analysis of a Refugee Movement and Its Impact on Israeli Society

EPHRAIM TABORY

*Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan, Israel*

*The immigration of several hundred thousand Russians to Israel will change the whole face of Israeli society, affecting the peace process, relations between Israel and the super-powers, and economic, religious, political, and social development within Israel. The assistance given to the new immigrants not only will affect them but also the absorbers—the Israelis who are providing that assistance. This article analyzes the multifaceted impact of the large-scale Russian immigration on Israeli society.*

Immigration is a demographic imperative for Israel, as well as a moral indicator of the veracity of the Zionist dream. The 180,000 immigrants who arrived from the Soviet Union during 1990, in addition to the 15,000 newcomers from other countries, increased Israel's Jewish population by 5%. Government leaders continue to take pride in the daily immigration of Soviet Jews, even though the number arriving is less than predicted. The Ministry of Immigrant Absorption (1990) had prepared guidelines for the absorption of 400,000 immigrants in 1991, and there were some who claimed that this was too low an estimate. Actually, less than half that number emigrated to Israel in that year. It is unclear what impact the break-up of the Soviet Union will have on future immigration.

The absorption of 400,000 immigrants annually or even "only" 200,000 persons is a challenge that few countries can meet easily. The readiness to accept such large numbers of persons, regardless of their age, health, educational levels, and occupational training, and regardless of the economy, the social composition, and the basic infrastructure of the absorbing society is an ideological principle of Israeli society. It is reflected in the Law of Return and by the affective-laden Hebrew terms used to describe migration to and from Israel—*aliyah* (ascent) and *yeridah* (descent). The impact

that such a large-scale immigration can have in such a short period of time is vast. The purpose of this article is to analyze the areas of Israeli society that can be expected to be affected by the large-scale immigration.

This impact is analyzed in terms of its macro-level effect on Israeli society in general and of the micro issues that relate to the individual. An additional frame of reference uses an instrumental/expressive dimension. Instrumental issues relate to material and physical needs and wants. The expressive dimension includes more intangible and abstract issues, such as the nature of social identity, values, cultural orientations, and a feeling of satisfaction and well-being.

### HOUSING

Immigration has created a housing shortage for the immigrants themselves, as well as for young Israeli couples. The tension that housing shortages can create was seen in the summer of 1990 when Israeli couples established tent cities in public areas as a protest against insufficient affordable housing.

To alleviate the possibility of an immediate housing shortage in 1990, the government agreed to forego taxes on rental payments. Investment in real estate has been one of the best safeguards against

inflation in Israel and it was thought that there were many empty apartments that could be rented out with this added incentive. Indeed, many unoccupied apartments were rented out during the year. However, the subsidies for rental payments had an indirect negative effect in that the housing allowance provided to new immigrants became the base rent in Israel. Apartment owners demanded similar sums from other occupants, including students and young couples.

Unless low-cost rental housing is constructed on a large scale, the most feasible housing solution is the construction of low-cost condominiums. Construction of permanent housing has been delayed, however, because contractors wish to guarantee a return on their investment even before they begin to build. In fact, they are asked to begin construction for a population that has not yet arrived. They also know that those who have already emigrated cannot really afford the cost of purchasing the apartments that they are building. The government is relatively generous with mortgages, especially in areas that it wishes to develop, but the Israeli banking system demands a system of guarantors that puts a tremendous handicap on new immigrants. It is unfathomable how anyone in Israel, from a rational economic perspective, can sign a bank guarantee for a Russian immigrant. In fact, what has happened is that immigrant families have pooled their mortgage rights, and they are purchasing common apartments for themselves. Guarantors to sign the contract can be "bought" for a fee. So the immigrants receive a speedy lesson in Israeli legal culture and how to manage in a bureaucratized society. The long-term impact of several families living together in one apartment in a society in which that is not the norm can only be viewed with trepidation.

Although new housing construction took considerable time to get underway, housing starts reached new levels in 1991, and it is claimed that average construction time has decreased from 2 years to 18 months. One

of the positive effects of immigration—and of the *Intifada*, which led to the withdrawal of cheap Arab labor—has been the impetus provided to the construction industry to re-evaluate its building procedures and to adopt more cost-efficient and speedy building methods. Yet, it appears that the immigrants are benefiting from the new wave of construction only indirectly, as veteran Israelis are upgrading their lifestyle by purchasing the new apartments. In turn, the immigrants are moving into the apartments that the veterans are vacating.

To shorten the construction process, the government has proposed a relaxation of the building codes and standards accepted until now. This short-term solution is fraught with negative long-term implications, inasmuch as sloppy construction unregulated by accepted standards could turn into slum settlements rather quickly. Because the housing built is for sale on the open market and because these housing projects are located in urban areas, not far removed from other residential areas, this has not yet happened. Proposals to establish temporary caravan cities have met much opposition, not the least of which is on the municipal level. Municipalities are not anxious to have what they fear will become permanent slum areas in their midst, and they see caravan cities to be like the *ma'abarot* of the past, the camps for immigrants from North Africa and Yemen built in the 1950s.

Housing arrangements also have a direct effect on employment and social segregation. Today, Soviet immigrants are often asked by apartment owners to pay a year's rent in advance. This long time commitment effectively limits their search for suitable employment. Living in more distant settlements with no local industry and that are almost entirely inhabited by other Russian immigrants means they will have to travel quite far for employment. There are cases today of immigrants leaving their families during the week, like migrant workers, to go to their work sites and returning home only on weekends.

Living together among other Russian immigrants, even though they may come from different parts of the former Soviet Union and may actually be a quite heterogeneous group, also retards social integration. The experience with immigration in the early years of the State indicates that social isolation should be limited to the degree that it can. In effect, some cities today are absorbing a disproportionate number of immigrants, whereas upper middle and upper class areas attract very few immigrants. The immigration movement is hardly felt in North Tel Aviv, for example, where apartment prices effectively keep immigrants away.

Although housing is a problem on the instrumental level, the immigration can be expected to have a very positive effect on Israeli society on the expressive-cultural level. Even though the immigrant population is quite diverse, emanating from all areas of the former Soviet Union, one can generalize that, in contrast with many (but not all) migratory movements worldwide, this immigrant group is characterized by high cultural levels. Its members are already having an impact on local cultural life in outlying cities and towns. Among the immigrants are many people who appreciate fine culture, music, and art. Once the short-term problems of housing and employment are solved, as severe as they are, one can expect a renaissance of culture throughout the country and a flourishing of cultural activities. The new population, spread throughout the land, can have a more general impact on Israeli society as the "critical mass" or the minimal number of persons needed for justifying and supporting local institutions is reached relatively quickly. This will reduce the centrality of such areas as Tel Aviv as main shopping and cultural centers. The high cultural levels of the migrants will result in the creation of strong cultural-intellectual centers throughout the country for the benefit of Israel as a whole. Yet, one must note that this movement is more of an Ashkenazi immigration movement, and the conflict between the Sephardic and Ashkenazic

cultures can be exacerbated, as is discussed below.

### EMPLOYMENT

Although housing is important for adjustment, the most crucial factor in absorption is employment. In a time of rising unemployment, allocating jobs to immigrants over veterans threatens the social fabric of society. On the other hand, giving jobs to veterans instead of new immigrants threatens the absorption of the latter, as well as continued immigration. Since unemployment is a general problem in Israel now, there are insufficient jobs for everybody.

Unpublished Israeli government figures indicate that 54% of the 180,000 Soviet Jews who immigrated in 1990 identified themselves as having a specific profession. The creation of productive jobs that are personally rewarding for these persons and that can earn adequate profits for the long-term benefit of the employer, the workers, and the state requires careful planning and large-scale investment. Israel's economic policy in its 43 years has been dictated by its geopolitical position, by internal coalition politics, by *proteksia* (influence) and, when *proteksia* was not enough, by plain favoritism (Danet, 1989). Creating jobs for hundreds of thousands of trained immigrants is an exceptionally difficult enterprise, especially if entrepreneurs are interested in a return on their investment. In a time in which multinational corporations decide where to establish enterprises based on the available resources at a given location, the nature of the potential work force at hand, and tax incentives provided by the local government, Israel is forced to seek investors who are mainly motivated by Zionism. There indeed are such persons, but perhaps not enough to employ a work force of several hundred thousand persons in such a short time span.

Unemployment is traditionally fertile ground for social unrest. Russian immigrants are not rich, although a very few individual immigrants are wealthy and have made arrangements to maintain their primary

means of income in Russia while residing in Israel just as do some Western immigrants. Israeli prices are somewhat manageable for families with two incomes. Immigrants struggling to manage on the initial money they receive from the government definitely cannot enjoy luxuries and may have to make do with relatively sparse diets. There are reports of immigrants frequenting the markets at closing time to purchase inferior quality fruit and vegetables at lower prices or even to rummage for discarded produce. Some immigrants have been caught stealing bread from supermarkets. These examples raise serious doubts about the level of assistance rendered to the immigrants if they are reduced to stealing such a basic commodity. Even working immigrants find it difficult to take advantage of the bountiful shelves in the supermarkets overflowing with a wealth of products, particularly compared with the sparse shops of Moscow. The difference is that the immigrants can now see what they cannot have.

The byproducts of unemployment found in many countries—the increased use of drugs and drug addiction (especially among frustrated youth), alcoholism, and crime—must be prepared for in Israel as an eventuality. Drug and alcohol treatment centers must be planned now, as well as other forms of psychological counseling and psychiatric treatment. Social workers are already hard pressed, but there is relatively little they can do to alleviate the real problems that families face. One wonders whether Soviet immigrants will turn to gambling in the hope of winning their fortune. Just in case they might, the state lottery, *Mifal Hapayis*, distributes Russian-language pamphlets describing all of the gambling opportunities it offers and how to play its games.

Economists will surely debate the structural changes that Israel must make to take advantage of the opportunities presented by the immigrant population, as well as the legislation required to encourage investment. One can expect increased pressure for more privatization, with a resultant

weakening of the power of the Histadrut, the General Federation of Labor. One can also envision the spectacle of new industries striving to be economically self-sufficient and profitable while contending with religious laws that require a cessation of operations on Shabbat. The immediate problem is that, while economists ponder, one has the impression that not much is actually being done on the governmental level to create jobs. It is an open question whether government leaders are capable of really responding to the challenge at hand. The lack of sufficient employment is already having an impact on the level of immigration, and the possibility that unemployed immigrants will find ways to leave the country, despite the obstacles placed in their path, threatens to turn this current opportunity into one of the truly colossal failures of Israeli society in recent years.

On the positive side, one of the remarkable aspects of this migration is the seeming flexibility of the immigrants as manifested in their willingness to work in any type of employment available. This flexibility is necessary because there is an oversupply of trained personnel in certain fields. For example, the migration wave is reported to include thousands of unneeded physicians. There are special courses to bring their training up to an Israeli level (which upsets some Russians for its inference that they are inferior doctors). However, one reads in the press many accounts of Soviet doctors, musicians, and professionals being willing to undertake any work in a wide range of other fields as long as they have a job. A more imaginative solution would be to think of a way to take advantage of the large number of physicians in Israel, by turning Israel into a regional medical center for people in African countries or using medicine as an export service.

#### TRANSPORTATION AND THE ROAD INFRASTRUCTURE

Dispersed housing and employment, together with the general increase in population, place an added burden on the roads

and public transportation. More people traveling the same number of busses affects a general sense of well-being. Crowding in public transportation leads to a heightened demand for private cars, which results in an increase in the number of motor vehicles on the roads. An inadequate highway system for large volumes of traffic increases the risk of traffic accidents and strains medical and emergency services (with a ripple effect on insurance premiums).

There is thus an immediate need for a more efficient, cheap, mass transit system. Rail transportation takes years to develop, and if it had been better planned, or even built, in the past, the settlement of immigrants in the north and the south of the country would not be as problematic as it is today.

Although transportation and the road infrastructure are macro instrumental issues, they have a micro expressive dimension as well. Even a superior mass transportation system will not stem the desire to purchase cars if the system does not operate when people want to travel. One can assume that many of the immigrants have family dispersed throughout the country and, as with many other Israelis, the only free time for visiting them is on Shabbat and holidays. Immigrants will purchase cars when they can, if for no other reason than to be able to travel on Shabbat.

#### UTILITIES IN GENERAL

The network of roads is not the only part of the infrastructure of society that will be affected by immigration. One must consider as well the whole electric system, which will have to adjust to increased consumption on the personal level and, it is hoped, to a tremendous upsurge in usage as a result of the establishment of new industries and plants. The problem of Israel's chronic water shortage will likewise be exacerbated, and the sewage system will be affected.

In general, Israeli society will have to be much more sensitive to ecology and preservation of the environment because of

the large number of persons living in a relatively small area of land. Again, there will surely be pressure to relax standards "temporarily" because the absorption of immigrants is the priority issue at hand, but short-term decisions have long-term effects that cannot be undone, and these should be avoided.

An additional "utility" that will be affected by the mass immigration is the health care delivery system. About 12% of the immigrants are 65 and over and can be expected to be in need of medical care. In addition, there are reports that many younger persons are also in need of medical treatment that was either not provided in the former Soviet Union or that requires additional or remedial treatment in Israel. The impact of Chernobyl and radiation-related illnesses will continue to be felt as immigrants from the affected areas continue to arrive.

Further expansion of geriatric services is also needed to help cope with the large number of elderly persons who will need attention. The Israeli system is woefully deficient in providing services to this age group and in many cases relies on care being provided by children. This is an unrealistic expectation with regard to Soviet immigrants. The general impression that one receives, though, is that the provision of substantial assistance for the elderly is an unrealistic expectation. Israel's great hope for this migration rests with the children, who can be expected to become full-fledged Israelis and make a productive contribution to society. Given the limited resources available, it appears that policy-makers have decided that money spent on the elderly is a luxury the country cannot afford, with all the negative implications this policy has for Israel as a caring, Jewish society.

#### EDUCATION

The school system is one institution that usually does not have to base its enrollment on estimates, but rather can use the coun-

try's birth rate to determine how many children will be registering for kindergarten and first grade. In the case of a mass migration movement, however, one cannot plan for a gradual increase, as might happen with changes in birth rates. One also does not know the ages of the children coming and therefore the grades they will be entering. In any case, the education system has to cope with many children from a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds (even from within the former Soviet Union) and levels (even in the same grade), who are trying to get along together in an environment that tends to be competitive, even though cooperation and mutual effort are encouraged.

The macro-level challenge facing the educational system is to absorb the large numbers of immigrants, strapped as it constantly is for enough money to carry on its routine activities. The school system apparently could accommodate expansion pressures until recently, for it was able to enroll an additional 40,000 children during 1990 with hardly needing to open new classes. This situation will not last, but at least it provided a breathing spell for administrators to plan for the new waves of immigrants that can now be expected.

The ability of the educational system to adapt is not just a function of money. It takes time to train teachers, even if there are adequate funds to open new classes in temporary housing. Once they manage the language, some of the immigrants can surely function as specialized teachers, but it is much harder to fill elementary school positions with immigrants. One could argue that teachers who are now in the system would benefit from training courses in proper methods for dealing with immigrant populations.

Adjusting to large numbers of students has both instrumental and expressive implications. By and large, the immigrant children entering these schools are coming from a system that is very respectful of the educational milieu, and they are already making their mark on the Israeli school

system—they are actually raising the levels and standards in the schools in which they are placed. Immigrant teachers in specialized subjects are also teaching on a higher level than was traditional in the schools, and there are initial reports that this is having a beneficial impact on many children.

On a micro expressive level, the school experience is an important socializing framework for the children. What the children and their parents encounter in the schools can affect their general orientation toward Israeli society and culture. Sometimes this encounter is fraught with tension as Russian children need to learn to dress more informally and to behave in conformity with the expectations of their peers. In some cases this conflicts with the conservative orientation of their parents, and the problem of the undermining of authority in the family, with immigrant parents who represent the Old World characteristic of the waves of mass migration of the past, repeats itself here.

#### POLITICS AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

An influx of several hundred thousand Soviet immigrants can be expected to change the whole face of society, especially with regard to the impact on the religious and political domains.

In general, the Jewish identity of the new immigrants is reported to be quite weak, as those who were more Jewishly identified came to Israel in years past. Even those coming now who do identify as Jews do so more on a civic or national level than on a religious plane. They care little about *halacha*. Therefore, the new immigrants can be expected to be interested in living in a state that leaves them alone as much as possible with regard to their Jewish and religious identity.

For years American Reform and Conservative leaders who argued for greater religious pluralism in Israel were told by Israeli politicians that it could be achieved by the immigration of large numbers of non-Orthodox American Jews. Those per-

sons are still not coming, but to the delight of the nonreligious politicians, and to the dismay of the ultra-Orthodox Haredi parties in Israel, the Soviet immigrants may fill that void. As Uri Avneri has written in the Hebrew language daily, *Ha'aretz* (June 23, 1991), "Those who are interested in the flourishing of the State of Israel as a secular, modern and progressive state should welcome the 'goyJews' who are coming to us, and to invite them as brothers." Orthodox Jewish movements are now actively engaged in the former Soviet Union in efforts to enroll Soviet children in religious establishments there. The Reform movement has also established a synagogue in Moscow and is seeking to establish synagogues in other cities as well, and it publishes a Russian-language paper for distribution in Israel and in the former Soviet Union. The struggle over the immigrants that characterized the mass migration in the first years of the state, including the school system in which they should study and even the Sick Fund in which they should enroll, continues today. The General Federation of Labor's Sick Fund even broadcast a commercial on Moscow television in 1991 aimed at future emigrants and extolling the virtues of the services that it offers in Israel.

Initially it was thought that the Soviet migrants would strengthen the rightist parties on the political scene because of their antagonism toward all socialist enterprises. (Labor party officials in Israel even discussed abolishing May Day celebrations in order to downplay this stigmatizing symbol.) However, it is very possible that a substantial number, although far from the majority, of the current wave of migrants and those who follow will be interested in supporting leftist parties, both because of their anti-religious stand, and their orientation toward the peace process. The crucial time for ascertaining the political stance of the immigrants is Election Day. Polls taken any time until then become out of date within a month with the steady influx of

new immigrants. Even if the rightist parties garner only 60% of the vote and the leftist parties 40%, it does appear that the rightist bloc will increase in overall strength and the religious bloc will lose the most because of the mass migration.

The exact nature of the political culture of the Russian immigrants is unclear. One may ask how the highly centralized authority that characterized Soviet society for so long has affected leadership, creativity, and initiative. One occasionally hears Russian immigrants complain about there being "too much democracy" in Israel. It is unclear what their support for the right in Israel means in terms of their tolerance for civil rights and the democratic process itself.

There is periodic talk about the establishment of a "Russian immigrant" party, but it should be noted that "immigrant" parties tend to focus on issues of immediate concern for new immigrants. They are less attractive the longer the immigrant is in the country and overcomes the initial problems involved in the absorption process. Their potential success depends on whether the absorption process fails to such an extent that support for such a party is seen to be one's only recourse.

In sum, the macro expressive impact of the immigration movement is a move to the right politically and the increased secularization of Israel, carrying with it the potential for greater conflict between religious and nonreligious segments of society. Many problems will surely arise in the rabbinical courts when these immigrants wish to marry or divorce, and questions of religion and state will be exacerbated. Religious elements in Israel seem to be more aware of these potential problems than are the non-religious, and many seminars and forums of one type or another are conducted in attempts to instill Russian immigrants with a Jewish identification that is religiously based. Likewise, efforts are undertaken to ensure that Hebrew ulpanim contain several hours a week of Jewish study. The Secular League of Humanist

Judaism is similarly seeking to train instructors to convey its point of view to the immigrants.

### ETHNIC RELATIONS

An additional expressive issue that may well be affected by the mass migration is the relationship between Eastern and Western ethnic groups. The seeds for a problematic relationship are in place, inasmuch as it could be claimed that the new immigrants are being provided with assistance that the masses of Eastern immigrants did not receive years ago when they came. At the present time, however, the difficult situation in which the Russian immigrants find themselves is generally acknowledged by all members of society.

A substantial amount of the ethnic conflict in Israel is related to status inequality. There is considerable status inconsistency among Soviet immigrants at present, with a discrepancy between their educational levels and former employment and their current occupation. Although their migration to Israel has not yet seriously undermined Eastern-Western relationships, they are still in a liminal period. Their social mobility as a group may yet fuel ethnic discord.

### ARAB-JEWISH RELATIONS

Russian immigration has had an impact on Arab-Jewish relations on several levels. On the intergovernmental level, Russian foreign policy reflects a very positive relationship between that country and Israel. Arab states and organizations have protested against Russia's Jewish emigration policy, but to no avail. One fear in Israel is that although Russia's influence on Arab countries has diminished, it can still seek to affect Israeli policy by threatening to limit immigration.

With regard to internal Israel affairs, the migration of hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews came at a time when the Arab

boycott of Israeli products was beginning to have an impact on internal production levels. Thus, the increased consumption by immigrants with some purchasing power has compensated partly for the lessened demand.

Perhaps more importantly, the willingness of Russian immigrants to work in any field has effectively led to the replacement of Arabs in many low-status jobs. Supermarket workers in Tel Aviv and street cleaners are increasingly Jews, although the low wages paid to construction workers are still keeping immigrants from this occupation. (One Tel Aviv street cleaner from Georgia has apparently already earned enough to improve his standard of living—he now works while listening to a Walkman.) The status gap between educational levels, aspiration levels, and actual employment may become problematic in the future, but for the present, the willingness to occupy low-status position threatens to freeze Arabs out of the Israeli labor market. This is detrimental to Arab-Jewish relations, if one holds that a situation of interdependence fosters tolerance and understanding. Such does not seem to have been the case over the past 20 years, but perhaps economic cooperation requires a minimal level of political acceptance for it to have a stronger impact. If the Russians are the new Arabs, then the old Arabs are being pushed even lower into a situation of economic frustration and need.

### CULTURE SHOCK

As well prepared as one might be for immigration, having tried to learn as much as one can about the new society even before making aliyah, there are always differences in culture that require adjusting to and that may raise self-doubts about whether the migration process was worthwhile. The difference in lifestyles with regard to etiquette, bureaucracy, work habits, and all varieties of social norms requires a period of adjustment. The adjust-



ment is difficult because normally people are unaware of the degree to which their cultural orientations are unique—in fact, the more they have been closed off from the outside world, the less they realize how relative culture is. They are used to their own “right” way of doing things. Realizing that there is a different way can come as a shock; hence, the term “culture shock.”

Culture shock is an expressive problem on the micro level. Some immigrant associations in Israel have special culture shock workshops to help their members bridge the differences between the cultural norms they were used to and the ones they encounter in Israel.

Russian customs and manners are also different from those prevalent in Israel. Companies have been created to teach Israeli businesspeople these differences and thus to facilitate their business dealings with Russian authorities. For the immigrants themselves, though, one of the manifestations of the differences is their desire to preserve their Russian way of life in Israel. Some wish to retain their Russian cultural heritage, including appreciation of the Russian language, art, music and literature. Some of these persons will remain veteran Russians in Israel just as some veteran immigrants from many countries are actually still expatriates in Israel to this day, rather than full-fledged Israelis.

Because Russian immigrants constitute such an important segment of society, various products are now marketed with Russian-language packaging. There are a variety of Russian-language newspapers and magazines, as well as special Russian-language supplements in the daily press and an immigrant radio station broadcasting in Russian 12 hours a day. If speaking a foreign language is a key difficulty in feeling at home in a new society, the widespread use of Russian is an indicator of the warmth with which the Israeli population accepts the new immigrants on their terms, in accordance with their needs.

Russian-language classes for “absorbers” are also now being held in a variety of locations.

Some of the cultural differences that Russian immigrants encounter relate to instrumental issues. Soviet immigrants do not understand how women can work if the schoolday ends at 12 or 1 o'clock and they must pick up their children at that hour. The migration wave also appears to be a setback for the feminist movement in Israel. The Russian immigrants are well steeped in gender-based roles. (Fears that immigrants might find it culturally difficult to get used to shopping in well-stocked stores without having to wait endlessly on line carrying their “perhaps” bags have thus far proven to be unfounded.)

One attitude that has been problematic in Israel's past is the tendency to view Israel's culture as superior to that of the immigrants. In the past, Israeli society was seen as having the responsibility to desocialize the immigrants from their earlier, inappropriate behavior and attitudes and then to resocialize them. Of course, this attitude is one of the sources of ethnic conflict, inasmuch as the agents of change were Westerners dealing with Eastern and Oriental immigrants. A religious element was injected into this argument in June, 1991, when Minister of Absorption Yitzhak Peretz claimed that secular kibbutz settlements had forced early Oriental immigrants to Israel to adopt a secular way of life. There appears to be more tolerance for cultural pluralism in 1991, although the tolerance is manifested toward a highly regarded group. The manner in which the Ethiopian immigrants who arrived as part of Operation Solomon in 1991 are being treated suggests that cultural tolerance might be limited to those who are similar to the dominant culture.

#### THE ABSORBERS

The assistance given to the Russian immigrants has had an effect not only on the

immigrants but also on the providers of the assistance themselves. Although national services are theoretically provided by the government, the real work of absorption in many areas is being done on the local level. The national government is doing a very good job providing the slogans, and the local municipalities are doing the work. Government workers in airports provide newly arrived immigrants with possible addresses for their "direct absorption," without necessarily mentioning that the same address was given to other families as well. Once they arrive, it is the local municipality that must ascertain that the immigrants have a place to sleep, and many of them organize volunteer services, including soliciting contributions of supplies ranging from groceries and clothing to furniture and appliances for the new immigrants.

The increasing independence of the local municipality is a changing feature of Israeli society that may alter the entire relationship between local and central government authorities. The problems of urbanization in Israel are severe, and it might just be as well that those who have to live with them will be the ones who have to reach decisions about them and act upon them.

The impact of immigration is felt at even a more micro level. Without doubt there are Israelis who are concerned about the impact of the migratory movement of Russian Jews to Israel on their personal welfare and view the immigrants as competitors in a zero-sum game for resources. A survey of high-school youth in Haifa found that 42% of eleventh graders feel that the number of Jews admitted annually to Israel should be limited to between 20,000 and 100,000. According to the daily Hebrew newspaper, *Yediot Acharonot* (March 20, 1990), 66% feel that immigrants affect negatively the chances of those currently unemployed to find jobs. However, in local communities throughout the country, individuals and local groups are organizing to help the new immigrants with

their physical needs, as well as providing them with a warm feeling of welcome. The voluntarism manifested is very beneficial for the immigrants and for the absorbing society itself as it renews the commitment to civil values and to identification with the State and its purposes. It is one thing to gather the immigrants "from the four corners of the earth." It is quite another to turn such diverse groups of people, immigrants from such different parts of the former Soviet Union, as well as immigrants from Albania and Ethiopia, into one unified people. This task can only be achieved from within, and the fact that it is being done by individuals is making it successful. This process will have a long-term impact on the new immigrants becoming full-fledged Israelis, as well as on the volunteers themselves, who are devoting so much of their time and effort in a project that is as self-rewarding as it is beneficial to others.

#### CONCLUSION

It is a matter of fate that Russian Jews, who played such a critical role in the establishment of the State, continue to be on center stage today. This immigration movement has ramifications for the peace process, relations between Israel and the super-powers, and economic, political, social and religious development within Israel.

The Russians are emigrating for instrumental reasons—they wish to improve their standard of living in a state that does not intervene in their private lives. Yet, they are encountering a state that is manifestly based on expressive considerations. It is important to recognize that the motivation for migration is intrinsically related to the absorption process and to the impact of the migration on Israeli society. When determining absorption policy, one must consider the needs of the state and the needs of the individuals themselves. The traditional Israeli attitude of "yihye beseder" (it will be alright) is insufficient as a policy

formulation when seeking to bridge the gap between what the immigrants want and what the state needs and can offer.

#### REFERENCES

- Danet, Brenda (1989). *Pulling strings: Biculturalism in Israeli bureaucracy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Ministry of Immigrant Absorption (December, 1990). *The preparations by the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption for the absorption of 400,000 immigrants in 1991*. Jerusalem: Author (Hebrew).

#### SUGGESTED READINGS

- Heitman, Sidney (1989). Soviet emigration under Gorbachev. *Soviet Jewish Affairs*, 19 (2): 15-24.
- Moin, Victor (1990). *The situation before the elections: Voters' opinions (results of inter-regional comparative analysis)*. Moscow: Sociology Institute of the USSR Academy of Sciences (Russian).
- Tabory, Ephraim (1991). Jewish identity, Israeli nationalist and Soviet Jewish migration. *Journal of Church and State*, 33: 601-613.

## WANTED

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/CEO

for Largest Not-For-Profit Camp  
in North America

Two Camp Sites Serving  
Children, Teens, Singles,  
Families Older Adults and  
Learning Disabled. Winter  
Programs in Florida and Europe

M.A. in Camping, Recreation,  
Education or allied field with a  
minimum of six years as a  
Camping Executive required.

Jewish education and experience  
in a Jewish setting essential.

Excellent salary and benefits.  
Send resume and salary history  
to:

Sherwood Epstein  
**JCC ASSOCIATION**  
15 E. 26th St., New York, NY 10010