Challenges in Israeli Society

Including:
- President Ruby Rivlin
- Brig. Gen Rabbi A. Rontski
- Rabbi Chaim Amsalem
- Dr. Chaim Peri
- Rabbi Yosef Rimon
- MK Ayoub Kara
- Minister Uri Ariel
- Rabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman
- Rabbi David Stav
The Jewish-Italian community has undergone tremendous changes in the last few decades, particularly in the areas of immigration, integration, and cultural assimilation. The story of Ethiopian Jewry is one of the most remarkable and complex in modern Jewish history. In the past, the Ethiopian Jews who came to Israel faced numerous challenges, including language barriers, cultural differences, and religious practices. However, through the years, these challenges have been overcome, and the Ethiopian Jews have become an integral part of Israeli society.

One of the key events in the absorption of Ethiopian Jews in Israel was the Operation Solomon in 1991, which saw the rescue of thousands of Jews from Ethiopia. This operation was a turning point in the history of Ethiopian Jewry, as it marked the beginning of a new chapter in their lives. Since then, the Ethiopian Jews have made great strides in integrating into Israeli society, and they have become an important part of the fabric of Israeli life.

The process of absorption has not been without its challenges, however. Many Ethiopian Jews have faced discrimination and racism, and their cultural identity has been threatened at times. However, the government of Israel has made a concerted effort to preserve the Ethiopian Jewish culture and heritage, and there are now several Ethiopian Jewish communities across the country.

The Ethiopian Jews have also made a significant contribution to Israeli society, and their influence can be seen in many areas of Israeli life, including business, education, and the arts. The Ethiopian Jewish community has become a source of pride for the country, and they are an important part of the Israeli identity.

In conclusion, the story of Ethiopian Jewry is a testament to the power of perseverance and resilience. Despite the many challenges they have faced, the Ethiopian Jews have continued to thrive and make significant contributions to Israeli society. Their story is one of hope and inspiration, and it serves as a reminder of the importance of respecting and valuing cultural diversity.

The Saga of Ethiopian Jewry

The errors made in absorbing previous waves of aliyah were repeated when the Ethiopians arrived, with disastrous results. It is not too late to correct them, says a famous educator, internationally known for creating unique and successful educational programs.

- By Dr. Chaim Perl | Photos: Flash90

A recent spate of violence and aggression by youngsters of Ethiopian descent has shaken the streets of Tel Aviv. A believer in Israel’s destiny cannot help but wonder: haven’t the 2000 years of Jewish exile erased from our DNA the drive for self-destruction?

In the face of some analysts by the media in which the Israeli government is blamed for the youngsters’ discontent, public figures and academia, educators and decision makers must remain practical and keep their feet on the ground. Learning from the mistakes of the past, they must focus on immediate tikkun.

First and foremost, the tikkun has to do with empowering the older generation. It is now widely accepted that a repeated error in the Jewish State’s absorption of various waves of immigration was its assuming responsibility for the education of the young, while overlooking and ignoring the sentiments of the parents. The parent generation’s move to a new country was expected to be experienced as a spiritual elevation, a fulfillment of the dreams and present of generations.

That it was, but in reality, the new immigrant parents soon found themselves confronted by culture shock and a shutting off of authority over their offspring.

This proved to be especially destructive for the Jewish Ethiopian community, where reverence for the older generations has always played a crucial role. These parents had been raising their children for generations upon generations with dignity, a sense of Jewish continuity, and a yearning to return to Jerusalem. Now, they found themselves torn between their adherence to the traditions of their forebears - so firmly entrenched in Ethiopia - and their wish to become part of modern Israeli society.

To make matters worse, not only was the inner fabric of the Jewish Ethiopian community tremendously weakened, society at large never really had the opportunity to acquire an understanding of who these strange and different looking people were. This lack of understanding was accompanied by headlines and a rash of national pride - yet these quickly gave way to disappointment and indifference once the immigrants settled down and the challenges were revealed.

Not only that, public adoration was completely reserved for the ingenuity of those Israelis who acted as their “saviors”, ignoring the undeniable perseverance, rooted in profound spirituality, of this unique Jewish community. Here, among us, unappreciated, were sisters and brothers who had descended from the heights of the Simien Mountains and the wondrous shores of Lake Tana in the Blue Nile, and, hounded by vicious militias, crossed desert, burying their dead by the thousands - the death toll is estimated at 4000 - on their way to Eretz Israel.

Three decades later a generation of new parents has emerged in the community. They are a whole eschewing of remarkable, learned, proactive individuals, with a record of leadership, be it in the Israel Defense Forces or in civil life.

This human resource needs to be tapped, in line with the Ethiopian Jewish heritage which puts parents, and first, a national council of Ethiopian Israeli parents with public visibility should manifest itself, spearheading the restoration of parental authority. The voice of such a national council should and could be heard. It could gather public attention, above and above the racket made by the young protesters in the streets. Only then will the dangerous tide that is sweeping through the young generation begin to subside.

Based on decades of learning and interacting with the Beta Israel community, I clearly sense a need for such a corrective move. Restoring parental authority and guidance to its original centrality can play a crucial role in restoring the realms with sentiments so deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of the Ethiopian Jewish community.

There is a second, historical tikkun which must be introduced, invoking the national educational system. I strongly maintain that had there been a national educational system, from the very onset of the Ethiopian aliyah, found the forefront to make the moves of this population into one of the pillars of values laden education in Israel, we would now be in a totally different place. Such a strategic move would have provided the native Israeli youngster with an incomparable opportunity to explore the boundaries of his self-perception, discovering an emotional and intellectual connection to an ancient Jewish tribe, its story and heritage. Had we done so, a generation of Israelis, from kindergarten to high school in academia, would have become part of a corrective process of absorption, in contrast to the educational failures of the previous waves of aliyah, which still haunt our society.

One of the advantages of being exposed to the uniqueness and depth of the Jewish Ethiopian story is that an entire generation could have been better equipped for life in a changing, multi-cultural world. In this regard, the Ethiopian aliyah could have been a goldmine, not a burden, while at the same time the new animals would have had their feelings of self-worth and basic dignity reinforced. When the dignity is lost, he becomes meaningless, and the chaos pouring into the streets is all that remains.

Experience shows that educational programs which uniquely highlight the genuine significance of Ethiopian Jewish heritage, portraying it as in no way an inferior or deficient representation of Jewish values, have had an important positive influence on the self perception and identity of the young, with far reaching therapeutic ramifications. Things that we are now being taught in many religious Ziona schools.

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