

THE JEWISH DIMENSION OF REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT: Welcoming and Integrating the Stranger

GLORIA S. BLUMENTHAL

Director of Acculturation & Community Organization, NYANA, New York

Jewish tradition prescribes just, caring, and loving behavior toward the newcomer making the Jewish dimension of resettlement clear and complex at the same time. To treat newcomers as citizens means teaching them about their new homeland but to love them requires learning about them, their background and aspirations. They will need to change but so will we as we welcome them to be part of us.

When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as one of your citizens; you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord Your God.

Leviticus 19: 33-34

He (God) brought justice to the orphan and widow and loves the stranger, providing him food and clothing. You must love the stranger since you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Deuteronomy 10:18-19



WELCOMING THE STRANGER IN JEWISH TRADITION

Guided by these biblical precepts mandating caring and just behavior toward the stranger, foreigner, or newcomer, NYANA since 1949 has provided financial support and assistance to newcomers in obtaining food, clothing, housing, jobs, and knowledge about their new homeland and in participating in the life of the community since 1949. As we reflect on these biblical verses, it is apparent that the Jewish dimension of refugee resettlement is at once basic and multi-dimensional.

The Torah is very clear about the need for a positive attitude toward and fair treatment of the stranger, foreigner, or newcomer—all variant translations of the Hebrew word *ger*. This term was usually applied to non-Israelites who had attached themselves to Israelite society and could no longer count on the protection of their former tribe. These individuals did not have to participate in Israelite/Jewish religious observance but they did have

to forego certain modes of idol worship—some of their past—in order to be included in the community. However, if strangers decided against making a commitment to the Israelite mode of worship, they were still entitled to legal protection because they, along with widows and orphans, were considered the powerless of society and thus in need of extra protection—physically, legally, and ethically. In fact, strangers were deemed more special than other powerless groups, as they were the only category of people singled out in the Bible as being loved by God (Deuteronomy 10:19). Perhaps because of God's special love for them, the notion of treating strangers justly, loving them, and including them in the life of the community appears thirty-three times in the Torah, exclusive of the rest of the Bible where one can find additional prescriptions for their treatment.

The commandment to be kind and just to strangers not only reflects God's love for them but is also shown to be of intrinsic value

to the Israelite nation. Chapter 19 in the Book of Leviticus begins with God telling Moses to instruct all the children of Israel to be holy because God is holy. The biblical text then delineates the commandments that lead one to holiness. This text is at once addressed to an entire nation and to every individual, as seen from the use of the Hebrew verb form in the second person singular. God has given the capacity to each of us, not only an elite few, and to all of us as a nation to act as partners in creating a holy community, one component of which is acceptable attitudes and behavior toward the stranger. By observing this commandment, we are given the opportunity to take a step on the path toward holiness.

The most-often cited rationale for treating the stranger well is because the Israelites were once strangers when they sojourned in Egypt. This memory of the Israelite experience in Egypt is echoed again and again in the biblical text, perhaps as an implicit warning not to create another Egypt—a place considered far from holiness—for someone else. This common memory—perhaps provoking personal memories of feeling strange and lonely—arouses empathy and reinforces the divine imperative to perform the commandment.

The rabbinical tradition highlights the importance of treating the stranger well by turning to the Bible for role models of that behavior. For example, we learn that Abraham, our first Patriarch, is visited by three guests—messengers or angels (the same word in Hebrew is used for both terms)—while he is recovering from his circumcision. His response is to welcome them and provide refreshment and comfort.

The commandment to welcome the stranger is repeated so frequently in the Bible and in rabbinic writings because such positive attitudes and behavior were difficult to achieve and thus required great emphasis and clear elaboration. For example, treating a stranger as a citizen means that he or she is entitled to the same legal protection as a native-born citizen, which is not so difficult

to do. However, loving a stranger as we love ourselves goes much deeper, requiring the host community to help the strangers feel included and overcome their feelings of strangeness. As part of that obligation, the host community also has to change its own perceptions of the newcomers' "otherness" by learning about their background, needs, and aspirations.

Another concept fundamental to Jewish tradition, which reinforces the divine imperative to help the powerless, is *tzedekah*, the obligatory pursuit of justice and righteousness. The organization of Jewish communal life to this day is based on fulfilling the requirements of *tzedekah* as they have developed since the biblical era. Hence, the creation of soup kitchens, burial societies, free loan societies, schools, and communal funds to help with marriage, scholarships, and other needs that were to be available to those in need, both citizens and non-citizens, both then and now.

JEWISH IMMIGRATION TO AMERICA

Jewish history can be seen as a succession of migrations beginning with the Patriarch Abraham, who was commanded to leave his family and home and go to the land that God had promised him. The Exodus from Egypt, the dispersion to Babylonia after the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE, and the expulsion from Spain in 1492 also shaped Jewish history. Jews have lived in many places and, wherever they went, whether under duress or voluntarily, they carried their traditions, their laws, their value base with them. The portable nature of Jewish tradition has ensured its continuity and its capacity to spawn a vibrant community in whatever new land they journeyed to.

The first Jewish immigrants to America were 23 Jews of Spanish extraction—Sephardic Jews—fleeing Brazil in 1654. Until 1720 the majority of Jews in America were of Sephardic origin. Most settled on the East Coast, although some moved to small towns in search of business opportunities. By 1880 the Jewish population in the United States

had reached 280,000, when what came to be known as the Great Immigration took place, resulting in an increase in population to four and a half million by 1925.

The Great Immigration was triggered by a terrible wave of pogroms in the Pale of Settlement, which were precipitated by the assassination of Russian Czar Alexander II in 1881. Almost five million Jews lived in the Pale of Settlement, which includes parts of modern-day Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Rumania, and Ukraine. The Great Immigration has been compared in magnitude to the migrations following the Inquisition and the destruction of the two Temples.

Absorbing the large numbers of Jewish refugees was an overwhelming task for the existing American Jewish organizations. The first efforts at resettlement were inadequate at best, and it took at least ten years for the Jewish community to set up a systematic structure to welcome the newcomers. In 1891, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) was established to provide services to refugees. They met the newcomers at Ellis Island; advocated on their behalf regarding the conditions on the ships; and provided employment, shelter, funds, and information about life in America—what we would call acculturation services.

In the early years of this century, America was conceived of as a melting pot society, and the prevailing sentiment was to help newcomers blend into the American scene, not to stand out. American Jews shared this belief, and there was some concern about the parochial nature of their Eastern European brothers and sisters who came from small cities and towns and still maintained a strong Jewish observance. The established Jewish leadership urged the newcomers to abandon their traditional behaviors and become Americanized.

However, despite the newcomers' success in learning English, becoming financially and professionally secure, and acquiring American behaviors, the larger society presented obstacles to complete assimilation because of its discomfort with Jews. In addition, the newcomers resisted the efforts of the

American Jewish community to Americanize them at the expense of their Jewish identity. The result was the creation of Jewish cultural, religious, fraternal, and social service institutions that encouraged the newcomers to become Americanized while still retaining a connection to Jewish observance and providing an avenue for Jewish expression. The development of such institutions as the Educational Alliance in 1891 was a natural outcome for these newcomers as the Jewish communities from which they came were highly organized and the Jewish community that they entered provided a base because of its extant organizational structure.

Many of these organizations, such as synagogues, burial societies, free loan associations, Yiddish theater, newspapers, and welfare groups, were continuations of institutions from the old country. However, they also reflected the needs of American life. For example, B'nai B'rith, the oldest Jewish service organization founded in 1843, established the Anti-Defamation League in 1913 to combat rising anti-Semitism and promote interreligious understanding. The American Jewish Congress, which was established in 1918 as a delegation to the Peace Conference in Versailles to develop a post-war program for the Jews of Europe, later combatted anti-Semitism and Nazism. Jewish hospitals were established to ensure positions for Jewish doctors and good care for Jewish patients.

The leadership and constituency of many of these organizations usually reflected the different geographic areas from which the organizers originated; for example, the American Jewish Committee that was formed in 1906 by German Jews continued to attract a German-Jewish constituency during the first 50 or 60 years of this century, and the constituency of the American Jewish Congress continued to be predominantly Jews of Eastern European origin. Today the geographic origins of the founders and members of these organizations have been relegated to the history books.

The Jewish community has continued to help Jewish newcomers with basic needs, such as food, clothing, housing, and getting

a job. The greatest change since the Great Immigration has been the development of a cadre of professionals to provide these services along with volunteer support. The concept of a melting pot society no longer holds sway; rather, this professionalized resettlement effort is guided not only by the mandates of Jewish tradition but also by great sensitivity to the newcomer's culture of origin.

**WELCOMING THE STRANGER:
FROM 1973 TO 1998**

**Jewish Emigration from the
Former Soviet Union (FSU)**

The arrival of the Jews from the FSU in the early 1970s caused great happiness and led to an expanded welcoming effort from all segments of the Jewish community. That happiness soon turned to confusion if not anger because the Jews from the FSU did not fit into our mental picture of thankful refugees being saved from the ravages of an anti-Semitic Communist monster, anxious to join the Jewish community and begin the upward climb toward economic success. It was assumed that this new group would have some cultural similarities to the Jews who arrived from Russia in the first half of the twentieth century. American Jews expected to welcome either people like their parents or grandparents or dissidents who had fought valiantly against Soviet repression, such as Natan Sharansky, Ida Nudel, and Vladimir Slepak. Both American and Israeli Jews did not understand that hatred of the Communist regime did not necessarily translate into love and understanding of Judaism or Western values. Moreover, the Soviet emigres were very different from the Syrian and Iranian Jews who were coming to America at about the same time. Although these Sephardic Jews were also unfamiliar with Western society, they had a positive and active attachment to Jewish tradition and community.

Jews from the FSU had not only been isolated from the world Jewish community but had virtually no organized Jewish community of their own. The Soviets had dis-

couraged religious affiliation and severely punished anyone who practiced Judaism outside of state-sanctioned institutions. Even Jews who accepted a Soviet identity and the proscriptions against religious affiliation were stigmatized professionally, socially, and politically. Therefore, in order to survive and even flourish, the Jews from the FSU focused on educational and professional pursuits. The belief was if they could attain excellence, they could be left alone, and their Jewish selves remained dormant.

The welcoming and resettlement of Jews from the FSU by American Jews were made more difficult because of the high expectations each party held of the other. American Jews expected a receptive audience to its plans for integration, and the emigres expected immediate gratifications on their terms. Not only were they disinterested in Judaism as a religion but they expected to be reinstated to their former professional positions. They were used to a non-competitive society with well-structured career paths and free social welfare benefits. Even though the quality of health care, education, and child care in the FSU was often questionable, these services were something that they expected and felt entitled to. This feeling of entitlement was exacerbated by the emigre view that, because the American Jewish community had gone to such great pains to bring them to the United States, they would just as strongly work to meet all of their expectations, including the quick re-establishment of their former lifestyle and professional status.

The fact that most newly arrived immigrants have to scale down their professional aspirations was difficult for the Jews from the FSU to accept because the avenue of social acceptance in their homeland was through educational and professional achievement. Moreover, they were not accustomed to competing for jobs, but rather were used to being assigned jobs, usually based on having made the right connections. These newly arrived Jews felt insulted by the thought of having to start over in a lesser position, and they made that clear to their hosts. In addition, the new arrivals shunned affiliation with organiza-

tional life because it reminded them of the additional state scrutiny it brought into lives. They were suspicious of authority and ideology. Yet, American Jews felt an obligation, if not a compulsion, to introduce the emigres to Jewish tradition and organizational life, believing that they were hungry for Jewish affiliation.

The outcome was mutual misunderstanding and anger. The American Jewish community was truly challenged to love the stranger as oneself. It had to reassess its resettlement approach, and in turn, if the emigres from the FSU were to adapt to America, they were going to need a clearer picture of our society. Even so, we still could not assure the outcome of our mutual efforts.

Jewish Emigration from Syria and Iran

At the same time as NYANA welcomed tens of the thousands of Jews from the FSU, it also resettled several thousand Syrians and a similar number of Iranians. They, too, required special understanding. While they came from intact Jewish communities unlike their Soviet brothers and sisters, their customs and lifestyles were very different from those in Western society. The Syrian Jewish community was isolated from the larger Syrian society and kept under careful scrutiny. It was thousands of years old, and in fact many Syrian Jews claim to be descendants from the priestly class of Temple times. Syrians were so aware of their lineage that they were able to point out those who arrived in the massive influx after the Spanish Inquisition in 1492, and "newcomers" were those who arrived from Egypt or Iraq 150 or 200 years ago. Most Syrian men were successfully engaged in business while the wives stayed home to tend their large families. The community was tight-knit, and life revolved around the family, the synagogue, and Jewish communal celebrations.

The New York Syrian community, while living alongside with Jews with roots in Eastern and Central Europe, was, in fact, mostly separate in its family and religious lifestyle. When Syrian Jews arrived in New York more

than 80 years ago, they were poor and illiterate. The European Jewish community looked down on them, and the Syrians in turn were suspicious of the Ashkenazim because they seemed so ready to blend into the melting pot. In contrast, Syrian Jews established their own institutions—parallel to those established by the European Jewish community—and became very successful in business, allowing them the wherewithal to maintain a separate community.

The local Syrian community took immediate responsibility for welcoming and absorbing the new arrivals. Indeed, it worked actively with NYANA and other Jewish communal organizations to provide support and such basic services as English language instruction, job counseling and placement, health care, child care, and Jewish education, as well as an introduction to American society. The Syrian community's goal in providing these services was to ensure that the new arrivals would stay within the community. Many of the jobs found for new arrivals were in Syrian businesses since working in business was the preferred way to make a living. Few Syrian Jews pursued a university education, and those who did were mainly professionals such as doctors and dentists. A special loan program was established to help new arrivals start their own businesses.

Iranian Jews were not as isolated from the larger Iranian society as their Syrian counterparts. They too ran successful businesses, but they had good relations with their Moslem neighbors until the fall of the Shah in 1979. As were the Syrians, Iranians were literate but generally not university educated. Having a successful business was the usual goal, though a few did pursue medical and legal degrees.

The Iranian community in New York, which was not as large as the Syrian community, was located in Queens and Long Island. They too welcomed the new arrivals, but did not play as active a role as did Syrian Jews, perhaps because government funds for refugees were available to help Iranian Jews for the initial period after their arrival. However,

the Iranian community encouraged the new arrivals to settle in Queens by helping find them housing and jobs with Iranian employers. In working with the Iranian community to provide employment, NYANA often found it could not obtain information about the jobs newly arrived Iranians were given. This was because many businessmen took new arrivals into their businesses in order to expand the existing businesses or to help begin new ones. Telling NYANA of these activities was like revealing family secrets.

The local Syrian and Iranian communities took an active role in the resettlement process, expecting NYANA to help with English studies, to provide initial financial support, and to help them gain access to government benefits. Syrian and Iranian Jews did not come from a welfare state and therefore did not expect that NYANA would provide long-term social services. In fact, these communities only wanted NYANA to help with the most basic of services and to provide only rudimentary information about America and the Jewish community; the local community saw providing a more extensive orientation as their job since they wanted to ensure adherence to their lifestyle.

**THE JEWISH DIMENSION:
A MODERN APPLICATION OF
A TRADITIONAL VALUE**

In many places in the Torah and in our daily liturgy, we are commanded to be just and caring toward the stranger because we once were strangers in Egypt. We are commanded to engage in a number of specific behaviors toward strangers, which serve as the value base and guide for delivering resettlement services. If we take our cue from biblical texts, we must help the newcomers adapt to the culture of their new homeland—more specifically, to learn about the “strange” customs and lifestyle of people in their new community—so they will feel less strange.

In recent years, a more nuanced understanding of the process of cultural adaptation has emerged that includes considerations of the newcomers’ geographic factors—whether

emigres came from a city, town, or village or a specific region—and demographic factors, such as age, profession and level of education. Most important, resettlement professionals now understand that adaptation is a lifelong process and that the desire to flee one’s homeland should not be confused with a desire to repress one’s background and culture even if it could be erased. There is no such thing as an ex-emigre. Similarly, we now understand that the expectations and perception of the host community play an important part in cultural adaptation, and just as for the emigre, the process of adaptation in the host community is also lifelong.

Jews from Syria and Iran

Syrians and Iranians needed little introduction to Jewish tradition; they came from observant communities and were familiar with, even if not observant of, a traditional Jewish lifestyle. In their new community, they were anxious to obtain religious articles, such as prayerbooks, bibles, and ritual objects, to replace those left behind in the perilous escape from their homeland. For Syrian and Iranian Jews the religious component was a given, but not the customs or worldview of Ashkenazic Jewry or the secular or pluralistic aspects of American Jewish life. These concepts needed to be introduced in a culturally sensitive manner into the presentations and materials describing the American Jewish community.

Moreover, the local Iranian and Syrian Jewish communities, although knowledgeable about the pluralistic and secular nature of American life, were not necessarily comfortable with the integration of these concepts into their conception of Jewish life. Although many Syrian and Iranian Jewish children go to *yeshivot* or Jewish day schools with other Jews, socializing is limited because of the strong desire that their children marry within the community and remain faithful to it. Over the years this goal has met with great success.

Therefore, NYANA and other resettlement agencies had to readjust their expecta-

tions of Jewish newcomers from Syria and Iran. Resettlement services and Jewish programming for the Syrian and Iranian Jews had to be provided in consultation with the existing New York Syrian and Iranian communities, respectively, because of their interest in ensuring that their newly arrived brothers and sisters would become part of their community. Consequently, a joint resettlement venture was forged, with the organized Jewish community meeting the initial needs of the newcomers and the Syrian and Iranian communities being responsible for their integration into the local community.

Jews from the Former Soviet Union

When Soviet emigres began arriving in large numbers in the 1970s and early 1980s, synagogues and other Jewish institutions opened their doors to receive the new arrivals, not realizing that they were generally not interested in organizational and religious life. Their experiences in the FSU made them at once proud of their identity but ignorant of its substance and wary of affiliation. Emigres were not interested in replacing one ideology with what they perceived as another. Those involved in developing Jewish and American acculturation programs had to develop a different approach if they were to be sensitive to the emigres and yet meet the expectations of the local community.

Indeed, the new arrivals were ready to develop and did develop a positive Jewish identity, but one that was secular, ethnic, and national in nature, in keeping with what they understood. This concept was unfamiliar to many American Jews, who could not fathom Jewish identity without a religious component. A gap in approaches to Jewish learning needed to be bridged. Since the religious component was part of American Judaism, it was important to teach it, but in a way that differentiated learning from acceptance. Information needed to be provided so that Jews from the FSU could choose the type and level of affiliation they wanted, just as do American Jews. And the American Jewish community had to be prepared to accept that emi-

gres, like their American-born Jewish counterparts, might choose not to affiliate at all. The burden was on the host to make belonging to the American Jewish community attractive and worthwhile.

In developing its introductory and orientation programs NYANA staff followed several key programming principles. First, issues and information related to adaptation need to be presented in Russian. Most concepts are unfamiliar and complicated, and attention and absorption of information are facilitated by using Russian. Second, if possible, presentations should be made by fellow emigres who know, practice, and love Judaism, providing a positive role model. Third, references to their cultural background and their experiences of being an immigrant should be key components of the orientation material. Such references are an explicit demonstration that who they are is not necessarily at odds with who they will become when they develop a new identity. Instead of giving up who they are, the goal of resettlement is to find a synthesis between past and present thinking. Fourth, these introductory programs should be designed to foster feelings of confidence in the emigres, who are entering a new world, with its own rituals, jargon, and philosophy. No one wants to feel stupid. Fifth and perhaps most important, emigres should be asked about their interests and their reactions to programs in order to make them accessible and relevant.

NYANA's basic literacy effort begins with an introduction to Jewish tradition from a historical and philosophical point of view. Emigres have told NYANA staff that they like history, culture, ideas, and even spirituality and instructions about conducting rituals. As a result, NYANA developed bilingual English-Russian booklets on the background of Shabbat, holidays, and life cycles. Practical information is included because emigres need to know that practice is valued just as are the origins and philosophical underpinnings of Jewish traditions.

In planning holiday presentations, the principles described above are applied. For ex-

ample, humor through jokes is an important aspect of Russian culture. Thus, Purim being a holiday of humor and irony, the NYANA celebration includes a joke-telling component. Emigres attend this celebration equipped with jokes and leave with a sense that they can make Purim their own. For Tu B'Shevat, while enjoying a snack of fruit and nuts, emigres learn about the tradition of planting trees and about the climate in Israel, where most of them have relatives and friends. The planting of trees is depicted as an act for the benefit of future generations, of which the present generation may see only the beginning results, much like the immigrant experience. Emigres are invited to discuss what they hope will result of their "transplanting" themselves to a new homeland and what they wish for future generations. They are given a story translated into Russian about Honi the Circlemaker who plants trees for the future generations, and they are encouraged to read this story to their children or grandchildren. Every session ends with a collection of *tzedekah* to plant a tree in Israel.

In its programs on Judaism, NYANA makes it very clear to new arrivals that the intention is to make available to them what was denied them in the FSU—knowledge about who they are, their history, traditions, and philosophy that shapes Jewish life and observance. All presentations, even those on religious ideology, do not promote one denomination over another.

In the past, NYANA has invited Russian-speaking rabbis to discuss such Jewish concepts as *tzedekah*, *teshuvah*, and prayer. Even though the notion of prayer and synagogue may be foreign to them, emigres were curious to meet a Russian-speaking rabbi who was not a representative of the State. These rabbis invited emigres with their children for family-oriented celebrations of holidays on Shabbat afternoon or for music presentations to facilitate their way into synagogue life.

In searching for the appropriate way to reach Jews from the FSU, NYANA educators also draw upon the immigrant experience. In teaching about Passover, the Exodus experi-

ence is described as the journey from oppression to freedom, which is not a smooth one. Emigres are told of how the Israelites were afraid to leave what was familiar to go into the unfamiliar, leaving home to go into the "wilderness" is likened to the emigre experience. Some of the Israelites rebelled, some became depressed, and some were exhilarated; most experienced all three emotions. Emigres are thus invited to express their feelings and ideas about the Exodus as a metaphor, to find personal meaning in the holiday.

NYANA has developed a six-week introductory course on Judaism called "Discover Your Roots." The Bible is taught as a historical document of the origins of the Jewish people, rather than as a theological work. God is included, but is not central at first. The Jewish calendar is used as a basis to look at the concept of sacred time, which includes Shabbat and the holidays. The course also focuses on major events in Jewish history and their relationship to tradition, practice, and culture. For example, the Inquisition in 1492 is related to Kol Nidre and Yom Kippur. This introduction to Jewish life and tradition is enriched with periodic field trips to such places as the Jewish Museum, Ellis Island, and the Lower East Side.

Different components of this course are taught daily on a more focused basis at NYANA's Jewish Lounge program. The Jewish Lounge takes place at NYANA every day during the break between classes at NYANA's English school. For about 45 minutes, emigres are invited to sit informally, bring their lunches—tea and cookies are provided—and listen to Jewish music, peruse the books in NYANA's library, ask questions of the staff, and/or participate in a presentation on a Jewish topic. Emigres' questions often focus on the history and structure of the American Jewish community, the services available in local Jewish organizations, Israel and its culture, and about the differences between the religious denominations within the Jewish community. The newcomers are extremely curious about Judaism, its traditions and culture. If provided family pro-

grams, newcomers go. It is the notion of membership that is difficult.

In its educational programs, NYANA deliberately blurs the boundaries between American and Jewish culture. Its four- and eight-session courses of American society include information on the history and structure of the American Jewish community, the role of Jews in American political and cultural life, and America's relationship to Israel, as well as a discussion of the notion of America as a civic and associative society. They are taught about self-determination—the ability to make their own decisions regarding where to belong and with whom to associate—and that there are many ways to be Jewish. The newcomers learn about the role of Jewish social service agencies in providing essential services and about Jewish organizations that advocate on behalf of the Jewish community and its beliefs and needs. One such issue was Soviet Jewish advocacy. They learn about the pluralistic nature of American society and its notion that all groups are equal. NYANA's classes work hard to discourage racism and inequality. The newcomers learn that Jews have prospered by being in a tolerant society. The competitive nature of America has allowed Jews to get ahead on merit, not connections.

ADAPTATION: A LIFELONG PROCESS AND A TWO-WAY STREET

To love the stranger as yourself not only means opening up avenues for them to learn about their new homeland and its society but also to be open and accepting of strangers as they are. To be open to newcomers necessarily involves learning about them and being influenced by them. They will offer new ways of looking at things and new ways of doing things.

Seeing cultural adaptation as a two-way street affects the way programs are conceived and implemented for newcomers. Who they are and what they want are considered in tandem with what we are and what we want. More important, emigres are brought into the resettlement service system and other Jewish

institutions as staff and volunteers. To increase the influence of emigres in service delivery, NYANA and the Jewish Board of Family and Children Services have sent their bilingual staff to school to obtain their master's degree in social work. UJA-Federation developed a program to train bilingual paraprofessionals to work in its network of agencies because of the recognition that emigres were important to the work of resettling newer arrivals. Emigres are part and parcel of the Jewish community, and a formal, professional presence is essential. In addition, NYANA has developed a volunteer program in which emigres who were high-level professionals in the FSU and have re-established themselves now help new arrivals from similar backgrounds. These volunteers have asked to learn more about Judaism and the Jewish community. Some have joined boards and committees in Jewish organizations. Others have become active in Jewish organizational life, including establishing a Russian Division at UJA-Federation.

Many emigres are more comfortable with others who speak their native language and share the same concerns. Consequently, several organizations for emigres have been established by emigres. Some of these groups have embarked on cooperative endeavors within the larger organized Jewish community. Some reach out to emigres in Israel and vice versa to promote the notion of an international Jewish community of Jews from the FSU with similar ideas and concerns.

Some within the American Jewish community have been concerned about the integration of Jews from the FSU as if the Jewish community is capable of being a melting pot society within a pluralistic society. Adaptation takes many forms: some emigres may blend totally into American society, and others will learn to negotiate life in their neighborhood but never learn to speak English and remain separate. Still others may prefer the company of those who share a similar language and culture and create parallel organizations. There seems to be a natural

tendency to gravitate to those from similar cultural backgrounds. The Syrian and Iranian Jewish communities have demonstrated clearly their desire to preserve their identity and traditions and to remain separated to some degree from other Jews. American Jews should be as comfortable with the separateness of Jews from the FSU as they have been with the separateness of Syrian and Iranian Jews.

Newcomers learn from us and we learn from them; this synthesis of ideas will be clearer in the next generation. The Jewish

community has never been a static one, and Judaism has always absorbed new ideas from the surrounding culture. Those ideas in turn have enriched our tradition and the meaning of what it is to be a holy nation. To reach toward holiness, we must reach toward whom we know, the strangers among us, so they will join us and no longer feel strange.

There is still much work to be done. As Rabbi Tarfon reminds us in *Pirke Avot* (2:20-21) (Sayings of the Fathers): "The day is short and the work is great. You are not required to complete the job, but neither are you free to desist from it."