

Aliyah from North America and Information Needs/

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Abstract

Aliyah of North Americans to Israel has increased in the past few years but there are still many *olim*, new immigrants, who return to their country of origin feeling that they were unable "to make it" in Israel. This qualitative research thesis focuses on the information needs of North American *olim* and what role the satisfaction of these needs play in the absorption process; does the satisfaction of information needs lead to an easier and successful absorption into Israeli society?

Thirteen in-depth interviews were conducted with families from the United States and Canada who made aliyah between March 2003 and December 2005. Each family had between one to six children at the time of aliyah ranging from newborns to teenagers. The mother tongue of all the interviewees is English and they all made the free choice to leave their homes in North America and immigrate to Israel. A large majority of the families consider themselves religiously observant. The grounded theory method was used to analyze the interviews creating themes and categories via open and axial coding. Through this method categories related to the process before and after aliyah were found, problems were recognized and information needs were revealed.

The four main research questions addressed in this paper regard identifying the information needs of new North American immigrants to Israel; whether these information needs have been satisfied or not; what channels the immigrants use before and after aliyah to try to satisfy their information needs; and evaluation of whether or not absorption into Israeli society relies on the satisfaction of information needs.

General and personal categories of information needs of North American *olim* were uncovered during analyses of the interviews conducted. General information needs categories include; housing, schooling, health, banking and finances, driving, government related issues, legal issues and practical information. Personal information needs related to problems of "split" or prior aliyah, changing over

medical licenses, starting a business, children with special needs and alternative medicine. Many of these needs were satisfied either prior to aliyah or during the absorption process while others were left open leaving the *olim* with gaps in their knowledge and feelings of uncertainty and, at times, anxiety.

During the preparations for aliyah the greatest source of information came from the internet; governmental, aliyah organizations and personal web sites, including the use of email and listservs. After aliyah, during the absorption process, word-of-mouth and personal contacts (social networks) were the main sources for *olim* to satisfy their information needs. Other channels of information included organizations, newspapers, radio/tv, prior visits to Israel and *shlichim*.

The satisfaction of information needs was found to be an integral factor in the absorption and acclimation of *olim* into their new environment and society. An immigrant will feel he is a part of his new culture once a sense of belonging and a reconstructed sense of self are gained. By satisfying all of the information needs regarding a new country, culture and life, a foundation is created allowing the *oleh* to satisfy Maslow's needs (basic, security, social, esteem, and self-actualization) leading to the formation of a sense of self and belonging. In addition to the feeling of belonging and a sense of identity, the *oleh* must also have motivation to live in Israel and to conquer obstacles, such as, language acquisition, employment and finances. The satisfaction of information needs is the key element in reaching these goals, leading to a smooth absorption into Israeli society.

System No.

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