Working with the stories of Jewish immigration to Israel

by

Yael Gershoni & Saviona Cramer

The Barcai Institute
10 Dov Friedman St, Ramat Gan 52503, Israel
fax: (972-3) 752 9295, email: cramerj@netvision.net.il

The Barcai Institute was one of the first family therapy institutes to be formed in Israel. In the last ten years the Institute has, and continues to be, committed to exploring the narrative metaphor in therapy in the Israeli context.

The origins of this paper can be traced to a conversation which took place two years ago over dinner in a restaurant at Jaffa, Israel. Looking out over the Mediterranean Sea, we Israelis at the table began to tell stories of our families' immigration to Israel. Almost all Jewish families in Israel have stories of immigration to tell and these stories are rich sources of meaning. Many months later, Cheryl White, who had been present at the dinner in Jaffa, approached us to speak at the inaugural Dulwich Centre Publications' conference on the topic of 'Israeli immigrants and their stories'. This paper is a combination of the presentation which we gave at the conference in Adelaide and conversations which we had with David Denborough in Israel in June 1999.

When we began this project we had little idea at first how meaningful it was to become in our lives. Nor could we have anticipated how significant we have come to understand such a project to be. In travelling to Australia it became clear that although these stories are well known by Israelis, they are not so well known by others. We hope that in documenting these stories here, others will become more aware of the historical context of Jewish and Israeli lives. We also hope that the ways in which we work with these stories of immigration, the ways in which histories of immigration are alive and a resource within the therapy room may open possibilities in the work of other therapists.

In the following pages we have documented one set of stories of the land of Israel: the immigration of Jews in this century. It is important to us to acknowledge that there is another set of stories attached to the same land and time: the stories of the Palestinian Arabs. In this paper we do not refer to these Palestinian stories. This does not mean that we believe these stories are of less significance than our own but simply that our emphasis here, in these pages, is on Jewish experience, history and immigration to the land of Israel.

Waves of immigration[1]

In Hebrew, the word for immigration to Israel is 'aliya' which literally means to 'go up', or to ascend. It is an act of great significance to Jewish people who have come from over seventy different countries to live in Israel.[2] In order to give shape to the stories which we are soon to convey here, stories of how people came to live in Israel and the ways in which these immigrations influence peoples' lives, we have selected stories that illustrate four major modern waves of immigration, or 'aliya' to Israel.[3]

The Zionist wave of aliya:
1882 - 1923

This wave of immigration consisted of very young people from Eastern Europe. These young men and women, aged between seventeen and twenty-three, left their families due to pogroms[4] in Eastern Europe and their belief in Zionism - a commitment and desire to rebuild a Jewish state in the land of Israel.

The aliya of Holocaust survivors:
1945 - 1949

This wave represents holocaust survivors who emigrated both during and after World War II. From August 1945 to May 1948 sixty six ships carrying Jews fleeing Nazi persecution arrived in what was then known as Palestine. Most of the passengers of the ships were expelled to Cyprus by the British who at that time governed Palestine. After the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 hundreds of thousands of survivors of the Holocaust immigrated to Israel. Many others left Europe for America and other countries.[5]

The aliya of Jews from Middle East and North African countries:
1948 - 1950s

This surge in immigration involved Jews from Middle East and North African countries. From the origin of the state of Israel large numbers of Jews immigrated from a range of countries but particularly from Yemen, Iraq and Morocco.

The Russian aliya: 1990
to the present

Up to one million Russian Jews immigrated to Israel after the fall of communism in Russia. This wave represented a dramatic change in the make-up of the Israeli population which prior to 1990 had stood at around five million in total.

As a way of introducing you to these different waves of immigration we interviewed Jews from each of these waves to tell their story. Due to constraints of time we kept these interviews focused on the following questions:

i) What were the reasons for you to make the aliya to Israel?

ii) What are your first memories of coming here?

iii) What were some of the ideas, hopes and belief systems which you brought to Israel from your family, community, country from which you emigrated?

iv) Who were the heroes, the significant people who influenced you from your culture of origin?

v) What were the things you learned from these people that helped you to survive here?

The Zionist wave of aliya: the story of Moshe Ben-Peretz

I (Yael) was excited to sit down and interview my father, who was born in 1915 in the Ukraine, about his immigration experience. I had heard his stories many times but never from beginning to end. This time I heard the story told very carefully and precisely.

It was the time of the revolution in Russia. In order to keep power the Tsar felt he needed to unite people against something - and we the Jews were that something. It was easiest to unite the people against us. At that time, all my family, my sisters, my siblings, my cousins, aunts and uncles were living in the same village. They came for us like a cloud. I remember waves of soldiers on horseback. I was a very small child, maybe three or four years of age and these images of the soldiers are some of my first memories. They descended on our small village in the Ukraine, hundreds of them

My mother took me and my sister to hide in a cupboard. We hid. I remember my mother putting a pillow over my mouth so that I would not scream or shout. It was suffocating. My asthma started from that day and has continued until now. We remained in the cupboard for at least a day, maybe more. Hiding. I can remember the shouting of the soldiers. The screaming. It went on for a long time. Eventually though it was quiet and we went out.

It was awful. Houses were burnt. Everything was broken. At the time I didn't realise that I was looking at people lying on the floor who were dead or wounded. My grandmother, the mother of my mother, had been raped and beaten to death. I learnt this later.

I saw her lying on the floor. Uncles and aunts on both sides of the family were also killed.

My mother was only very young at that time, in her early twenties, but she was a very strong woman. After this pogrom she gathered people together and spoke in a rage. 'That is it,' she said. Zionism had already begun. She had already heard of people at that time who were leaving, travelling to the promised land. She said we should go. 'We cannot live here any more. We have to return to our own land, live in our own country. It is time to go.'

My mother found out about a group that was gathering together people from villages that had suffered from the same pogroms. She began to gather people together who were willing to go to Israel. She took her father, who had been widowed by the pogrom and who was in a state of shock. He had lost his wife, some of his siblings and all of his property. It took him seven years before he became productive again. My mother had two younger brothers who were only teenagers at the time. She took them and of course her own children. She also gathered together four other children who had been orphaned.

'I believe in Israel', she used to say. 'I want us to go there. There is no way to ensure our safety here. We are going.'

She was very determined. Together they gathered seventy people from the surrounding villages. She made sure to take every person from the families who had survived the massacres. They took elderly people and young children. All of them decided to leave together. They had a dream and it was time to follow it.

The year we left was 1918. The journey took over two years. We were not officially allowed to leave the Ukraine. We started the journey at night and moved across the border to Romania. We had to cross a river so we paid people to smuggle us through. I remember the shouting, the noise, the fear. It was very cold. I recall walking in the dark.

The very moment we set foot on the Romanian side of the border my mother spoke, 'No more speaking Russian', she said. 'Now we are Jewish and we speak Hebrew or Yiddish.' I knew neither Hebrew nor Yiddish. I had been born in Russia and was raised by a Russian nanny. From that day on when I would speak in Russian the adults would say no, and ensure that I spoke in Hebrew or Yiddish. From that moment I never had a conversation in Russian again.

We stayed in Romania for some time until we could gain permission to enter Palestine. We lived in tents. My mother gave birth to a baby who died. Finally we were granted permission and the boat took us directly to Haifa. There we camped in a very sandy area. There were swamps and I was taken ill with malaria. I remember being taken to the doctor.

Throughout the early years in Israel, everyone we knew would eat at our house - all the relations. My mother provided for the larger family. Every lunch she cooked for thirty people. She would know everyone's favourite foods. Each day she would wake early to prepare. She would wash clothes to support us all. I have so many good memories of my mother who had time for everyone. She was a mother to an entire community.

We still had the dream that we would work the land and work for ourselves. We were determined to be a 'new kind of Jew'. For generations in Europe Jews had not been allowed to be farmers, to work on the land, to own the land, to do anything productive. My family had had to find other ways to survive and this had meant to sell and trade. Now we could shut the door to this past and build a country with hard physical work.

We had left Russia at a time of revolution and we had brought many of the dreams of that time with us. They walked with us from Russia to Romania and then sailed to Israel. Ideas of equality and community were very common then. We embraced them, we cherished them. Many Eastern European Jews came to Israel to build a society of equals in which everyone would work. Women and men were seen as equal workers. Even in child raising we believed in finding solutions that would enable women and men to work. Hard work was admired above all else. People would wake early and work until very late at night. We were driven by the desire to create something anew and to do so together. There was a powerful sense of comradeship. The community was upheld as all important.

We wanted to be productive and to live a simple life. We knew that we would be strong in the land of Israel, that we wouldn't be afraid any more. After so many years of waves of soldiers upon horses, after so many years of helplessness, of murder, rape, robbery, we had made a decision to build a different kind of society of Jews.

Although we had brought nothing with us, we had also brought a lot. We had brought the value of hard work, the desire to live a simple life, to be honest and to be strong. And we brought with us the spirit of revolution - that the

community is most important. Throughout my childhood and early adulthood I would attend political lectures on any topic to do with Israel. I went to every speech given by David Ben Gurion (the first Prime Minister of the State of Israel). The founders of this country were very important figures to us. We would talk and talk about what they had said. These were the conversations within which I was raised. The survival of the Jewish people depended upon us building a nation. So build we did. And it was my mother who made everything possible.

Working with the meanings of the Zionist wave of aliya - Sharon's story[6]

When we (Saviona and Yael) as therapists thought about the values of this aliya and how they had influenced Israel - such as the importance of a simple life, hard work, modesty, we were reminded of Sharon who was fourteen when she first consulted us about her struggles with anorexia nervosa. By sharing her story here we hope it will illustrate the ways in which stories of immigration inform our conversations in the therapy room.

Sharon's grandmother on her father's side was the first baby born in one of the first Jewish agricultural settlements in the land of Israel earlier this century. There are pictures of this grandmother being held in the arms of Ben Cvi, the second president of the country. The family was very proud of this history as the first babies born on these settlements are seen in Israel as 'the salt of the earth'.

Sharon's father, Ilan, was raised in an atmosphere in which the community members were writing Jewish songs and poetry, and working out ways to connect socialism and Zionism. It was a very spiritual community and was seen as a settlement that gave spirit to the country.

In this context, Ilan was raised to understand that the value of simplicity was of the utmost importance. Everything was to be only for necessity. Meals, for example, ought to consist only of the simplest of foods. Life was to be lived as a spiritual quest not according to the body's earthly desires.

When Ilan finished high school he chose to do his military service in a new kibbutzim. It was there that he met Miri, the woman that he was to marry and who is Sharon's mother.

Sharon was very close to her father as a child and they were seen by others to be very similar. They used to go to lectures about the history and geography of the country. Sharon was a young child when Ilan started to take her to these lectures during which they'd talk about values and what was important in life.

These conversations were informed by the traditional ethics of Israeli kibbutzim. They were in many ways rigid conversations in which it was declared that there were good ways to live and bad ways to live - right ways and wrong ways, shoulds and should nots. Sharon loved these talks and felt special to her father.

When Sharon started to become a teenager it became clear that she was very pretty and she started to enjoy the remarks people were making. She knew her body was changing and she enjoyed this. One day her father saw her watching herself in her mirror in her room, he saw her admiring herself and he was very angry. 'How come you are concerned with these things?', he questioned, 'This is not important. You are so earthy. I am ashamed. That is not the way I brought you up to be.'

Sharon felt so guilty. She felt she had disappointed her father terribly and the connection between them was so precious to her. She started to feel that she was bad, that she needed to control her desires and not let herself be spoilt by food and earthy ways. This was the beginning of how anorexia started to court Sharon. The voices of anorexia began to taunt her that she was worthless, earthy, bad, that her beauty was too much, and Sharon started to starve herself.

In the therapy sessions, which were attended by Sharon, her parents and Sharon's brother, we had conversations that enquired as to how Sharon had been recruited by anorexia, into the anorexic lifestyle. We began by asking questions such as 'What do you think opened the door for anorexia to come into your life?' And Sharon related the incident of being seen in the mirror by her father and how painful this was to her.

As these conversations took place, we began to discuss values and to deconstruct them, trace their histories. The following questions opened space for the conversations:

* *What do they think about these values?*
* *How did you come in contact with these values?*
* *Are these the only values to live by?*
* *Is there only one way to live your life?*
* *What are the effects of these values on your life if you decide to live according to them?*
* *What effects do they have on others in your life?*
* *Are these values a preferred way for*

Sharon?
* *For Ilan?*
* *For Miri?*

We undertook an exposé of the effect of values on people's lives. We asked ourselves and one another - if one lives a life rigidly what can it mean? We explored the territories that exist between being either a liar / dishonest person or instead doing everything exactly ritualistically perfect. Knowing that anorexic voices often recruit people into rigid definitions of perfection we explored openings and histories that spoke of the possibilities of flexibility in life.

These conversations took some unexpected turns. Overtime, as Ilan seriously considered these questions, he talked about how he had learned that he didn't want to live his life in black and white so much. He spoke of wanting to add more colour to his life, which was critically important for Sharon to learn, as it meant that he was starting to change too. Ilan decided that at times he could enjoy doing something not exactly as it should be! Importantly he also spoke in very honouring ways about how his wife, Miri, had brought colour into his life.

Miri was a very elegant woman and in some ways represented all that was not right according to Ilan's values. Miri enjoyed the earthy delights - food, clothes. Sharon had always adored her mother on the one hand but had also at times looked down on the way in which she lived her life. When her father spoke of his respect for his wife, when he spoke of their histories together and the ways in which she had brought delight to his life, it was very significant. It contributed to the relationship between Sharon and her mother being significantly reclaimed.

We asked questions of both the parents and Sharon about the similarities and differences between the cultures in which her parents became adults and the youth culture of today. We explored how Sharon wanted to find her way through all of this. How did she want to look and behave? At this point Miri and Ilan began to share stories of their own about their teenage years.

Ilan talked a lot about being a teenager and its meanings for him. This was how we learned of the ways in which his family was linked to the early settlements and the ethics by which they lived. We also heard his reflections in relation to wondering about what were the remaining connecting links between the early Israeli culture and today's Israeli youth culture.

Miri spoke about a very serious accident she had had as a teenager. She was involved in a car accident and was badly injured. After an operation, she had spent almost a year at home rehabilitating. This occurred in Miri's life at almost the same age that Sharon was at the time of the consultation. Miri spoke of how the accident separated her from friends, social activities, and from study. She talked of how the accident had a very bad effect on how she saw herself as she gained a lot of weight and started to believe that she was very ugly.

Miri spoke about the ways in which she could understand what it means to try to reclaim your life from something, as she struggled to regain her life back from the accident. After Miri had gained a lot of weight thoughts of anorexia began to harass her. Sharon hadn't known about any of this and these conversations enabled the two of them, mother and daughter to share a lot of knowledge about gaining their lives back.

In this way, family histories became a resource for connectedness once again. Simultaneously, new values within the family also evolved including a cherishing of flexibility and a celebration of differences.

The aliya of Holocaust survivors- the story of Edith Rozner

The following story is that of Edith Rozner who is the mother of Annat Blaugrand one of our colleagues at the Barcai institute. Here she retells stories of the events that led to her aliya to Israel, events that included the Holocaust.

The whole community in which we lived in Hungary was very close. The day came in the latter part of the war when all of these people from my village, including myself and my family, were put on trains and sent to Auschwitz. As the trains moved across Hungary and Poland we knew we were being sent to be killed. I was seventeen and was with my mother, my father and seven brothers and sisters.

I remember asking my mother during the journey, 'Why doesn't somebody come? Why don't the Americans bomb the railroads to stop this?' We knew we were heading to be killed, everybody knew. It was no secret. And my mother replied, 'Nobody loves the Jews. Nobody likes us. There is no hope for us.' That was the last conversation I had with my mother. When we arrived at the camp we were separated. Shortly afterwards she was killed.

The last picture I have of the community alive was of us all climbing out of the trains. After days of nothing to eat, nowhere to wash, as soon as we got out, the men were separated to one side. There they stood and prayed. It was the holy day of Shavouth [the annual Jewish holiday celebrating when the old testament was given to Moses on Mt Sinai.]. They had on their special white prayer clothes. I can still see them praying.

We came from an orthodox family. When we entered Auschwitz the Germans ordered us to take off all of our clothing and they shaved our heads. Although the men and women were separated, when this was done we were all visible to each other, men and women. It was a time of humiliation. Seeing my father naked, and my father seeing me naked was one of the most traumatic moments of degradation. Having to expose ourselves to each other was one of the worst moments of the war for me. The disrespect they showed to my father was terrible to witness. That was the last time I saw my father and my brothers.

For a long time I was in the camp with my two sisters. We would save bread for one another, we would share stories, and we would sleep together. For most of my time in Auschwitz I had my sisters beside me. They made the time meaningful. I had people to stay alive for, that I was responsible for and this made it easier. If I had lost all meaning, all hope, it would have been the end for me.'

When the war was finally over I fled to Hungary to go back to our village. I knew that if anyone else had survived they would return also. That is where I saw the man who was to become my husband. I had known him before the war, we had been neighbours. As soon as he saw me he took care of me. He prepared a warm bath for me, with hot water and this touched me so deeply. He understood what to do for me. He had been in a working camp. We immediately married and planned to travel to Israel.

When I was planning to come I still had my prison uniform with the yellow star that the Nazis made us wear at all times. I tried to decide whether to take this uniform to Israel or to leave it behind. I found this a difficult decision, but finally I said no. I am not going to take it. I shall leave it here and we shall go fresh to a new country.

Directly after the war, concentration camp survivors were not allowed by the British to enter what was then called Palestine. We were taken as prisoners to Cyprus to another sort of camp, which was very difficult for me. It was run by the British, there was little privacy and all the routines of camp life were too evocative of Auschwitz. We were kept there for some time. Eventually we were transferred to Israel into a transition place for new immigrants. But I wanted my own place. I could not stay for another day so I took my husband's hand and we walked with nothing. With torn clothes and no shoes we walked. I felt as if I was from the moon. I knew how different I looked to everyone else. We walked for hours until we got to a village in which I knew my husband had a younger brother. He had left Hungary before the war as a Zionist. We were walking on the main street when suddenly I saw him. I had not seen him since he was small child. I did not know where he lived, I just knew we would find him. He took us and found us a place to stay. He hadn't known we were alive. He thought he had lost everyone.

At that time it seemed as if everyone in Israel was looking for family members. Everyday people would listen to the lists spoken on the radio of new arrivals. Nobody knew anything. We were all living with hope. People wanted so much to be connected that they would hold out hope that maybe a relative had survived.

People would put notices in the paper 'A man who was in the Lodz ghetto would like to meet with another man so they can be friends'. Or even 'A survivor of Auschwitz would like to meet another survivor'. People met, got married and decided to have children immediately. In these moments people joined for life.

We left behind the identity of Jewish and became Israeli. When I arrived in Israel and saw the first Israeli policeman, the first Israeli in uniform, suddenly I was not afraid any longer. Someone in uniform was on my side. There was someone who would protect me, who is my brother. I was not scared any more. Being Jewish had represented being hated, being degraded, humiliated. Being Israeli, however, meant having our own country, our own pride, our own independence. Even now I do not describe myself so much as Jewish, I say I am Israeli.

We were living for the future. My life I could not gain back, but I was there to make something possible for the next generation. I had placed a full stop between me and the past. Still now, I don't look back. For me, it was important for us to be strong, to shut the door on all the terrible things that had occurred and to be a new Jewish person, to be Israeli.

At that time it seemed as if everyone in Israel was looking for family members.

Working with the stories of the Holocaust

When the survivors of the Holocaust came to Israel they found the culture of the people from the first wave of aliya which was similar to their own as they had also emigrated from Eastern Europe. But while the culture was similar, people's experiences had been so different that for many years speaking about the Holocaust was impossible. This was not helped by some of ways in which people interpreted the actions of the Jews of Eastern Europe. The dominant depiction of Jews during WWII had been of 'sheep going to the slaughter'. There were only passive representations of the Jews of Europe. This only really began to change in Israel in 1961 when Adolf Eichmann was captured in South America and put on trial in Israel for the crimes he perpetrated as a senior Nazi. Only then did survivors in Israel begin to speak of their experiences. Only then did the stories start to be told.

I (Saviona) remember as a small child the ways in which the Eichmann trial was so alive for us. We spoke of it everyday. I would line up my dolls as if they were in a courthouse and I would replay the scenes of the day before. The trial lasted a year or more and it was all we talked about in that time. These conversations enabled people to begin to understand their neighbours, their friends. They enabled people to hear the stories of resistance for the first time. Even in Auschwitz there was significant resistance - I remember a story in which a man who had the job of using explosives to make mass graves saved small pieces of explosives until he had enough to blow up an SS office. Many Jews joined the underground and fought for the allies. Many others chose death rather than demeaning other Jews. Many others supported or hid others at great risk to themselves. In every camp there were so many acts of resistance and these acts took many forms.

The gift of life

Some years ago a family came to consult us after the son, Eyal, had said calmly and quietly to his mother and father, 'I just want to tell you that I am going to die. I am going to kill myself. I am not saying it will be tomorrow, no there are things I must organise first, but I have decided. Please don't ask me why. I just wanted to tell you that this is my decision and it is final. I just wanted you to know.'

His parents came with him to consult with us and we soon heard that Eyal's four grandparents had been the only survivors of the Holocaust of each of their families.

The subject of the Holocaust however had never been spoken about. On the father's side of the family it was forbidden to even mention the topic. A step-grandfather of Eyal had actually written a book about his experiences during the Holocaust and Eyal had read this book but had never been allowed to speak about it.

We discussed with the family all sorts of ideas and connections with these histories. In these conversations Eyal told us that he felt that he could not live, that he could not enjoy his life, for in a way if he was to live fully this would be an act of betrayal to all those people in his family who were killed. 'So many people my age were killed', he said. Holding on to the memories of these people seemed so significant to

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him that his own life seemed much less important.

We were curious about those stories that had gone untold - stories about life and struggles for survival. When we asked about these stories the conversation came alive. Eyal's mother began retelling stories of their immigration to Israel, life in the camps and the ways in which people were striving to make new lives. As curiosity grew about the histories within the family of the will for life the parents decided that they must involve their own parents.

Only one of Eyal's grandmothers was still alive, but they had the written testimony of another grandparent. They came back and retold many stories. These were stories not only about dying but about surviving. These were rich descriptions of the wishes and hopes of Eyal's family members. Significantly they spoke about what they had learnt about the will to live. They spoke about what life meant to those in the camps, to those who had died and to those who had survived. They spoke about what was important to them.

And what was most important during those times, they said, was the will for life. The desire to live and to have full lives. They spoke of memories and short stories about how this was demonstrated even in the worst periods in the worst places, in the worst situations.

One of the most significant moments came when Eyal's grandmother told him the following story:

We were still in the ghetto and the soldiers had a number of Jews that they were to kill each day. You never could tell exactly who would be chosen. They would usually simply say, 'You and you and you come with us. You others stay.' One morning my sister and I heard the noise of the soldiers coming. You could always hear the shouting when they separated the mothers from the children, the husbands from the wives. This time they were coming for me. We knew it. They were calling my name and my sister said to me, 'Go, go from here. I will say that you are working. I want you to live. It is so important to me. You are so young. Life is so important. I want you to live.' And of course my sister said that she was me. She was taken and killed in my place. But I lived. She gave to me the most precious gift of life.

Eyal had not known these stories. He had known the stories of death but not the stories of the will for life. He had not known that it was possible to honour those who had been killed by honouring life. Eyal had felt as if he was living with ghosts in the house, ghosts everywhere and that they were calling to him, 'Come, join us, we are your true family'. In the course of these conversations we asked him about what the ghosts might now be saying. He told us that now they say other things too, they are the holders of other stories. They speak of life. The voice of the sister of his grandmother does not beckon him to death, but beckons him to life.

Eyal answered this beckoning by finding life and vibrancy. We continued to see his parents in therapy for a year afterwards, about their own relationship. But it seemed as if once Eyal had witnessed these other stories, stories that could beckon him to life, and once he had been introduced to his family in new ways, that his own life was ready to be lived.

The aliya of Jews from Middle East and North African countries - the story of Bedra Sharabi

Bedra is 80 years old. Until 1950 she lived with her husband and six children in Yemen. Just after Israel was established in 1948 she decided to move to Zion.

In Yemen our community was organised around the celebrations and rituals of the Jewish faith. My father was a rabbi and our home was the centre of the community. In our house, or in the courtyard next to it, very many ceremonies would occur - weddings, ceremonies around death, ceremonies about holy days. These all took place where I lived and it felt very special to me.

The religious figures, the rabbis were my heroes, those who conducted these ceremonies. Continuing these religious traditions, and being a mother to my family were the values I most cherished. To me these symbolised playing my part in the broader community life of the Jewish people.

We are religious Jews with a love of Zion. Our dream to migrate to Israel was a religious dream. We hoped to become more Jewish in a religious sense. Before I migrated, in my imagination Israel was like the country of the Bible. I believed that people here would be living lives as they had in biblical times.

An old American plane came to collect us. None of us had every seen a plane before. It gathered us inside and suddenly we were high in the air being flown to the holy land. It was as if we were living a miracle.

When the plane landed in Tel Aviv we all fell down to the ground and kissed the earth. We had arrived in the holy land. As we entered the airport young Israelis came to greet us. They handed us cookies and tea. It was a huge celebration and we felt like we were living a dream.

Over time though, many things were very different from what I had imagined. It was a very big shock to discover that Israel was mostly a secular country and that so many Israelis were from Eastern Europe. We had never seen people who looked like this, also Jews.

Joining the life of this country was in no way easy. It was so different to Yemen. So completely different - even the Jewish practices, the songs, the clothes. Instead of becoming more Jewish, some of my children became secular and in some sense this feels like a broken dream. I regret that my children are not practising the religious traditions I was raised within, I am forever hoping that one day they will take them up again.

But I am very happy that there is a Jewish country for us to live within, and that we are here. Most of our community from Yemen has moved to Israel now. I live surrounded by my friends and family.

We brought with us many things - our religious practices, our music. Our songs are very important in our ceremonies. We brought with us our traditional clothes and our costumes and these began to influence people here. Our dances, songs and melodies, so much of our culture from Yemen has gradually become woven into Israeli life.

Some Jews from Middle Eastern countries such as Bedra from Yemen came to Israel primarily for religious reasons - to practise Judaism more fully in the Holy Land. Some also came due to experiences of antisemitism, especially after the war between Israel and many Arab states in 1948. For Shlomo, who came to consult with us, his decision to immigrate was due both to religion and a desire to seek sanctuary from antisemitism in Tunisia.

Working with the meanings of the third aliya - Shlomo's story

...We had read the bible and we wanted very much to come to Israel. I remember as a small child sitting on the steps of the synagogue in Tunisia waiting for my father to finish praying. It was a beautiful sunny day and suddenly there was shouting. Somebody was hit. I remember the crowd saying to the man who had been stabbed, 'Why did you leave the Jewish quarter? We told you we can not trust anybody. Don't you know that this is forbidden?' There was always such a sense that we could not trust anyone. It was very strong...

These are Shlomo's words who was referred to us because he was physically violent to his female partner. He beat her very severely and she was hospitalised. In trying to work with him we were initially very interested in the meanings that he had given to power over the course of his life and how this had occurred.

In response Shlomo told us stories of his younger years and how he had come to believe that he needed to be very physically strong to protect himself. He spoke of stories like the one above in which if you were weak you could be killed. He spoke of how he believed that he could trust no one, only himself and his own physical strength

and of how he was recruited into believing that as a man he had to be physically strong and abuse others in order to survive. He deconstructed the ways in which he took on beliefs that justified the abuse of others.

Many of these beliefs and the ways in which they came into Shlomo's life were linked to his own experience of immigration. As soon as he entered Israel as a child he was separated immediately from his mother because the authorities thought that she could not take care of him. She was poor and unwell. She had lost her husband just before she left Tunisia and she could not speak Hebrew. The authorities did not consult her. Believing they were helping, they took Shlomo as a child and placed him in an orphanage. There he suffered terribly because no one understood his culture, his hopes, his dreams, his language. He loved his mother but did not see her for at least two years.

As Shlomo started distancing himself from the beliefs of violence, and understanding more of their effects, he also began to explore alternative ways of being a man.

In exposing the histories of the beliefs that enabled Shlomo's violence, alternative ways of being a man also became more available. As Shlomo started distancing himself from the beliefs of violence, and understanding more of their effects, he also began to explore alternative ways of being a man. Through a series of re-membering conversations, Shlomo recalled an uncle - the husband of his sister - who was a very warm kind person and still a man. Finding ways to more richly describe the influence of this man in Shlomo's life enabled a further moving away from violence and towards peaceful ways of being.

Shlomo has reconnected with all of his three children and is maintaining warm, understanding relations with them all. Thirty years of violence, however, has done irreconcilable damage in his partner's life and to their relationship but they continue to live together without violence. Misguided practices in the processes of immigration, and histories of violent antisemitism played their part in life long consequences.

The Russian aliya

Nine years ago I was still living in Russia working as a scientist. Where others have religion, it is science that gives me hope for humanity, it is my source of meaning in life. In Russia, as now, I was surrounded by the writings of Russian authors and famous scientists. Their words and thinking are the source of my understandings of life.

After the fall of the communist regime in Russia there was a renaissance of culture. I had always known that I was Jewish but I did not have connection to other Jews. I was a scientist and, although I would meet other Jews at times through work, I was disconnected from Jewish life and from Jewish community.

After the fall of communism, Hebrew schools started again. I have only one child, a daughter. She began to learn Hebrew and the bible and started to talk to me about the land of Israel, the place where all stories took place, the country of the Jews. As she would speak to me she would ask me about emigrating to Israel.

At first I could not understand this. I would ask her, 'Why? I have a good job here, your father has a good job here, you have many friends, a good life'. And she would say, 'I want to be part of the dream of there being a Jewish country'.

Over time, although I found it very difficult to accept, I realised that I had really already lived most of my life and I wanted to give her a chance to live her life in the way that she dreamed. I remember saying to myself, 'I will give my daughter her chance. I can understand her desire of wanting to be part of a new society. I will go with her.' And so we moved to Israel.

When we arrived old friends from Moscow came to meet us at the airport. We lived with them until I found my own apartment and they also assisted me in finding a job at Tel Aviv University. I felt very welcomed. It was an easy landing. Academically there are many more options available to me here than there were in Moscow.

I live in Israel now but I am Russian. Russian traditions travelled with me. All my friends are Russian. The culture I enjoy, the movies, theatre, books are Russian. I tried at the beginning to read Hebrew books, to go to Israeli movies and theatre, but from the start I knew this was not for me. I love the Russian culture. It is my culture, it will be my culture for as long as I live.

The reason for moving here was my daughter, and having lived here now for a few years I believe we made the right decision. My daughter is living in the country of the Jews as was her dream. She has a chance to be part of making this country's future. She has much to give and Israel has much to offer.

This is an extract from the story of Dr Galina Denisova, an extremely well respected scientist from Tel Aviv University, but it could be the story of many of the one million immigrants from the former Soviet Union who came to Israel after the collapse of communism. Whereas once, as in most countries, Israel tried to assimilate people from many cultures into one national identity, increasingly now there is an emphasis on multiculturalism and the celebration of difference. This brings with it implications for therapy.

Raising children across cultures

The latest wave of immigration to Israel as with all the other waves, has brought complexities and possibilities into many spheres of everyday life. Each new aliya raises different dilemmas for us as therapists also. We recall a woman, Regna from Russia who came to consult with us about difficulties she was encountering in raising her son Yori. The reason they had come to therapy was because of the clash of cultures. Yori wanted to be Israeli whereas Regna wanted him to be a Russian child in Israel.

This raised dilemmas for us. How could we remain sensitive to the differences between the cultures? How could we honour and acknowledge the heritage, skills, knowledges that Regna brought with her from Russia? How could we begin to understand what Regna believes it means to be a mother?

It some ways this began an anthropological exploration. We talked about these issues together and inquired as to how Regna wished to raise her child. We had to try to understand what it means to be a good mother in Russian culture and how very different this is to being a good mother in Israeli culture.

We talked a lot together about the differences in cultural meanings of motherhood and gradually discovered that our common inquiry centred around the following questions:

* How can I, Regna, find a way to hold onto my own values and heritage and yet help my son to find his way in Israel?
* How can I Yori find my way as an Israeli without my mother losing her identity as a Russian mother?

Once these questions were articulated, the therapy did not last so long. Regna came to believe that it was quite possible for them to find their ways through this situation as long as she found ways of standing up to her fear of losing her son. By speaking about the immigration experience and other losses in Regna's life this fear was placed in context and diminished in its effects. Regna began reading books to Yori before he went to sleep that spoke of her stories and her culture. And she began to feel just fine about him playing football in the afternoons with friends outside.

Reflections

Over years of working with families we have heard many times the ways in which the stories of individuals and families are shaped by their immigration experience and by stories of what it means to be Jewish. We have tried to explore in these pages some of the dilemmas, possibilities and richness that this brings to our conversations in the therapy room. We hope that this will spark the imagination of other therapists in their work in their own contexts.

This is a land of long and complex histories which we are currently grappling with as we try to find ways of living here in peace. The Jewish people have learnt over two thousand years of

living in the diaspora not to trust. We have learnt that if we are not strong enough we will suffer again. We so want to believe in the possibility of peace. We want to believe that we can live like and with others, but many of us are fearful. We hope that by sharing some of our histories here, by sharing something of the context of Israel and the ways in which our lives are linked to the history of Jewish people, that this in some small way can contribute to the making of peace.

Telling these stories has made our own Jewishness more meaningful. We have become more aware of what it means to us to be Jewish, to be a part of this tribe, a part of these histories. To belong to these Jewish stories - stories of survival, persecution and belonging - is so shaping of our lives and our children's lives. Because of the process of writing this paper so much has changed.

It has, in many ways, been a ceremony of definition that has more richly described our lives. We are proud to share the stories of the Jewish people with people who are non-Jewish, with people who do not know these stories. We offer them here to you.

Notes

1. In this paper we refer in detail only to the modern waves of Jewish immigration to Israel. Please note that Jews have been living and moving and to and from the land of Israel from the earliest recorded times.

2. We know that there have been many other waves of immigration to Israel, but we are just focusing on these four.

3. Within this paper the land of Israel is referred to in a number of different ways depending upon the time period being described. In this paper, if we are discussing the period of time after 1948 when the State of Israel was established we simply use the word 'Israel'. If we are referring to the period of time between 1918 to 1948 when the British were governing what was then referred to as the 'Palestine Mandate', we use the word Palestine. For periods of time prior to 1918 we refer to 'Eretz Israel' or simply 'the land of Israel'.

4. Campaigns of violence carried out against Jewish communities.

5. See 'Under This Blazing Light' Exhibition at Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem September 1999.

6. Please note that at the request of the families described in this paper there have been some changes of details and names in order to ensure anonymity.

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