



Feeding New Immigrants *in Their Time of Need*

Michio Nagata/bridgesforpeace.com

“WE KNEW YOU WOULD COME. You have helped us before and we knew you would again. We recognize you. You are the people who help. You are the people who bless. HaShem will bless you.”

Tzvi Khaute’s eyes were pools of tears as he looked at the pallets of food a team from Bridges for Peace was busy unpacking—food that would help feed Tzvi’s community, the Bnei Menashe. The Bnei Menashe (literally “Sons of Menashe”) are descendants of one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel living in northeastern India and have steadily been fulfilling their dream of many generations to return to the Land from which they were exiled more than 27 centuries ago—with the help of Shavei Israel, an organization helping Jewish descendants reclaim their roots.

Tzvi made *aliyah* (immigrated to Israel) 20 years ago and made a life for himself and his family in the “Promised Land,” as the community lovingly refers to Israel. Today, he is part of the Shavei Israel team that assists the Bnei Menashe as they undertake a similar journey from the land of their birth to the Land of their promise. “We are a hardworking community,” Tzvi says, eager to play their part in prospering Israel.

However, for many of the Bnei Menashe, this is no longer an option.

Over the past three weeks, Israel has made every effort to curb the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus, implementing strict regulations to ensure self-isolation and social distancing. While these measures are crucial to the health and well-being of Israel’s population, the economic impact has sent many reeling. Employers sent 85% of their workforce to work from home or take unpaid leave. As the usually thriving tourism industry ground to a complete halt, many working

in the sector lost their jobs. Within a mere three weeks, unemployment has more than quadrupled, skyrocketing from 3.6% to 22.7%, with nearly 800,000 Israelis registering for unemployment since the beginning of the month.

The Bnei Menashe and Chinese Jews from Kaifeng are among those who now face a bleak future without an income to support their families. More than 200 Bnei Menashe *olim* (immigrants) have now lost their jobs. Moreover, many Chinese Jewish *olim* working in the tourism industry are now unexpectedly unemployed as hotels, tour agencies and popular tourist attractions have shut their doors. While nearly every nation in the world is currently battling the invisible enemy, these new *olim* are engaged in a double battle of making their home in their new country in the midst of a pandemic.

Ruth, 30, is a mother of three. She and her husband barely make ends meet when both work. The prospect of



Daniel Kirchevel/bridgesforpeace.com



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without pay when the coronavirus hit.

The situation is dire. Many of these new immigrant families live from paycheck to paycheck as they settle into the land and have to stretch every cent to make ends meet. Now, with Passover—one of the most widely celebrated festivals on the Jewish calendar, marking freedom from slavery—around the corner, many fear they won't have enough to feed their families, much less celebrate the festival.

Bridges for Peace has assisted the Bnei Menashe before in happy times, partnering with Shavei Israel to help community members come home. Now, in hard times, Bridges for Peace will once again help these families weather the storm. We have already made a generous delivery of food and gift certificates to those in need, but more is needed. As the lockdown continues and more employees are sent home without pay, more of these new immigrant families will lose their ability to put food on the table. Will you help us answer their cry for help? Will you give generously to help these new immigrant families who heeded God's call to return to the Land remain steadfast and weather the winds of financial hardship and lack?

no income affects her family “mentally and physically,” she shared. Miriam, 35, has four children. The youngest is autistic and attends a special kindergarten. Baite's five-year-old daughter has special needs and must attend costly therapy twice a month. Kokhava, 52, is widowed and the only breadwinner in the family. Her two children, both soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces, depend on her for financial support. These are but a few of the people who were sent on leave

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