CROSS-CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS: THE CASE OF ETHIOPIAN IMMIGRANTS-JEWS IN THE ISRAELI SOCIETY*

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This paper centers on problems that arise between the absorption authorities and Ethiopian immigrants due to misunderstanding of the latter's cultural codes. It was observed that Ethiopian immigrants, upon their arrival in Israel, perceive Israeli absorbers as figures of authority. Hence, an Ethiopian behavioral code is applied, which dictates specific behaviors as well as certain expectations from the absorbers. These are misinterpreted by the absorption authorities, who bring to the encounter their own values, expectations of the Ethiopian immigrants, and norms of Israeli society.

Failures in communication are explained on the basis of a)the absorbers' lack of specific knowledge of Ethiopian cognitive maps and construction of reality, and b) the psychological processes the absorbers undergo while facing the Ethiopian immigrant. Specific measures are suggested to remedy these cross-cultural misunderstandings.

INTRODUCTION

It is a truism that misunderstandings occur in cross-cultural contacts. This paper aims at describing some of the foci of difficulties connected to the specific encounter between Jewish immigrants from Ethiopia and Israeli society. I shall focus on those misunderstandings connected with the initial encounter between the Ethiopian immigrant and the official absorption authorities. It is hoped that this paper will contribute a psycho-anthropological viewpoint to a growing body of literature concerning the absorption of Ethiopian Jews into Israeli society.[1]

The data for this paper were collected over the past three years, while I was working as a clinical psychologist in the absorption of Ethiopians.

I found myself in close, intensive contact with the Ethiopian immigrants on the one hand, and with the different absorption authorities on the other. I was able to observe hundreds of meetings between the Ethiopians and social workers, teachers, counselors, government officials, and other figures of authority. This close and extended acquaintance enabled me to arrive at initial conclusions regarding some processes which both absorber and absorbed undergo in cross-cultural encounters.

A description, in detail, of one such encounter, will enable readers to understand the nature of the data from which the conclusions of this paper were derived.

Recently I was approached by a social worker who coordinates the handling of Ethiopians at the absorption center, who told me the following story:

* The present paper is partially based upon the analysis of points taken from the psycho-cultural profile of Ethiopian youth in Israel (Ben-Ezer, 1983.

Last week Daniel* came to see me. He's the seventeen year old who arrived eight months ago with his mother and two sisters. He asked me to arrange for the relocation of his family to a differnt city, further south. All his relatives live there. His mother is ill, he told me, and her proximity to her family will make things much easier for her and for them.

I promised Daniel to take care of the matter. Unfortunately, I returned a few days later with a negative reply. When we met, I explained to Daniel why we are unable to fulfill his request. Daniel sat quietly, listened attentively to what I said, nodded his head and seemed to understand. At the end of our meeting he said goodbye and left. Two hours later he returned. When I asked him what had happened he repeated his request to move his family to another city. I thought that perhaps he hadn't understood my reply or that maybe he had missed a detail and I again explained the entire matter to him, from beginning to end.

Daniel nodded his head, seemed to understand, said goodbye again and left. About two days later he returned. He made the same request – again related that his mother is ill and spoke about his relatives... in another city. I thought that I had not understood. I thought that perhaps my memory was failing me and that I hadn't yet replied to his request ... perhaps I was confusing him with another fellow in similar circumstances. At any rate, I again, slowly, explained it all to him, from beginning to end. Daniel listened, nodded his head, seemed to understand, said goodbye and left.

Yesterday he returned again – the same story, the same explanations, the same request. I don't know what to do, I don't understand a thing ... Is he trying to drive me crazy or is something wrong with him? Maybe a serious emotional problem? Maybe a problem in Hebrew? Something with his comprehension? Tell me, you know him, is he okay?

Several days later I happened to meet Daniel outside the Absorption Center, and he told me his own version of the story:

I came to ask the social worker for her help in moving... It's because of my mother ... it's difficult to manage alone ... I'm missing school ... I have to take care of her ... The social worker told me that it's impossible. I heard her but couldn't accept the fact that she was refusing us. I couldn't tell her that her refusal is unacceptable. I obviously can't tell her that she's wrong and ought to give us a different answer. These things can't be said to a social worker. So I left and returned another time. I hoped that she would understand that I'm returning for a different answer. But she responded in the same manner. Therefore I had to return again and again, in the hope that next time she'll understand and change the answer.

This case illustrates characteristic failures in communication, which take place in everyday dealings between Ethiopian immigrants and Israeli authorities. The case raises a variety of questions such as: Why can't Daniel tell the social worker that he disagrees with her? Why did he expect her to understand him without his explanation? And in general – how do Ethiopian immigrants perceive the absorption authorities in Israel? According to which cultural code do they relate to them? What, in this context, is the

* A ficticious name.

"cognitive map" of Ethiopian immigrants? And on the other hand – what is the Israeli absorbers' viewpoint? How do they perceive the Ethiopians?

MISUNDERSTANDINGS SURROUNDING THE ETHIOPIAN CODE OF HONOR

Discussion of the misunderstandings between newly-arrived Ethiopians and the absorption authorities calls for prior examination of concepts of authority and honor.

Every Ethiopian youth is raised in an authoritarian atmosphere, in a social structure which operates according to a hierarchy of authority. The Ethiopian family is usually of the patriarchal-traditional type. In the framework of the family, as well as the ethnic group, and the wider society, there are clear criteria which define the hierarchy, for example: age, familial authority, tribal role and others. The hierarchy dictates a normative set of behaviors, one central aspect of which is the concept of *honor* and the avoidance of affront to it. Especially important is the honor of a person who is higher than oneself in the social order, and therefore an authority figure. For example, according to this cultural code, the young are obliged to serve their elders, to honor them and to obey their authority. These norms of honor in Ethiopian culture are expressed by a wide range of specific behaviors which are a source of misunderstandings in the encounter with Israeli society. One must emphasize that the absorption authorities whom the Ethiopians meet in Israel are viewed as authority figures, at least during their initial encounters, which dictates the use of the cultural code of honor. On this basis, certain difficulties are created, upon which the present paper focuses.

The discussion will be divided into two sections. In the first I will discuss the Ethiopian immigrant who uses the code of honor with authority figures dealing with his initial absorption, both in and out of the absorption center. In the second section, I will discuss the immigrants' expectations of the authority figure.

What is the code of honor? What are its specific expressions of behavior? How is it enacted upon the absorbers – authority figures? Some major elements of this code are as follows:

1. *Inability to refuse authority figures.* 'No' is a concept rarely found in Ethiopian society, especially towards authority figures. One does not refuse an authority figure. The cultural code obliges one to say "yes, yes," (Ishi, Ishi), even when one disagrees with or does not accept what the authority figure says. Obeying the authority figure is final and he who wants to refuse can do no more than remain silent. The possibility exists, in certain cases, of not carrying out orders, but there is no possibility of verbal refusal. Therefore situations are created whereby the Ethiopian expresses verbal consent but later does not perform. "He does whatever he feels like doing" the absorption authorities will say characteristically. It is also prohibited to make *alternative suggestions*. An absorption worker may, for example, suggest an appointment at an inconvenient or impossible time for the immigrant. In the immigrant's terminology, to propose an alternative time means "no" and therefore is not a possibility. It would involve a rejection of the original proposal, rejection meaning an affront to honor.

In the framework of my experiences with Ethiopians I learned to offer them a number of alternatives and allow them to choose between them. In this manner, I enable them to say 'yes' to suggestions made by the authority figure, and as a result of this, increase the chance of arriving at agreement.

Offering several alternatives eases communication and increases the change of implementation, but still does not guarantee it. A clash can still occur over different aspects of the cultural code and another element of importance may interfere with the implementation of a goal. For example, a youth who is on his way to a meeting with me, meets an elderly family member, who has recently arrived in Israel. This relative asks the youth to accompany him and help him. Because the youth cannot say 'no' to his elder relative, an honorable authority, and because he cannot offer an alternative suggestion ("I'll help you at another time") he will give in to the demand of his honor code and not arrive at our meeting.

One can say from the Ethiopian's point of view the meaning of 'no' is first and foremost an expression of impertinence. In the socialization process of the family, the child learns never to say 'no' to his father, mother, and other authority figures. Even more important, *saying 'no' is an expression of hostility. It is an affront to honor, which obliges a declaration of war by the person who has been affronted (has "lost face").* From this, it is clear that from the Ethiopian immigrant's point of view, refusal, saying 'no', and offering an alternative suggestion are all culturally forbidden, even dangerous.

The act of refusal or saying 'no' is a much wider concept in the Ethiopian than in Israeli culture. In its wider meaning it includes also verbal expression of dissatisfaction with authority. Here it is necessary to mention that Ethiopian culture inculcates in its members emotional restraint, in general: negative emotions. More specifically, open expression of emotions such as anger, jealousy, hostility and revenge are considered taboo in human interaction. This is in opposition to the 'straightforward' cultural code of Israelis, which encourages raw, direct expression of emotions ("Don't be shy, spill it out!"). Needless to say, it is impossible for Ethiopians to express these emotions to authority figures.

2. *Asking questions and taking the initiative with authority.* In encountering an honored person of authority, the Ethiopian does not initiate or ask any questions. According to his cultural code, he may only respond. A question directed toward an elder, a parent, or other authority figure, is conceived as impertinent and shameless. One who interacts with one more honored than himself is not supposed to approach the more honored person or answer more than asked, or volunteer any information and especially not ask any questions. If asked about his health, he does not ask the same of the more honored person, even if it be his own father, meeting him after a long separation.

3. *Body language and gestures of honor.* Behaving honorably towards authority figures is expressed in gestures of all sorts, including body language. In Ethiopia, for example, it was customary to kiss the knees of the authority figure, a phenomenon which has all but disappeared in Israel. Other phenomena still exist, for example, bowing and bending the entire body toward the authority figure upon meeting him; or crossing one's hands behind one's back when addressed by an honorable elder. These are bodily expressions of modesty and bashfulness which are preferred values in the behavior of children in the family. Children lower their eyes before their father and feel ashamed in his presence. A direct gaze in the eyes is considered impudent and involves a reprimand or immediate punishment. This is especially true for girls. An Ethiopian girl is supposed to giggle, to lower her gaze from that of the elder or stranger who meets

her. She must never initiate any conversation, must answer only when necessary in a soft voice, even a whisper. In short, she must display what Israelis would describe as shy and modest behavior. Shyness is considered an educational tool in the hands of the parent which should be used as a means of achieving ideal educational goals. These physical gestures of honor are retained by the adult immigrant who addresses the authorities.

A large part of these physical expressions will be interpreted by absorption authorities as submissive, disciplined behaviors; in other words, the behavior of 'good, well-behaved children'. But, after a period of time, it becomes frustrating. Workers who are not successful in bridging the cross-cultural communication gap have a difficult time fulfilling their functions. They find it difficult to speak with groups of giggling girls or with other Ethiopians who always say 'yes' but 'do whatever they feel like.'

WOMEN IN AUTHORITY AND THE CODE OF HONOR

The initial encounter between the Ethiopian immigrant and the absorption authorities includes meetings with a variety of functionaries: social workers, *somchot*, the *ulpan* (language) teacher, director of the center, house mother, doctor, psychologist, etc. The difference between these roles is not clear to him, but all, for him, are representatives of the government (Amharic: *mangestu*) and therefore authority figures in the hierarchy, requiring the usage of the cultural code of honor.[2]

In Ethiopia, government representatives were always men, while in Israel most of those employed by absorption centers are women. According to the Ethiopian cultural code, women must honor men: they do not judge men and do not rule. It is a grave insult for an adult Ethiopian to face judgement or arbitration by a woman, since she is unable to fulfill an authoritative role. In Israel, the Ethiopian finds women in responsible decision-making positions and his fate is in their hands. A conflict arises when he is faced with a female authority figure. He must honor her as an authority figure, but she, as a female, must honor him. Nonetheless, after the initial shock the Ethiopian adapts and finds a solution to his conflict. He alters the image of his world and neutralizes the sex aspect in relation to "female government representatives". A female authority figure, from his viewpoint, is not a woman. He ceases to react to her as to a woman, and for him she is solely an authority figure, a representative of the government, and therefore to be honored.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE ABSORPTION AUTHORITIES

As a continuation of the discussion and in continuation of the claim that the absorbers are seen as authority figures, one must understand the authorities' set of expectations in order to relate all the elements of the cross-cultural misunderstandings.

The Ethiopian immigrant, during the process of his absorption, encounters a large number of government authority figures. In his image of the world, which he brings with him from Ethiopia, the governmental authorities were remote figures. Typically, contact is maintained there with one representative of the district who acts as a mediator in all contacts between him and the central government. Upon his arrival in Israel, immediate face-to-face contact is established with a substantial number of figures who all represent the government (and who often come from conflicting

agencies with conflicting offers). Despite the fact that he grasps "cognitively" the existence of different representatives of authority, it is difficult for him to change his old perception of the world (the perception of *one* representative), and he reacts accordingly. He relates to *each* authority figure as if he or she is the only representative to deal with all the matters between him and the government.

Because all are equal representatives of the governmental authorities, the immigrant enforces his code of honor upon them and expects of them proper behavior in return. It is a two-way code, binding on the authorities as well.

Fulfilling promises. One of the central elements expected of the authority figure is to live up to his promises. The Ethiopians trust people. The Ethiopian culture is thrifty with words, but attributes great importance to each one. If an Ethiopian gives his promise, he always means every word he utters. A promise[3] implies an obligation to carry it out. The honor and status of the person who promises is dependent upon the fulfillment of his promise and therefore he will make every effort to stand by his word. It is clear that an authority figure has "more honor to lose" and therefore when a promise is made by an authority figure, fulfillment is considered almost a certainty. In such a cultural context, oaths are gravely important, taken very seriously, and not frequently taken.

"We'll see" and "Maybe". To the Ethiopians, "we'll see" and "maybe" are also promises. In the immigrants' eyes, these expressions, used by an official, are interpreted as meaning: "I am the government representative. The matter is in *my* hands and is entirely dependent upon *my* will." Therefore a belated reply is interpreted as resulting from the absorption workers' lack of desire due to personal animus. And thus, when the Ethiopian makes a request whose outcome is doubtful, it is better to delegate the responsibility to a higher authority and say, "It's not in my hands, I'll check and let you know."

Acknowledgement of his existence. Another element of the Ethiopians' expectation of the authorities is that they acknowledge his existence by not ignoring him. The lack of interaction with him over a protracted period of time is seen as deliberate avoidance, dislike, and even as expression of a personal grudge. This fact expresses itself in a surprising manner in Israeli schools. An Israeli pupil will prefer to be overlooked by his teacher when she questions him repeatedly in class in order to check his knowledge. He will ask himself: "Why is she picking on me?" An Ethiopian pupil, on the other hand, who is *not* approached by the teacher over a long period of time, will ask himself the identical question: "Why is she picking on me?" To the Israeli pupil the achievement of a correct answer is more important than the teacher's interaction with him. The opposite is true for the Ethiopian, who sees interaction with authority as more important than academic accomplishment *per se*. The teacher-pupil interaction is regarded as educating and rewarding in itself while its absence is considered a deprivation.

It is clear that teachers may err and try to be "understanding" of the Ethiopians by not asking them questions and not asking them to present their knowledge in front of the class. In this way they fall into the trap of cross-cultural prediction and they will achieve opposite results with their Ethiopian pupils.

Ethiopian adults see their interaction with the authorities in the same manner. When the authority figures do not say hello while passing by or do not acknowledge them over an extended period of time, they may interpret this as meaning that they have been picked by the authorities as a target for humiliation.

Insult. The Ethiopian, when functioning within the framework of his cultural code, and avoiding an affront to the honor of the authorities, expects the authorities to refrain from affronts to him; to avoid "declarations of war", not to embarrass him and not to insult him.

Since the concept of honor is so central to Ethiopian society, one of its dominant emotions is taking offense, especially when insulted or affronted by a person of authority, e.g., the absorption official who represents the government. The causes of offence can come from many sources: If you call him *cushi* ('Negro[4]') whose meaning for him is slave (in Ethiopia this is a grave insult); if you use a 'come here' finger sign, which is used only for slaves and less respected people in Ethiopia; if you curse him in any way; or if you place him in front of any group of people and humiliate him.

Humiliation and insult in front of a group are the worst sort of punishment for an Ethiopian. In certain instances, it can cause him to react in a radical manner towards the inflictor; or in the absence of that possibility, he might injure himself. In that case his environment will support and justify him.[5]

The reaction to an insult is very strong. The expectation is that the insult be absorbed quietly and no anger be shown at the affront to one's honor. But at the first opportunity, he will return the insult in some way. "We store things in our stomachs"[6] is the expression used by them for the described process, implying the inability to forget a personal insult or affront to honor.

"I don't know what will happen"; "It will be bad"; "I don't want to create problems" – These are a few typical verbal signs of attempted restraint of anger and desire for revenge. In the event that an outbreak occurs, it is preferable to wait for spontaneous calm before responding verbally, because the cultural mode of expressing anger does not allow the Ethiopian to pay attention simultaneously. Therefore, the Ethiopian immigrant expects the absorption authorities, especially in a group context, to avoid insulting him, to avoid revealing his requests and troubles to others, and to respect his honor. Otherwise, there will be a decisive breach in trust of the authorities and a break in the social code.

Discrimination. The authorities are expected not to discriminate in a negative manner. The Ethiopians become very hurt in instances of discrimination. "You discriminated against me, means that you don't like me, and I feel it in my stomach." This means that they will not forget incidents of injustice, preference to others, failure to give benefits justly due to them, or to pay proper attention. In Israel, they are likely to connect discrimination with the fact that they are black and different. This is an easy way in which to acquire feelings of ethnic repression, which can be destructive in the future.

Outcome: The surprisingly rebellious Ethiopian. From all that has been said above, it is not surprising that misunderstandings arise between the absorption authorities and

the Ethiopians. Probably the strongest expression of these misunderstandings is the image of Ethiopians in the eyes of the absorption authorities which include conflicting elements. On the one hand, Ethiopians are said to be nice, orderly, ambitious, disciplined, delicate, understanding and well behaved. On the other hand, it will be said of them by the same person that they are stubborn, unreliable, annoying, frustrating and spoiled.

Long-term misunderstandings between the immigrant and the absorber, the failure on the part of the authorities to live up to the expectations of the immigrant according to the cultural code, eventually generate the 'surprisingly rebellious Ethiopian'. We are referring to the phenomenon which absorption authorities often describe as sudden surprising outbursts of anger and frustration on the part of some Ethiopians, who totally cease to cooperate with the authorities. Usually, the absorption workers are unaware of the early warning signs of such outbursts. By not fulfilling his obligation in social interaction with the immigrant, and above all, by repeated failure to fulfill promises, the absorption worker will finally cause a breach of trust and hence, termination of the relationship. Breach of trust is an irreversible process, that is, the previous relationship cannot be restored. In cases such as these, immigrants will ask, without giving an explanation, to be moved to a different absorption center, a different class or school, or a different place of work. In extreme cases, the anger will be turned against themselves. This is also a potential source of "rebellion" of different sorts, whether on a personal or collective level.

An interesting last point is connected to the Ethiopian who has become acculturated, that is to say, who has ceased to behave honorably towards the absorption authorities and has learned the Israeli code of behavior towards government representatives. "I'm going to bang my fist on the table," is an accepted expression in Israeli society. Raising one's voice, sit-down strikes, etc., are also acceptable. These are aggressive-assertive behaviors which the Israeli uses when coming in contact with the authorities. From the Ethiopian's point of view, these behaviors are especially harsh, because they involve a total shattering of the image of authority and the collapse of the honor code. Those immigrants who have undergone this process are left with no criteria of internal judgement of behavior. They are likely to behave in an extreme fashion, with indiscriminate aggression towards *all* governmental representatives or authority figures.

DISCUSSION: THE ISRAELI ABSORBERS' POINT OF VIEW

We have, then, seen the cultural code which the Ethiopian immigrant brings with him to his interaction with absorption workers, who are conceived as authority figures. In this respect, we have presented the way in which the Ethiopian expresses his honor for authorities: the avoidance of saying 'no', the cultural dictates of not initiating a conversation or asking a question, etc. On the other hand, as a part of the same cultural code, we presented the Ethiopian's expectations of the authority figures. The immigrant reasons that since the absorber is a figure of authority, he no doubt "knows all" and has the power to help as well as the power to humiliate and injure. A figure of authority must be honored and honor in return, must fulfill promises and avoid cursing, or raising his voice because that is not honorable and is liable to cause offense. He is merciful and caring but can also be firm and hostile. In short, in the language of the Ethiopians, the absorption worker is "my mother and father".

The agents of absorption whom the Ethiopians meet do not fit this cognitive image of an ideal authority figure. They are, first and foremost, members of a different culture. The worker brings with him to the encounter the norms of the Israeli society. As a member of this society he behaves differently than Ethiopian figures of authority. Furthermore, he brings with him his set of expectations of immigrants in general and the recently-arrived Ethiopians in particular. Finally, he develops his own interpretation of the behaviors of the Ethiopian Jews.

How does the Israeli absorber perceive the Ethiopian immigrant? What does he expect of him? How does he react to the gestures of honor and the expectations directed at him? It is our intention to present initial observations on these issues.

On the basis of Zionist motivation and the ideology of "the ingathering of the exiles" into Israeli society, absorption workers perceive themselves as part of a mission whose aim is to "educate and teach" the Ethiopian immigrant. As such they see themselves as aiding in the immigrants' adaptation and absorption. They expect the Ethiopian to exhibit "learning behavior" and to be grateful for the energy and resources invested in him. The immigrant is further expected to function in accordance to the image of an ideal student: to be disciplined, obedient, ambitious, industrious, pleasant and quick to learn. He should also be satisfied with his educators (the absorbers), with the absorption procedures and with the Israeli society in general.

Paradoxically, the Ethiopian is supposed to help the absorber by behaving, from the very beginning, according to the accepted code of the absorbing culture. He is expected to ask when he doesn't understand, to express his needs verbally and not through gestures and actions, and to focus on the learning of skills considered 'vital' to his absorption and adaptation.

The Ethiopian immigrant fulfills some of these expectations. He quickly learns some Israeli codes and, as already noted, is considered, by the absorption worker, to be pleasant, bashful, obedient, intelligent, willing to learn, etc. At the same time the absorption worker interprets the Ethiopian's silence as refusal to cooperate and an unwillingness to communicate; the blank facial exapression is seen as an attempt to hide his 'real' feelings. He perceives the Ethiopian's attempt to transfer decision making to the absorber ("*You* decide") as an avoidance of responsibility. He sees the repeated questions about the same matters as evidence that "he lacks understanding"... "something is wrong with her" ... "he is mixed up". He sees the inability to say 'no' verbally and the characteristic expression of will through action as "they ignore our opinions and do as they wish!" The fact that the Ethiopian doesn't come to pre-arranged meetings is differentially interpreted as "they have no concept of time" ... "they lack minimal responsibility" ... "they don't care about anything" and occasionally the absorbers even interpret the physical expressions of honor as "deliberate mockery".

These and other misinterpretations can partly be understood by looking at the psychological processes which the absorption workers undergo when facing the Ethiopian immigrants.

As the first in Israeli society to encounter the Ethiopians, they are also the first to face different values of a different society. Primitive fears and anxieties are aroused by the interaction with the foreign and unknown. These sometimes find expression in a characteristic intensification of dreams and fantasies, especially nightmares dealing with physical assaults on the absorbers by "dark people", "brown giants", or fears in

dreams of turning "into them", "into the other group", "into another person", etc. These are natural reactions to the workers' interaction with what is alien to them. This interaction undermines the absorber's confidence following a breakdown of some useful "adaptive" stereotypes and of "safe" constructs of the world.

These fears may result in a "counter-attack" on the immigrant, expressed in different ways, among which discriminatory attitudes are not uncommon. They may also lead to a fortification of individual boundaries on the part of the observer, as well as to the well known reaction of seclusion within the boundaries of one's affiliation group.

In sum, in this type of encounter between the two cultures, misunderstandings are bound to occur. These are likely to have far-reaching effects on the process of absorption of the Ethiopians in Israel and its future results.

The cross-cultural misunderstandings described in this paper, are highly regrettable, because they are *not* inevitable and *can* be avoided. In intensive contacts with both sides of the absorption process, it was found that at least in the initial phase, good will exists on both sides. There is eagerness to learn as well as eagerness to teach and educate. Many resources are indeed being invested – time, money, thought, energy, etc. – in the process of absorption. Important projects are being carried out, such as the teaching of the Hebrew language, basic orientation and guidance in modern technological society, enrichment programs and more.

I would like to advance the view that the absorption workers, seeking to improve their functioning, should invest their efforts in coping with two issues: 1) They should turn their attention to the psychological processes they undergo in the face of the foreign and unknown, and try to cope with the resulting implications for their communication with the Ethiopian immigrants. One way of coping with these processes is by turning the unknown into the known and gaining a sense of familiarity. This brings us to our second, and even more important recommendation: 2) The absorbers should arrive at a better understanding of the Ethiopian's cognitive map and construction of reality. They should be equipped with a better knowledge of the cultural code according to which Ethiopian immigrants operate.

Without such understanding there is a real danger that all those efforts and resources mentioned above, will end in failure. The Ethiopian immigrant Jews will then suffer from mal-adaptation to the Israeli society, a process that may lead to social tension and social conflict. It is clear that a better understanding of the mutual and two-sided process which occurs in the cross-cultural encounter can contribute to the better functioning of the field workers.

FOOTNOTES

1. Research and theoretical material dealing with the Ethiopian immigrants in Israel is relatively limited. Those few research projcts which deal with the subject concern (1) the process of absorption (Ashkenazi and Weingrod, 1983; Abbink, 1982); (2) the changes in religious ritual (Abbink, 1983); (3) education and community mental health (Zehavi and Hanegbi, eds. 1983); (4) psychological evaluation and testing (Dotan, 1983); and (5) project reports on application (Zipstein, 1983; Zipstein et al., 1980; Ben Ezer et al., 1985).
2. At the onset, the code can be applied almost indiscriminately to any non-Ethiopian visiting the absorption center where they live.
3. A promised as opposed to a mere nodding of the head in agreement.
4. In Hebrew "cushi", meaning one who comes from the Land of Cush, i.e., Biblical Ethiopia or Africa.
5. It is clear that a compliment received from an authority figure in the presence of others is a valuable reinforcer and a great honor to an Ethiopian.
6. The stomach and not the heart, is the place where emotions are believed to be housed in Ethiopian culture.

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