

Israel 2.0

by

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There is no clearer illustration of the change that Israel will have to undergo in the war's aftermath than the crisis emanating from the current lack of agricultural workers. As a result of the steep decrease in the number of foreign and Palestinian workers, Israelis have mobilized in groups or volunteered as individuals to help as much as possible. That's the "beautiful Israel" that emerges in crises. But the solution, while heart-warming, is both temporary and insufficient.

And then there's the other Israel, the one that is still living in the past, unwilling or incapable of looking beyond its myopic belief that the private sector can continue with business as usual indefinitely with the help of the usual Band-Aids. The Economy Ministry's proposal to immediately import 170,000 foreign workers is problematic not only because of its long-term implications for a private sector addicted to cheap labor in a country already inundated with unskilled and poorly educated Israelis. If implemented, the measure would also create huge disincentives for investments in capital (physical and human) and technologies that could increase labor productivity and raise wages.

Even if we set aside the long-term consequences and focus only on the immediate need for a substantial number of workers in agriculture, the government's proposal reflects a major case of willful blindness by both policy-makers and the public. Instead of relying on students and other volunteers, or on the massive importation of unskilled foreigners over the course of weeks or months, there is an immediate solution right under our noses.

There are hundreds of thousands of men in Israel that the country already funds at a level that enables them to choose non-work as a lifestyle. Setting aside how problematic this is in general, we now need all hands on deck. Just as it is permissible to call up citizens and make them the soldiers that go into Gaza to defend Israel with their lives, it is similarly possible to immediately pass a regulation with regard to hundreds of thousands of yeshiva students living at taxpayers' expense. There's no reason why they shouldn't hit the fields and harvest the unpicked fruits and vegetables that both they and us will need to subsist. After all, we pay for their livelihoods in any case, so isn't it time for them to give something back to their country – aside from singular and limited examples such as Zaka – at its most difficult hour of need since attaining independence? There is nothing more simple, logical or just than that.

The inability to think outside the Israel 1.0 box doesn't just limit Israel's current government of horrors. The scenario described above is one that even the general public is unable to comprehend as an actual possibility today. But that's exactly why we need to upgrade to Israel 2.0. The magnitude of the threats from our south, north and east, and the American armada sent, just in case, by the last Zionist president in the U.S. who will preside in generations to come, underscore how important it is for Israel 2.0 will need to draft every citizen between the ages of 18 and 21. The military will take those that it needs while the remainder will serve in the severely understaffed police and hospitals. We need to prepare them for the day when they will be the only ones standing between the continued existence of a modern liberal democracy and the onslaught of the Middle Ages so vividly on display in the October 7 atrocities. This is in the interest of every Jew (secular, traditional, religious, ultra-orthodox) and Arab in Israel desiring a life of freedom and liberty.

Israel 2.0 will require the integration of population groups that seemingly understand the danger, but have not actually internalized the implications. For example, those still unable to imagine a reality of men studying/working/fighting under female teachers/managers/commanders will have to deal with the new realities of life in Israel 2.0. These issues just scratch the surface of the tectonic changes that Israeli society will have to undergo in its upgrade to the new version – the only one that can ensure Israel's existence for generations to come.