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**WND EXCLUSIVE**

## 'LOST TRIBE' OF ISRAEL RETURNING HOME

'The words of Isaiah are coming to life before our eyes'

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After a five-year immigration halt, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government has given permission to a community of Indian citizens who believe they are one of the "lost tribes" of Israel to move to the Jewish state.

"We had a major breakthrough, and thank God, the Aliya [immigration to Israel] is set to resume this summer, and we hope and pray to bring the first batch of 50 families, or about 250-300 Bnei Menashe immigrants, to Israel by the end of August," said Michael Freund, chairman of [Shavei Israel](#), which is behind the initiative.



Shavei, based in Jerusalem, hopes to bring to the Jewish state the remaining 7,000 Indian citizens who believe they are the Bnei Menashe, the descendants of Manasseh, one of biblical patriarch Joseph's two sons and a grandson of Jacob.

Already Freund's group helped facilitate the immigration of over 1,700 Bnei Menashe, with successive Israeli governments allowing and then halting the process. In 2007, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's administration put the kibosh on the process, which is now being reopened.

Shavei plans to bring 50 Bnei Menashe families to Israel this summer with hopes of transplanting the remaining tribe members from India to Israel in the next few years.

The original batches of Bnei Menashe to arrive here came as tourists in an agreement with Israel's Interior Ministry. Once in Israel, the Bnei Menashe converted officially to Judaism and became citizens.

But diplomatic wrangling halted the immigration process in 2003, with officials from some Israeli ministries refusing to grant the rest of the group still in India permission to travel here.

To smooth the process, Freund at the time enlisted the help of Israel's chief rabbinate, who flew to India in 2005 to convert members of the Bnei Menashe, a process stopped last year by India.

Freund then coordinated with the Israeli government the arrival of batches of a few hundred Bnei Menashe as tourists who would later convert, but that process was halted in July 2007.

Tribe members live in the two Indian states of Mizoram and Manipur, to which they say they were exiled from Israel more than 2,700 years ago by the Assyrian empire.

According to Bnei Menashe oral tradition, the tribe was exiled from Israel and pushed to the east, eventually settling in the border regions of China and India, where most remain today. Most kept customs similar to Jewish tradition, including observing Shabbat, keeping the laws of Kosher, practicing circumcision on the eighth day of a baby boy's life and observing laws of family purity.

In the 1950s, several thousand Bnei Menashe say they set out on foot to Israel but were quickly halted by Indian authorities. Undeterred, many began practicing Orthodox Judaism and pledged to make it to Israel. They now attend community centers in India established by Shavei Israel to teach the Bnei Menashe Jewish tradition and modern Hebrew.

Freund sees the Bnei Menashe immigration as biblical, quoting from Isaiah 43:5, which states, "Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bring your children from the east and gather you from the west."

"Those words," Freund says, "are coming to life before our eyes."

"I think this is a very historic project," he added. "It is the closing of an historical circle. It is the return of a lost tribe of Israel after 27 centuries of exile, and it is a fulfillment of biblical prophecy."

Audio of Freund's interview on WABC's "Aaron Klein Investigative Radio" can be heard below:

