

# HELPING BUKHARIANS RETURN HOME



## *From the Silk Road to Israel*

The Jewish settlement in and around Bukhara, now in the country of Uzbekistan, is believed to date back to the time of Cyrus king of Persia. They are believed to be made up of the descendants of those who chose to stay in Babylon after being freed from their captors by King Cyrus and called to return to Jerusalem. By the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE there was a large community of Jews living in this area where they became merchants and financiers, investing in the caravans that traveled the Great Silk Road. Though this was their main occupation, the Bukharian Jews, were also involved in making crafts and especially known for their silk weaving. They lived through several difficult seasons of persecution, first coming under Islamic rule and later under communistic Soviet rule. Between 1918 and 1920 there were angry riots against the Jews when this area was conquered by the Soviet Army. Trouble for them continued.

## **Aliyah Begins**

Aliyah, for this very isolated Bukharian community, began in 1890 with the building of the Trans-Caspian railroad that opened up the ability to travel for them. By 1914, eight percent or 1,500 from the community had immigrated to Israel settling Rehovot, known as the Bukharian quarter of Jerusalem. They began to prosper greatly in many ways. Between the 1920's and 1930's a second aliyah took place of approximately 4,000 Bukharians. This was carried out mostly

in secret because of Soviet anti-immigration restrictions. Although there were still strong restrictions in place another wave of immigration to Israel took place between 1972-1975, with 8,000 making aliyah. In the 1980's as travel restrictions in the FSU lessened, people were able to visit the Jews in Bukhara. They came to let them know they would be welcome in the West, the United States and in Israel if they wanted to move. Finally in 1989, with the collapse of the USSR, there was a mass exodus of Jews from Uzbekistan already underway. They left mainly for Israel, and the US cities of Boston and New York. Today approximately 40,000 live in the New York City area.

***"Do not fear, O My servant Jacob, says the Lord...I will save you from afar and your seed from the land of their captivity...For I am with you..." Jer.30:10***

Last year in 2006 another aliyah began of a community 300-500 Bukharians from Queens, New York, led by Rabbi M. Borohov. The first group of 35 has already moved and others are preparing to go. Rabbi Borohov contacted the Cyrus Foundation for help. Most of them had no money to take anything with them except two suitcases on the Jewish Agency flight. We were able to make it possible for them to ship some of the belongings needed to start their new life in Israel! Many more will be leaving soon to be a part of this community in Israel! They will need our help.

While in Israel the Rabbi invited us to visit them and to see how happy they all are. We rejoiced with them that they are finally home.