

# NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY

# LIFELINE

FALL 2013

*This article, written by NACOEJ President Rabbi Jerome (Jerry) Epstein, appeared in the "Jerusalem Post" on 9/1/2013, and has received a great deal of attention.*

## OPERATION WINGS OF THE DOVE

*With regard to the Ethiopian aliyah, as arduous as the efforts of the past have been, they pale in comparison to the challenges we must now confront.*

**O**peration Wings of the Dove was celebrated at Ben-Gurion Airport on Wednesday as the State of Israel and the Jewish Agency proudly concluded their commitment to enable the aliyah of Ethiopian Jews.

There is, for certain, a remnant of that community whose cases must be reviewed and others whose legitimate claims of hardship must be heard and resolved. But, we must not lose sight of the magnificent accomplishment that has been achieved.

The North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry has also played a pivotal role in this aliyah narrative. It was NACOEJ that mobilized the North American Jewish community to make the aliyah of Ethiopian Jews a priority nearly three decades ago.

It was NACOEJ that helped inspire rabbis from various streams, including the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, to agree that for the purposes of aliyah, Israel should consider the Ethiopian Jewish community to be Jewish.

For most of these three decades, it was NACOEJ that ran the food pantries to feed the hungry.

It was NACOEJ that created a "weaving business" to provide work for the unemployed in Addis Ababa. And, it was NACOEJ that built and ran the Gondar school.

We are proud of our accomplishments and those of the Jewish Agency and the State of Israel. But believe it or not, as arduous as the efforts of the past have been, they pale in comparison to the challenges we must now confront.

Ethiopian children who have recently come to Israel enter school



## Celebrating the Special Holiday of Ethiopian Jews

**A**gain this year, thousands of Ethiopian Jews gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate their unique Sigd holiday, commemorating the return of the Jews from Babylonian exile, the re-giving of the Torah by Ezra the Scribe, and the renewal of the Sinai covenant.

And again, this year, NACOEJ-Israel Director Shoshana Ben-Dor and partners taught the Sigd liturgy in the ancient Ethiopian Ge'ez language to Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian students at the Jerusalem site. An "experimental edition" of the Sigd prayer book with Shoshana's transliterations and translations of the prayers was distributed.

But there are some changes. Now that the Sigd is a national Israeli holiday, Ethiopian Israelis feel secure enough to argue about it. Some prominent Ethiopian Kessotch (Ethiopian-Jewish religious leaders) complain that the holiday that commenced with a fast in Ethiopia, has become more of a social get-together than a day of

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at a severe disadvantage. Their education in Gondar was not close to the level of their peers in Israeli schools. They are struggling to learn a new language.

They are struggling to learn a new culture. And, they are learning how to learn for the first time in their lives.

Because in many cases their parents do not have the educational skills to help them, these children are often at a disadvantage when compared to their Israeli peers.

Their public school teachers strive to nurture their learning, but the challenges are frequently greater than the system can handle. Various organizations have created outstanding educational programs to foster learning opportunities for these children.

NACOEJ, for example, has established Limudiah programs after school for several hours a day in a spectrum of communities. We guide students with their homework and answer their questions. We enrich their daily lessons.

Yes, the programs exist – but there are not enough.

And, because of a lack of funds, some – too many – children are overlooked



Rabbi Jerome Epstein

or neglected. We have succeeded in fostering the Ethiopian aliyah, but we can do more.

We must do more.

Unemployment and under-employment in the Ethiopian community is stimulating poverty. Various reports indicate that 65% of

72% of Ethiopian children live below the poverty line.

Many are hungry – which impacts on their learning as well as their attitudes toward life. I have watched the children in Limudiah programs voraciously eat the lunch we give them as part of the program because for many it is the only balanced meal of the day. Then, with tears in my eyes, I have seen children carefully pack a portion of the meal so that they will have something to eat for dinner.

Families live in cramped conditions in neighborhoods in which poverty is the norm. Because unemployment is so high, there are too few models of success for children to emulate. The culture of poverty becomes cyclical. We need to develop training programs that will help Ethiopians acquire skills that will equip them to enter the workforce in Israel. Then we must provide the right incentives to hire them and give them on-the-job training.

Adequate housing is a burning issue. When Ethiopians leave the absorption centers, they are, indeed, granted stipends – either mortgages or rental allotments for housing. The rental subsidies for five years permit them to live modestly for the duration of the grant, but they are then responsible to carry the burden on their own. Unless they have been fortunate enough to obtain a reasonable job during that period, they have no resources to pay the rent and must move into even more inferior quarters.

Those who receive mortgages often find that the only apartments they can afford are in substandard housing and in neighborhoods that do not inspire upward mobility.

Perhaps the time has come for all those who are concerned about the Ethiopian community to create a consortium for providing solutions that will ameliorate the housing crisis in an effective fashion. Together, we can do more. We must do more.

Now is the time for celebration of our achievements! We have accomplished what many said would be impossible.

But our outstanding success must now inspire further commitment to action. Without resolving the crises in housing, education, and jobs, we run the risk of creating a permanent under-class that will plague Israel for generations to come. ■

**Congratulations to...**

- NACOEJ Office Manager **Nelya Danielova** and husband Yuriy Danielov, on the marriage of their daughter Rita to Yan Kusayev. Congratulations also to Rita's brother Salomon.

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prayer and repentance in Israel – with political speeches and vendors selling food and drink.

Others are urging that Sigd should be a more universal day of prayer for Jews everywhere.

Shoshana points out that the Sigd liturgy includes aspects of the High Holidays, Tisha B'Av, Yom Ha'Atzmaut, and Shavuot, which all Jews can relate to.

And Rabbi Yosef Hadane, Chief Rabbi of the Ethiopian-Israeli community says, "Our forefathers in Ethiopia always prayed to return to Jerusalem...We are here, but the vast majority of the Jewish nation is still in the Diaspora. This day and these prayers are very important for the ingathering of the exiles...I would suggest that Jews around the world adopt this."\*

As if in response, this year two Sigd celebrations were held in New York City, attracting not only Ethiopian-Israelis here, but many Americans fascinated by an ancient Jewish ritual born in Africa. ■

\*Quote excerpted from "The Gift of Sigd", by Shai Afshai, *Voices of Conservative/Masorti Judaism*, Fall 2013.

# Three NACOEJ Heroes Whose Work Lives On...

These three NACOEJ heroes had important things in common. They were all Jews wanting to help those in need. All made a huge impact on the Ethiopian-Jewish community. Sadly, all are gone, but their work lives on.

What they didn't have in common was money. One was a retired teacher living on a pension, one was a retired businessman living comfortably, and one was very rich.

**Evelyn Deitchman** was the retired teacher. For over 20 years, she administered the Adopt-A-Student Sponsorship Program as a volunteer in the NACOEJ New York office. She corresponded with hundreds of sponsors via hand-written notes and phone calls. Many became close friends.

Evelyn couldn't afford to adopt a student on her own, so she formed a group of friends who sponsored together. Evelyn shared the students' letters with her friends and answered them. The AAS Program grew substantially and still reflects her structure, her ideas, and her ideals.

**Jerry Simon** was the retired businessman. He could afford to adopt a student but one wasn't enough for him. So he too formed a group. Every year he wrote a letter to his friends, asking them to contribute whatever they could. He added his own money and sponsored as many students as the combined funds

would cover. Like Evelyn, he answered the students' letters.

One of Jerry's students invited him to her wedding in Israel. By then Jerry needed a walker. But he went to the wedding, where the bride asked her "American grandfather" to join her for the first dance. The bride, Jerry, and his walker danced together. He called it "a night of supreme joy". After Jerry passed on, the group was continued by friends.

**Lloyd Rigler** was the very rich man. He had a foundation which usually sponsored the arts and environmental issues – but the plight of Jewish children in Ethiopia tugged at his heart. He volunteered funds to create the NACOEJ Feeding Centers in Addis Ababa and Gondar. Lloyd funded life-saving meals for thousands of children.

Children in Ethiopia have a high mortality rate around age three. But the children Lloyd fed did not die. Today most of those children are in Israel. Many have gone through NACOEJ educational programs and become self-supporting citizens in Israel. Looking back, some of them now say, "NACOEJ saved my life." Lloyd's legacy is their lives.

**Evelyn, Jerry, and Lloyd** were heroes who gave generously of what they had and of what they were. Their influence did not end with their lives. ■

## Condolences to...

- NACOEJ Director of Development and Donor Relations **Danielle Ben-Jehuda** on the passing of her beloved father, Jehuda Ben-Jehuda, of Metar, Israel.
- NACOEJ Education Coordinator **Karen Gens** on the passing of her beloved father, George W. Gens, of Coconut Creek, Florida.
- The family and friends of **Dr. Joan L. Schiff**, curator of the NACOEJ Ethiopian artifacts and member of our Advisory Board.

## Rabbi Ovadia Yosef

On October 7, 2013, hundreds of thousands of Israelis followed the coffin that carried the late Rabbi Ovadia Yosef through Jerusalem to his final resting place.

Within the crowd were many Ethiopian Jews, mourning the loss of the former Chief Rabbi who opened the doors to Israel for them in 1973.

At that time, when most Jews were either ignorant of, or ambivalent about, the Jewishness of these dark-skinned Ethiopians, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef spoke out strongly, ruling that the so-called "Falasha" were indeed Jews and eligible to come to Israel.

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's word was law to the many who revered him as one of the greatest Talmudic scholars of his time, and though he was sometimes considered a controversial figure, to the Jews of Ethiopia he was, and remained, their beloved champion and protector.

With them, we mourn the loss of a courageous rabbi, without whose outspoken advocacy the Jews of Ethiopia might have been left isolated and abandoned forever.

## Living On...

If you, like Evelyn, Jerry and Lloyd, would like to ensure that your concern and affection for Ethiopian Jews will live on past your own lifetime, you can help secure our ongoing education programs for this special community, some of whom are still very new to Israel, by making provision in your will.

Even as you continue your support now, please consider a bequest to NACOEJ. Help ensure that the programs you support today will be there for children from immigrant families tomorrow, and they will not be trapped in a cycle of poverty.

For questions about making a bequest, please contact your lawyer, accountant, or financial advisor. For questions about NACOEJ programs, please contact Danielle Ben-Jehuda at [donors@nacoej.org](mailto:donors@nacoej.org) or phone 212-233-5200, ext. 227.

**And if you've decided to make provision for a bequest to NACOEJ, please check off the special box that tells us so on the enclosed reply card. We hope you will do so – and we thank you so much.**

## AAS STUDENT LETTERS TO SPONSORS

### In Their Own Words...

Here are some excerpts from letters written by college students to their AAS sponsors. We think they illustrate how important AAS sponsorships are to the students, and how fulfilling they can be for those who help these outstanding young people reach their goals. Please consider becoming a sponsor yourself.



#### From Nursing Student Almaz Ababa:

"I would like to thank you again for your sponsorship. For me it is a lot. I don't take your support for granted. It is greatly appreciated...I send you a big hug and wish you much health, happiness, love and an undying smile."



#### From University Student Shoshana Gete:

"I hope that you are well. I want to share a bit of what has happened to me since my last letter...I want to tell you about my volunteer project at

university. Over the past few months we have taught classes at different schools around Israel.

"Working with classes with and without Ethiopian-Israeli students was amazing. For the Ethiopian students, there was important added value when they saw university students from our community. This gave them a feeling of 'yes, I can'. Many thanks for your support."



#### From Education Major Ilana Raskay:

"Thank you very much for your letter. It is great to receive a reply and to know a little more about you. Thank you again for everything!

I really appreciate your commitment...you made things a lot easier for me. I hope this won't be our last letter."



#### From College Student Yenenesh Kasa:

"First of all, I want to wish you well and thank you from my family after they learned of your sponsorship. It's nice to know that there are people like you who think about students in

my situation. I am moved by your warmth, love, and desire to help people like me advance."

## COLLEGE STUDENTS W



#### Avraham Valda-Miryam

*He trained medics in the IDF.  
Now he hopes to become a doctor.*

My name is Avraham Valda-Miryam. My father, Gabriel Siles, emigrated from Ethiopia before the State of Israel was established in 1948. My late mother, Asalfatesh Ingida (z"l), arrived in the 1980's. They met and married in Israel. I was born in 1984.

I graduated from Ziv Marks High School in Jerusalem in 2003, and then served as a soldier and a medic in the IDF Givati Brigade\*.

During my IDF service, I worked alongside army physicians, and discovered I can function well under pressure, and during military action. Then I trained soldiers and medics. They're still in touch with me. I think that's a measure of my success that they feel I did a good job.

After the IDF, I took a college prep course at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and recently I was accepted into HU's course in nursing and paramedics at Asaf HaRofeh Hospital. Now my plan for my future is to go as far as I can in the medical field. Maybe I can be a doctor.

But my father cannot provide me with everything I will need to live while I get my degree. I very much need a sponsor to enable me to realize my dream of helping people as a medical professional, and hope someone will help.

*\*The Givati Brigade is a very high-prestige unit in the Israel Defense Forces. Serving in Givati, and training others, shows not only courage but a high degree of competence and intelligence.*

**To sponsor an Ethiopian-Israeli college or high school student, and help make their dreams come true, please contact Karen Gens at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or email: [Education@nacoej.org](mailto:Education@nacoej.org). Please tell her you learned about the students in Lifeline.**

## WHO NEED SPONSORS



### Sando Dasta

*She guarded Israel's borders in the IDF. Now she wants a career in law enforcement and criminology.*

Shalom. My name is Sando Dasta. I immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia with my mother, brother and three sisters in the 1990's. We have lived in Safed ever since.

We had to make aliyah without our father because he had been forcibly conscripted into the Ethiopian army. We have tried to locate him, but without success. The Ethiopian government says he is missing in action. We miss him terribly but with G-d's help, we hope for a good outcome.

My mother works at the Jewish Agency's immigrant absorption center in Safed. To her, helping other new immigrants to Israel closes a circle of gratitude to Israel for opening its arms to us.

I graduated from high school in Safed. I enlisted in the army on October 22, 2006 and served in the military police in the Border Crossing unit\*.

During my service, I took an officers' course and was recognized as an exceptional soldier. After my service, I got a job as a worker and translator for new immigrants in a factory. I am now about to begin my bachelor's studies in criminology and law enforcement at Safed Academic College. My mother, who is a single mom, cannot help me with my living expenses, so I very much need a sponsor. Can someone help?

*\*Policing Israel's borders is a high-risk post, even in peacetime.*

## HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NEED OF SPONSORS



### Mordechai Kesete

is in 7th grade at the Religious High School in Yavne. He has five brothers, one who is presently in the army. The others are all in school.

During the summer, recognizing family responsibilities at an early age, he helps take care of his younger brothers because both of his parents work in a factory.

Mordechai loves sports and computers. In school he studies English, math, communication, Bible, and Hebrew grammar. His favorite subjects are math and physical education, and he dreams of being a soccer player when he grows up.

Mordechai needs a sponsor to cover the books, educational materials, trip fees, basic school supplies and other essentials his family is unable to pay for. He hopes for a sponsor to "help him and his community".



### Wuda (Ruti) Wodag

is in 9th grade in the Bayit VaGan School in Bat Yam. She came to Israel from Ethiopia in 2004 as a small child. Her family lived in an absorption center in Beer Sheva for a year and then settled in Bat Yam.

Wuda has eight brothers and sisters, two serving in the army, the rest in boarding schools. Wuda wants to remain in the good local high school she's attending. "My dream," she says, "is to be a doctor in a hospital, and a successful one at that."

She likes learning English and science and proudly says she is really good at both. "I dedicate a lot of time and effort to them," she says. Math is "also great."

To become a doctor, Wuda needs a good high school education to prepare for college. To stay in her high school, she needs a sponsor. Might you help her realize her dream?

## From Herdsman to Physician: A Dream Realized

We've told you before about the outstanding Maru Gete, who was a herdsman as a child in Ethiopia and who has become a doctor in Israel with the help of NACOEJ AAS sponsor Elaine Schwartz.

Maru graduated from a yeshiva high school, and, along with his close high school friend Asael Lubotsky, was accepted into the IDF's high-risk, high-prestige Golani combat unit. The two served together during the second Lebanon war, until Asael was severely wounded.

Maru accompanied his buddy to the hospital. Back on the front lines, under fire, he managed to contact Asael's sister

Shaked, and asked her to go to the hospital, see her brother, and tell the family about his condition.

Maru and Shaked fell in love and married. Now Maru has his MD, and is interning at Soroka Hospital, considering specializing in pediatrics or ENT surgery. (And he's also working on a Master's Degree in public health!) Maru and Shaked (who's embarking on a PhD in epidemiology next year!) now have four children.

We're happy to share this beautiful family photo with you. Maru's sponsor, Elaine, can have much "nachas" from Maru and her important role in helping him achieve



his dreams. You too can have "nachas" by providing a modest living stipend for an Ethiopian-Israeli college student shown here or another on our waiting list. (See box on page 4 for information.)

## Challenging Problems Ethiopian Children Face in Israel Today

**T**here are many after-school programs for underprivileged children in Israel. So why do towns, schools and communities ask so urgently for our Limudiah programs? Of course, the small groups, top teachers, hot lunches, and locating in the children's own schools, make a big difference. But there is more.

It's time to talk about some of the difficult problems many of our children bring with them to Limudiah. Some are issues no one wants to talk about, but in Limudiah we do our best to face them. They can be formidable barriers to a child's ability to learn.

One big problem is that some Israeli teachers have very low expectations of Ethiopian children: "They can't learn!" we hear, and this leads too often to self-fulfilling prophecies in homeroom.

*In one of our first-grade Limudiah classes a little boy we'll call Yarden\* seemed exceptionally bright – but*

\* Names changed for privacy.  
Children discussed are not in the photos.



*he was failing first grade. He didn't seem to understand what the homework the other children were doing was about.*

*Our puzzled Limudiah teacher visited his homeroom class.*

*To her dismay, she discovered the homeroom teacher hadn't given Yarden the first grade workbook. She assumed he couldn't handle it, so she had given him a kindergarten workbook instead.*

*Our Limudiah teacher promptly got a first grade workbook and worked on it with Yarden. She developed special exercises to help bridge the gap Yarden now had to cross, visited his parents, and showed them how to track and respond to Yarden's progress themselves.*

*At the end of the year, Yarden went home with a prize from the principal. His homeroom teacher had changed her attitude (maybe toward all Ethiopian children?). And Yarden's parents were justly proud of the role they played in helping their son.*

Another problem: children everywhere can be cruel to others. Children seriously hurt by abusive teasing can act out, become disruptive, or stop coming to class. One child came to us afraid even to eat with other children. Others hide the pain.

Our Limudiah teachers try to be extra sensitive to hidden anguish, especially in children who arrive as transfers from a previous school where they may have had a bad experience.

*A 4th grade Limudiah pupil told us, "I have a Limudiah teacher who always helps me. When I'm unhappy about something and I don't want the other kids to know, she takes me outside so I can tell her in privacy. And she takes care of it."*



*Another child, 2nd grade: "If we're hurt or someone teases us, we get help from our Limudiah teacher. We can talk to her about anything."*

Some people have unrealistic expectations of Ethiopian parents also, mistaking illiteracy for stupidity. Or assuming that uneducated parents do not care about their children's education in Israel. "It's no use talking to them, they don't understand," we hear too often, when the problem may be that the parents don't yet know how to get involved in school issues.

But Ethiopian mothers and fathers are individuals with different histories, expectations and abilities to cope with a strange new world.

*It's true that some Ethiopian parents can't cope with the huge transition to a modern state, and Limudiah, in cooperation with the school, may have to step in more than usual. We know one family that arrived with nine children and struggle daily to support them. They've given up on everything but survival.*

*Their daughter, Maya, came to our Limudiah looking unkempt, unclean, and neglected. The school helped with clean clothes and new school supplies but the parents wouldn't cooperate.*

*"So it was up to us," our Limudiah teacher said. "Maya's homeroom teacher and I got together and made a plan to give Maya the praise and encouragement she wasn't getting at home. In both classes, every little*

*success of hers was noticed with compliments. As she got confidence, her schoolwork started to improve. When she started to speak up in class, we knew she'd make it! Now she's helping a little brother learn how to read."*

But there are other Ethiopian parents full of passion about their children's education. We hear from some NACOEJ-sponsored high school students that, "My mother works two jobs every day to support us, so I try to help around the house at night. But she tells me, 'No, don't help – do your homework so you'll never have to scrub floors like me.'"

*In one family, the only son, Birhan, was poor at language and math. His father was upset about his lack of progress, but even more upset because he couldn't help his son with schoolwork. "I could have taught him weaving," he said. "But not this."*

*Birhan's Limudiah teacher noticed that the margins of Birhan's not-so-good workbook pages were filled with drawings showing real talent.*

*She appointed him "My Official Helper for Creative Activities", and he blossomed! Before the end of the school year, Birhan was showing his rapt classmates how to make little figures out of clay, and the children voted him "King of Art"!*

*Not surprisingly, his grades began to improve, and Birhan's father, who, at the advice of the Limudiah teacher, applauded his son's artistic and academic progress, felt empowered. He told our teacher, "You have made me as happy as if this was Birhan's wedding day!"*

There's much more, of course. Like the use our teachers make of a simple technique often called "Come sit next to me", which can do wonders with a disruptive or frightened child.

Or placing a child with outstanding social skills but poor academic skills next to a classmate with the opposite talents, and encouraging them to work together as "buddies", which can help both children as they help each other.



The stories of our Limudiah teachers' sensitivity, generosity of spirit, and creativity in teaching and nurturing, could fill a book.

But what it all comes down to is looking at the children, parents, and other teachers with open eyes and hearts, seeing them for who and what they are, and doing our best to bring out the best. This is as much a part of Limudiah's success as flashcards and story books and little prizes...as much as the fun and games and good hot lunches in the Limudiah's ten hours a week of making miracles.

We can't make every child's life perfect, but thanks to your support, we can provide both the emotional security and academic success that open the golden doors to their future. That is why Limudiah is such a success. ■



## IMPORTANT CHANGE: PLEASE READ New School Supplies: The Children Still Need Them, But...

Unfortunately, NACOEJ can't store donated school supplies at our New York office anymore. And we cannot ship them to Israel now because the high cost makes it impractical. But the Ethiopian children in our Limudiah programs still need school supplies.

Fortunately, you can still contribute school supplies. Here's what to do:

- Contact Danielle Ben-Jehuda (212-233-5200, ext. 227 or [donors@nacoej.org](mailto:donors@nacoej.org)) for our latest list of needed supplies and please stick to it. Please don't include not-needed items.
- Be sure all the supplies are new and in their original wrappings.
- Take the supplies with you when you go to Jerusalem, or send them with others. They must be brought only to Jerusalem.
- Before the supplies are due to arrive in Israel, please notify NACOEJ New York (212-233-5200 or [nacoej@nacoej.org](mailto:nacoej@nacoej.org)) or NACOEJ Israel (011-972-2-624-5104 or [nacoej@netvision.net.il](mailto:nacoej@netvision.net.il)) as to when and where the supplies will be in Jerusalem. We can pick them up at any address in Jerusalem but not elsewhere in Israel.

**THANKS SO MUCH!**



*Torah dedication procession in Katamon, Jerusalem*

## Torahs from America Go to Ethiopian Jews in Israel and Africa

Last June, Rabbi Dan Levin and congregants of Temple Beth El in Boca Raton climaxed their visit to Israel by presenting a fully restored, beautifully mantled, Torah to an Ethiopian synagogue in Katamon, Jerusalem that holds services in an empty bomb shelter.

Tracey Grossman, whose family played a major role in enabling the Temple Beth El Torah donation, writes of the procession through streets closed by the police for the event:

“As we paraded the Sefer Torah from their community center to their shul, two groups who had little in common – including language – were joined as one. Our men, and even our teenage boys, danced as excitedly under the mobile chupah as our new friends and brethren.

“To increase the joy, many, many people came to their windows and out to their stoops or even joined in

our parade and celebration to glean the ruach of our simcha. I have no words for how much it meant to me to realize not just the effect that our actions had on this particular congregation, but on the community at large.

“At the end of our parade, in front of the entrance to their bomb shelter/shul, a man was selling cotton candy. It was the perfect metaphor for our evening: incredibly sweet.”

Two months later, the leaders of the left-behind community in Gondar, Ethiopia begged NACOEJ not to leave them without a Torah with Rosh Hashanah approaching.

When the Jewish Agency left Gondar, their staff was to bring the NACOEJ Torahs to our office in Israel. But when we got the request to leave the Torahs in Gondar, we happily agreed, so the left-



*Rabbi Dan Levin presents the Torah*

behind community (many of whom are appealing to have their cases for aliyah reconsidered) could celebrate the High Holidays with them.

Hundreds of ecstatic men, women, and children turned out to escort the Torahs to the old NACOEJ compound (temporarily rented for the holidays by another organization), and thousands prayed there for reunification this year with family already in Israel.

According to one person who has participated in several Torah donations: “If you want to experience true joy, take a Torah to Ethiopian Jews!”

To discuss a Torah donation, please contact NACOEJ Board member Sandy Goldhaber at [goldhabers@optonline.net](mailto:goldhabers@optonline.net).



*Torah being carried into former NACOEJ synagogue in Gondar, Ethiopia*

## UPDATE ON OUR TIGIST

Tigist Bitau, our teenage Olympic-hopeful star runner, is still in physical therapy after having had her leg cruelly smashed by a youth on a dune buggy.

The good news is that, thanks to generous NACOEJ donors, we were able to hire good tutors to help her pass the high school courses she missed during her on-going recovery. As a result, Tigist is now in 11th grade.

The final outcome of her recovery is still unknown – and the bad news is that her long-delayed court hearing has been postponed yet again. Her family is still struggling to survive and provide Tigist with therapy and other special needs. They are most grateful for NACOEJ’s help. ■

### NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY

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