

# NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY

# LIFELINE

SPRING 2012



*Families outside the Israeli consulate in Gondar, waiting to be interviewed by the Jewish Agency. This photo was taken last March. We hope these families are in Israel by now – but the aliyah has slowed down!*

## SHOCKING NEWS!

Last October, the Israeli government cut the rate of aliyah from Ethiopia from 200 Jews a month to 110 a month.

The reason they gave: Not enough space in absorption centers for 200 a month.

Now they have admitted there is plenty of space.

**But the Prime Minister's office says they still won't even consider upgrading the aliyah until September.**

That is seven long months away!

This is shocking. It is a violation of the aliyah agreement among NACOEJ, the Jewish Agency, and the Israeli cabinet – and it is unworthy of the great State of

Israel that has done so much to bring Ethiopian Jews home in the past.

It is particularly painful because September is the prelude to the yearly malaria epidemic in Gondar. Thousands of Jewish men, women, and children – already fully approved to come to Israel – will be exposed to yet another deadly mosquito onslaught.

And thousands of impoverished Ethiopian-Israelis who still have close family members in Ethiopia will have to keep taking food out of their own families' mouths to send rent money for tin-roofed, mud-walled hovels that

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## Saving the Littlest Drop-Outs: A Story from the Limudiah

You see them in the malls or on the streets: Ethiopian children on their own during school hours, too young to be counted as “drop-outs”, but too unhappy in school to show up.

Lior (not his real name) had all the qualifications for becoming a “littlest drop-out”: a middle child in a big, struggling, impoverished immigrant family – a second-grader who still couldn't read, couldn't do first-grade arithmetic, couldn't sit still, couldn't make friends. And increasingly often, couldn't be found in class or even in the NACOEJ *Limudiah* where most Ethiopian children love to be, where they can have a good lunch, catch up to their classmates, and feel like successes.

Lior, who felt like a failure, would duck out of class, escape from the building, and wander in the streets until the after-school bus came to take the *Limudiah* children home. Then Lior would suddenly reappear, gobble down the no-longer-hot lunch set aside for him, get on the bus, and go home.

His *Limudiah* teacher feared it was only a matter of time till he didn't come back at all. She consulted Lior's morning teacher, who said, “He's out of control.” She spoke with Lior's mother and an

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## SHOCKING NEWS! | CONT. FROM PAGE 1

barely provide shelter to their relatives in Gondar.

Despite the Jewish Agency's continuation of NACOEJ feeding programs for children in Gondar, hunger and malnutrition still devastate the community.

Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, head of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, was so shocked when he visited Gondar that he offered to re-start the long-discontinued NACOEJ food distributions to families.

I have written to thank him, and ask whether the distributions have started yet. I fear not.

So there's terrible misery still for Jews in Ethiopia, and the only excuse the government can now offer for the cut-down aliyah is unspecified "absorption problems in Israel".

That's not acceptable.

Sure, there are problems in Israel. But they can and will be successfully addressed in Israel. The problems in Ethiopia cannot be fully addressed except by aliyah.

The reason we agreed to leave Ethiopia was to get the aliyah started again.

Now we have to keep it going.

NACOEJ former president Joseph Feit made 12 trips to Israel in 2011 for this purpose. Now, as I write, he is there again, meeting with cabinet ministers, chief rabbis, Knesset members, and other great allies in and out of the Ethiopian-Israeli community.

And, things are happening.

As you read this, there is a Knesset committee meeting scheduled, as well as a Supreme Court hearing. There is publicity in the media, and growing awareness of the issue among Israeli citizens, including, of course, over 120,000 Ethiopian Israelis and their leaders.

But we have a job to do in America as well.

I recently sent you a letter about this life-threatening issue, and asked for your personal help.

I'm happy to say that many of you responded by contacting the Israeli embassy in Washington (3514 International Drive NW, Washington, DC 20008. Phone: 202-364-5500. Fax: 202-364-5423. Email: info@washington.mfa.gov.il), local Israeli consulates, and Jewish Federations (which are expected to help fund the now-delayed aliyah).

Thank you for making your voices heard. It helps so much.

But in light of this insupportable and unsupported refusal to even consider promptly restoring the old aliyah quota – which would save Jewish lives and continue Israel's great tradition of rescue and absorption – I must ask you to please revisit those contacts now again or establish them for the first time. Make it clear how much you care.

Bless you – for your support at home in this crisis, and for your support of the leadership NACOEJ takes in Israel – even as we struggle at the same time to maintain our educational programs that mean so much to the current generation of Ethiopian-Israelis. Their successes are great advocates for the aliyah and absorption of their community.

With your help, their relatives still in Gondar will become equally fine citizens – if we can ensure that they survive to reach Israel, and find our outstretched hands waiting for them.

Please keep up your good work, and your support. The aliyah needs NACOEJ, and NACOEJ needs you. Together, we'll succeed.

*Barbara Ribakove Gordon*

## Caring for the Future Today

**T**o each of you reading this newsletter, we extend our thanks for your unceasing generosity and compassion. You are our essential partners in NACOEJ's assistance to Ethiopian Jews.

For Ethiopian Jews who have reached Israel, and for many born in Israel to immigrant parents, your support means an opportunity to achieve the education that will enable them to become independent, to care for their families, to be the kind of citizens of Israel they want to be.

Together, we've already achieved so much. But we still have a great deal more work to do to ensure that more members of this ancient community of Jews, thousands of whom are still arriving, can make successful lives.

As you continue your generous support of NACOEJ's work today, please give thought to extending your partnership into the future.

By remembering NACOEJ in your will, you can enable Ethiopian Jews who are still on their way to Israel to find the educational opportunities they need waiting for them when they arrive. You ensure that those who are already in Israel – especially the young people – can achieve their tremendous potential. Without our help, too many fail.

A simple instruction in your will naming NACOEJ can change the future for thousands of Ethiopian-Israeli children and families. On their behalf, we offer our profound gratitude.

If you have questions about specific NACOEJ programs you may wish to designate, or just want to let us know your plans, please contact Danielle Ben-Jehuda at 212-233-5200, ext. 227 or email to [dbenjehuda@nacoej.org](mailto:dbenjehuda@nacoej.org). If you have legal questions, please consult your attorney, accountant, or financial advisor. Thank you so much.



## LITTLEST DROP-OUTS | CONT. FROM PAGE 1

older sister, who said, "He doesn't listen to us." She asked the *Limudiah* city coordinator, who said, "Let's all have a meeting."

The next time Lior returned to *Limudiah* from his wanderings, expecting to eat his cold lunch, he found five anxious women waiting for him, all worried about him, all wanting to help him.

And as happens so often in our small *Limudiah* classes, where close attention is paid to every child's individual needs, something went "click" in Lior's mind:

Somebody cared! Five women – his mother, his sister, his morning teacher, his *Limudiah* teacher, and even the special *Limudiah* coordinator – were paying attention! To him!

The next day, Lior sat through his morning class and the *Limudiah* class. The *Limudiah* teacher asked him to stay after class so they could read a (first-grade) book together. She drove him home herself. The next day they did number puzzles together.

When Lior finished a page in his workbook, he got a little prize to take home to his mother. She showed it to the whole family. The school coordinator came especially to hear him read a page from a (second-grade) book and told Lior she was "amazed". And the morning teacher told him, "You're getting to be one of my best pupils!"

At the end of second grade, Lior was reading at class level (he made up two years in one!), and was almost up to average in arithmetic. And today in every *Limudiah*, he eats his lunch while it's hot, and stays till it's over. He's no longer a "littlest drop-out" and we don't expect him to become a teenage drop-out either.

There are many Liors in Israeli elementary schools. Their regular teachers, with up to 40 children in a first or second-grade class, can't give them personal attention. Their parents, who may not be able to read or write in any language, can't help them with schoolwork.

Like Lior, these children can become depressed or angry. They lose faith in their ability to succeed in this strange new world. Too often, they just give up trying – and then can become the littlest drop-outs, on their way to becoming street children, youth-at-risk, teens-in-trouble.

There are programs in Israel to try to put these young lives back together – once they reach their teens.

**At NACOEJ, we prefer to prevent the disaster from happening.**

We try to intervene early, when we can usually give a child what he or she needs to feel wanted and experience real success.

***Limudiah* children don't become teens-in-trouble. They go on to good high schools, successful years in the army or national service, and often to college (often with NACOEJ sponsors).**

And with time as their friend instead of their enemy, they are becoming teachers in our programs, parents with good jobs, and professionals eager to "give back" to their community, and to the State of Israel – and to send their thanks to the American Jews who helped them when they needed it most.

**Thank you, our NACOEJ family. ■**

## Some of our *Limudiah* Children

*For obvious reasons, we can't show you a picture of Lior – but we can't resist showing you a few photos of children in some of our *Limudiah* classes, currently in 15 schools, in eight cities. Alas, some institutional support for the program is due to end with this school year, so we'll need all our donors' help more than ever to keep the classes going.*



*In a *Limudiah*, children get ready to light Chanukah candles. Chanukah came late into the Jewish calendar, and wasn't known to most Jews in Ethiopia. We invite parents to join our classes in holiday celebrations.*



*Science lessons start early in Israeli schools, and our *Limudiah* classes take pains to set up child-friendly demonstrations. With only eight children to every teacher in *Limudiah*, every child gets a chance for a hands-on experience.*

*Photos: Win Robins*

LIFELINE • FEBRUARY 2012 • ISSUE NO: 73

Lifeline is published three times annually. • NACOEJ • 255 West 36th St. • New York, NY 10018

## High School Kids Needing Sponsors

*These high school students help a lot at home – and need a little help in school!*

*Most Ethiopian-Israeli teens, like other high school girls and boys, talk about their dreams, their ambitions, their best and worst subjects, their celebrity idols, their favorite sports.*

*This time, we're writing about two girls who have hopes and dreams, but who put special emphasis on helping their siblings and their parents at home. For their families, like most Ethiopian-Israeli families, the costs of books, school supplies, school trips, transportation and everything involved in attending a good high school in Israel, are beyond their financial means. They need sponsors in our NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program to help with these costs.*



### HANA MEHERET

Hana, who attended a NACOEJ *Limudiah* in elementary school in Ramla, where she lives with her parents and four siblings, is now in 10th grade at the Amal Ben Ami High School. She likes Amal Ben Ami because, like the *Limudiah* faculty, "the teachers help and support me when I don't understand something or have a problem."

Like many Israeli girls, Hana's active in a youth movement (hers is called Noar HaOved) and a City Scouts troop, but usually, she says, she goes home after school to help her younger brothers and sisters with their homework! "This is very important to my parents," she tells us, adding "I also help clean the house."

And when we asked her if she had a message for someone in America who might sponsor her, here's what she replied:

"Your sponsorship would help me to continue to do the things I like – to do well in school – and to stand by my parents and help them with what they need."

It sounds to us as if this family is applying good traditional Ethiopian values to raising children who will do well in modern Israel. Hana is lending a willing hand at home – let's give her a hand to make sure she has everything she needs in school!



### TEZANO TEKELE

Tezano, who was born in an Ethiopian village, is one of six children. The family arrived in Israel only in 2010, so she still has vivid memories of life in rural Ethiopia, and of her role in a farm family.

"We took care of cows, sheep, and donkeys," she says proudly. "I'd help Dad when he took care of the cows. At night, we would take them to their

shed." During the days, "I also helped Mom to clean the house."

Life in Holon, where the family now lives, is different – no cows, sheep or donkeys – but Tezano still likes to "... help my Mom at home" as well as to play on the computer, do her homework, and "...help my little brothers and sisters. I like to help people."

Today Tezano is in seventh grade\* in the Yavne Holon School, which she likes because: "It's fun, even though English is hard for me, and math is, too, but not quite as much!"

So what is this helpful girl's dream for her future? Is she going to be a doctor, a teacher, a social worker?

Not exactly.

"I want to be a pilot!"

We think that's a great ambition for a terrific girl who arrived in Israel on a plane! A high school sponsor can ensure that she doesn't lack for the books, school supplies, and other basic tools she must have to get the most out of high school and pave the way for her dream to come true.

*\*Some Israeli high schools include seventh and eighth grade.*

***Want to sponsor Hana or Tezano or any of the 300 other high school students on our waiting list? Contact Judy Dick at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or email [highschool@nacoej.org](mailto:highschool@nacoej.org). Tell her you read about them in Lifeline.***

## CONGRATULATIONS TO...

- NACOEJ Advisory Board member **Rabbi Lynn Goldstein** on her engagement to Jack Dougherty, and congratulations to Lynn's daughters Jenny and Becky, and Jack's daughter Andrea.
- Dr. Avraham Nguise**, head of the Ethiopian-Israeli South Wing to Zion organization and wife Leah, on the marriage of their daughter Rutie to Ariel Gershman of Kiryat Shmona. Mazel Tov also to Rutie's sister Hanni and the Gershman family.

- NACOEJ friends **Avishai Yeganyahu Mekonen and wife Shari Rothfarb Mekonen** for inspiring and directing a very moving documentary, "400 Miles to Freedom", about Avishai's childhood escape from Ethiopia, traumatic kidnapping in Sudan, and life as an Ethiopian Israeli. The film has already played several engagements in New York City. To locate showings nationwide or get it into your local Israeli or Jewish Film Festival or other venues (and invite Avishai and Shari to speak!), go to the website – [fourhundredmilestofreedom.com](http://fourhundredmilestofreedom.com) – or phone the Mekonen family at 212-663-3109. NACOEJ staff and Board members who have seen the film are very impressed!

## AAS Students Needing Sponsors



### ELIAS BARUCH

Back in 1984, Elias Baruch must have traveled to Israel in a pouch on his mother's back – and if so, it was his last free ride.

He grew up in Petach Tikva with his parents and seven siblings, a loving family with no money to spare. But they had dreams.

"My parents," Elias says, "were uneducated themselves, but they inculcated in us the importance of an education. I chose to work hard to be accepted in a university."

When Elias says "work hard" he doesn't mean it metaphorically. He was determined to get the best education Israel has to offer, and was willing to work both hard and long to get it.

When he finished his military service, Elias decided that his grades at the ORT College High School in Givat Ram weren't good enough to get him into the university of his choice. So he went to work for two years to save enough money to enroll in Ra'anana College, where he could upgrade his high school marks.

Then he enrolled in a prep course at Tel Aviv University – and having run out of money again by the time he finished it, he postponed the big dream once more, got a job in a café, and worked for another two years.

Only then, without being a burden on his family, did he enroll in the

campus of his dreams – Jerusalem's super-prestigious Hebrew University.

Elias is now a computer science major, looking forward to the great education that "will give me a wider platform for economic and social success".

Unfortunately, he still has to pay for food, rent, medical insurance, books, and a hundred other things including part of his tuition.

The NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program exists to solve that problem for deserving Ethiopian-Israeli students.

We really don't want Elias to have to drop out to go to work yet again. He's been there, done that, and proven himself already.

Now Elias needs an AAS sponsor to give him the modest living stipend he needs while getting his degree. He's worked hard, dreamed big, and deserves a helping hand. Would you like to provide it?



### EVI MELAKU

Evi Melaku was born 25 years ago in Ethiopia. At age four, she and her 11-member family made aliyah to Israel. They went to an absorption center in the Negev where they learned Hebrew and Israeli culture.

It wasn't easy then, Evi says. Many children saw only the color difference between her and them and didn't want to make friends. But, over time, things

got easier. Her Hebrew improved so quickly that even as a child, she was able to help other Ethiopian immigrants learn the language.

After five years, Evi and her family moved to Holon, near Tel Aviv. Many of the people they met in their new home had never met an Ethiopian before. But again, after a time, she says, things got easier.

Already showing signs of great academic promise, Evi attended the Ashalim Religious Elementary School, graduating at the top of her class. At the Efraim Katzir High School in Holon she enrolled in the scientific-mathematics track and accumulated achievement awards in many subjects. It was easier to relate to her fellow students there, Evi says, because they already knew Ethiopians and were receptive to friendship.

After high school, Evi enlisted in the Israel Defense Forces in the communications corps, where she received a top student award, and was then placed in the elite intelligence corps. She won another award in a ten-month officer's course.

After four years of army service, she worked for over a year to earn money for her education.

She's now a second-year biotechnology student at Bar-Ilan University. Her parents can't help her financially, and this bright young woman, with so many awards already, and a promising future ahead, needs a sponsor to help her with basic expenses through her college years.

- NACOEJ staff member **Caroline Barg** and husband Hershel on the birth of a son to Hershel's granddaughter Rivky and husband Yekutiel Anis in Israel. Mazel Tov to big sister Henya Sorah.

### JOIN US ON FACEBOOK!

Join NACOEJ on Facebook and receive news about our programs plus updates of immediate interest relating to the Ethiopian-Jewish community.

Go to [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and enter NACOEJ in the Search bar at the top of the page. Once there, please "Like" us by clicking the LIKE button.

Any questions? Please call Judy Dick at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or email [jdick@nacoelj.org](mailto:jdick@nacoelj.org).

***Would you like to help Evi or Elias (or any of 100 other deserving students who are waiting for sponsors) by becoming a sponsor through our NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program? If so, please contact Judy Dick at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or email [college@nacoelj.org](mailto:college@nacoelj.org). It's a great experience for sponsors as well as students! Tell Judy you read about them in Lifeline.***





*Roberta Nusim with her two college students (left) and some of her high school students (right).*

## "We hugged goodbye and promised to keep in touch..."

BY ROBERTA NUSIM

**T**he highlight of my December 2011 trip to Israel was meeting the high school and college students I support through NACOEJ's sponsorship programs. I very much enjoy the letters and photos I receive from the students, so I contacted Judy Dick at the New York NACOEJ office to ask if I could meet my students face-to-face.

Judy contacted Yehudit Abramson, coordinator of the Adopt-A-Student college program, and Leah Barkai, of the High School sponsorship program, in NACOEJ's Jerusalem office. Together they took me to the Dshalit School in Rehovot to meet my 12 high school students and then to Meir Hospital in Kfar Saba to meet my two college nursing students.

During the drive to Rehovot I learned about Yehudit and Leah's work with these students, and the many challenges first-generation Ethiopian-Israeli students encounter. Leah cautioned me that many high school students are shy, don't speak English, and may be uncomfortable with a foreign stranger.

So I was delighted when I entered the Dshalit classroom and found a dozen smiling teenagers who could understand me and were happy to practice their English. I asked each about themselves, their families, and their aspirations. Each told stories of large families, many worked part-time to help their families, and all wanted to go on to study, with career goals such as law, teaching, nursing.

A common theme was how much they looked forward to their army service. The day I visited was Pilot's Day, when new Israeli pilots get their wings. They were excited because for the first time five girls earned their wings. As with teens everywhere, our talk soon switched from academics to sports, movies, music. They wanted to know

more about me. Did I know any "famous" people in the States? What is it like to live in New York? They wanted to hear all about my dog, Kismet.

When they left for their next class, (after many hugs, photos, cookies, and promises to stay in touch on Facebook), I spoke with the NACOEJ school coordinator and the vice principal of the school, both impressive in their commitment to these students and appreciative of the support that NACOEJ offers students whose families can't provide for the books, tutoring, and other programs these students need.

Then, on to the Meir Medical Center, where I met Este Dese and Glanish Sheferaw, both charming, intelligent, beautiful young women studying nursing. Both came to Israel as children, both shared stories of having to care for younger siblings and of their desire "...to integrate and live like native-born Israelis despite the challenges".

One had served in the army, the other, in national service. Without the help of NACOEJ both said they could not go to nursing school. "Your contribution made all the difference in the world to me," Glanish said. "Without it, I would not be here." Este agreed. "I hope you understand how much we appreciate that you have given us this opportunity to have better lives. Someday I hope to repay it by helping another young person," she said.

When we hugged goodbye and promised to keep in touch we were all misty-eyed.

When I returned home I received an email from Glanish, who wrote: "Dear Roberta, I am very glad I met you. Many thanks for all the help you give me."

It is that personal connection that makes what NACOEJ does so special. ■



LEFT: A Kes at Sigd in front of the Israeli flag.

ABOVE: Shoshana Ben-Dor (third from right in traditional Ethiopian dress) with students. Clearly, we need more chairs!



Photos:  
Win and  
Sue Robins

ABOVE: Three of the many Kessotch presiding at Sigd in Jerusalem. The prayers, the exquisite chanting, and the ritual are the same as they were in Ethiopia, but in Israel the Kessotch have elegant new robes, bright new priestly sunshades, sparkling white turbans – and microphones! (At center is Kes Hadane, who befriended NACOEJ many years ago in Gondar.)

## NACOEJ at the Sigd in Jerusalem

**S**igd is a unique Ethiopian-Jewish holiday, celebrating a seminal moment in Jewish history, the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile and the renewal of the Biblical covenant.

It has recently become a national Israeli holiday, which we hope will mean that Israeli schools will do much more teaching about Ethiopian-Jewish history, culture, and traditions in Israeli schools.

In Ethiopia, Sigd was celebrated as a day of fasting followed by feasting (when there was food!), with a long ritual of prayer, sermons, and exquisite chants by Kessotch\*, the Jewish religious leaders. It took place on a hilltop, and the thousands who attended wore white in token of repentance for sins.

Today, the largest Sigd in Israel takes place on the Haas Promenade in Jerusalem, overlooking the Old City and the Temple Mount, and is attended by thousands of Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians, Israelis and tourists, curiosity-seekers and political vote-seekers, who come to observe, participate, make speeches, or socialize.

Shoshana Ben-Dor, NACOEJ's extraordinary Director of Israel Programs, is there to teach. In a NACOEJ tent, a few yards from the Kessotch who are chanting the ancient prayers, Shoshana offers a day of study and explanation of the liturgy. Most of her students are young Ethiopians.

Why, you may wonder, is an American Israeli teaching the meaning of this uniquely Ethiopian-Jewish celebration

\*Shoshana tells us that the proper spelling of Kes is Qes, and the correct plural is Qessawost. However, for clarity and consistency, we will continue to use Kes and Kessotch.

to members of a community whose own tradition it is?

The answer goes back to Ethiopia, where the Sigd, like most Ethiopian-Jewish prayers, was conducted in Ge'ez, an ancient Ethiopian language no longer spoken or understood by most Ethiopian Jews.

The Kessotch might, of course, explain the Sigd in Amharic to older Ethiopians – but younger Ethiopian Israelis often don't speak much, if any, Amharic, and most Kessotch don't speak much, if any, Hebrew.

That leaves our Shoshana, an internationally known scholar of Ethiopian-Jewish religious traditions to explain the Sigd, which she has studied for many years – in Ge'ez.

So, on the 50th day after Yom Kippur, when the Sigd is held in Jerusalem, seated in the NACOEJ tent, wearing a traditional Ethiopian dress, Shoshana teaches in Hebrew the beautiful Ge'ez liturgy to Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian visitors alike.

What does this mean to NACOEJ? A very great deal.

Our organization was born in 1982 with four mandates: to help Jews survive in Ethiopia; to help them reach Israel; to help in their absorption into Israel; and finally – to help preserve their unique, beautiful, and ancient Jewish traditions.

Alas, because of the desperate urgency of the first three mandates, we have had little time or money to spend on the fourth mandate.

But Shoshana, despite the more-than-full-time pressures of her work with NACOEJ programs in Israel (especially *Limudiah*), devotes her

nights and so-called vacations to preserving the culture.

She works with other anthropologists, translating, transliterating, and recording liturgies, all while continuing to learn with Kessotch. And every year, she takes her place in the NACOEJ tent, to share with growing numbers of Israelis, Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian, the meaning and beauties of the Sigd taking place just outside.

At the last Sigd, some hundreds came to the tent, leaving only when their ¾ hour shift was up and they had to make room for others.

We are more grateful than we can say to Shoshana for this extraordinary – even unique – contribution to the preservation of an endangered oral tradition of great age and significance.

And we sympathize with her one regret every year that because she is teaching in the NACOEJ tent, she can't be outside participating in the Sigd herself. But it's worth it. Every year, several hundred people, especially young Ethiopians, find out what it is that they are watching and hearing, discovering its meaning for themselves and their community, and that's what really matters.

Thank you, Shoshana! ■

### IN-HONOR AND IN-MEMORY CARDS DEPICT SIGD

When you make a gift to NACOEJ in honor or memory of friends or family, we will send a beautiful card to whomever you designate, informing them of your gift. On the cover is a stunning photograph of Sigd as it is celebrated in Israel (and as described in this *Lifeline*).

Just send back the appropriate section of the enclosed reply card with your gift and we will send out one of these unique cards.

## A Visit to an Absorption Center is a Great Inspiration

On a trip to Israel with The Associated: Jewish Community Federation of Baltimore in December 2010, Jennie Jacobs and her family helped refurbish an absorption center in Ashkelon (Baltimore's sister city) that was expecting the arrival of a group of Ethiopian Jews. Jennie worked alongside an Ethiopian Jew.

Jennie was deeply moved by the challenges Ethiopian Israelis, especially the children, face as they make the transition from life in third-world Ethiopia to modern-day, high-tech Israel.

Jennie's Bat Mitzvah portion included the story of Abraham moving away from his home to a promised land. The present-day aliyah of the Ethiopians, crossing the Red Sea to the Israel of their dreams, resonated with her. She decided to dedicate her Mitzvah Project to supporting NACOEJ's *Limudiah* program, helping Ethiopian children in Israeli elementary schools.

She also decided to participate in the NACOEJ Bar/Bat Mitzvah Twinning program. She and her Ethiopian "twin", Nitzan, began a correspondence that is still going on, even after Jennie's Bat Mitzvah last November. Jennie: "I was glad to have a connection with

someone my age living in Israel...and I hope one day to meet my twin."

For her Mitzvah Project, Jennie set up her own page on the NACOEJ website, explaining her goals and how much money she hoped to raise – \$2,800 – to sponsor two children in the *Limudiah* for a year. She urged friends and family to help her make her dream come true. Jennie: "It felt good to help other people by raising money for the after-school program for Ethiopian-Israeli children."

Jennie's Bat Mitzvah party was at an art museum. She loves creating art, in and out of school, so the centerpieces at the party were made of new art supplies that were then taken to Israel by a family friend and donated to Nitzan's school. And Jennie also made a generous contribution to her Mitzvah Project from Bat Mitzvah gifts she received. Best of all, she has raised awareness about Ethiopian Jews among her family and friends.

Jennie's also a shining example of a young person who understands the



Jennie and her parents, Charles and Elizabeth Jacobs.

great importance of tzedakah in our lives, and her delight in her projects shows how much more it means to give than to receive.

Now she has a wonderful new pen pal in Israel and hopes to meet her in person. This is a win/win situation for everyone involved, with the lives of children thousands of miles apart being enriched through Jennie's generosity and caring.

Thank you, Jennie! ■

**For more information on Mitzvah Projects, contact Judy Dick at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or email [mitzvah@nacoelj.org](mailto:mitzvah@nacoelj.org).**

### CONDOLENCES TO...

- Special NACOEJ friend **Gerald Bronstein** on the loss of his beloved wife and partner in philanthropy, Carolyn, after over 58 years of marriage. Our hearts go out to Jerry, daughter Nancy, sons John, Bill, and Bob, and their spouses, and to all the grandchildren, Jenny, Katy, Mandy, Nicole, Alisa, Lily, Jake, and Ben, as well as to the Bronsteins' close friends, NACOEJ Board member Peachy Levy and husband Mark. The Bronsteins' kindness has meant a great deal to Ethiopian-Israeli children in NACOEJ *Limudiah*.
- **Tigist Bitau**, award-winning young Ethiopian-Israeli athlete and student in the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program, on the loss of her beloved mother who passed away after a long illness while visiting one of Tigist's brothers who is still in Ethiopia. Deepest sympathy goes to Tigist and her seven siblings. Tigist, the youngest of the family, is receiving special tutoring at her high school, Eliezer Ben-Yehudah in Nes Ziona, to help her keep up with her studies. NACOEJ is helping the family through this painful time.

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