



SPRING
2019

Update from Ethiopia

In my last letter, I promised you new photos to show you how we go about doing so much good together for the malnourished little Jewish children in Gondar.

First, I have a new picture of a mother bringing her children to the nurse (*below, nurse at right*) who weighs and measures all the children in the Feeding Center every two weeks. ▼



She pays special attention to children who, like this mother's little boy, do not seem to be doing as well as most of the children who are now running and jumping almost like healthy children. He will no doubt be referred to the doctor.



There are also two nice photos of the servers in the Feeding Center, especially the one where milk (*below*), which used to be unknown to the children, is being poured generously into their cups. ▼



All this is good, and I am so deeply grateful to you, our partners in this lifesaving work.

BUT (there's always a "but", isn't there?), the doctor keeps telling us, urgently and often, that it isn't enough.

"They are still not getting enough nutrition," he says. He has goals the children still haven't met.

Because the children are so young and so small – ages 9 months to 4 years – their tummies can't absorb enough food in one meal to satisfy the needs of their brains, organs and muscles that are still developing.

So, they are definitely better, but still not strong enough to fight off the many diseases and ailments that can attack them in the crowded hovels they live in.

They can still die of illnesses like malaria, bronchitis, measles and more. I remember that a few years ago in Ethiopia, the highest childhood mortality rate was among the three-year-olds.

Thank heaven, so far, we haven't had a single death among our Feeding Center children.

◀ Feeding Center

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But the dangerous cold, rainy season is about to begin in May. If we hope to maintain that blessed record, we must begin funding second meals for the 3-and-4-year-olds now.

Our partner organization, SSEJ, is covering second meals for the 1-and-2-year-olds.

We have taken responsibility for the 3-and-4-year-olds and we must see that they get second meals also.

Can we do it? I believe we can. **I know we can if we work together.**

Every year we struggle with our much-stretched budget for left-behind Jews in Ethiopia.

Not only to save the lives of the children, but also:

1. **To help all the families with the costs of Passover food (coming very soon).** ▶

2. To give simple lunches in both Gondar and Addis Ababa to the older children who come to the wonderful Kaytana day camps in August, staffed by young Israeli volunteers and local knowledgeable Ethiopian Jews.

3. And to provide holiday meals for whole families at Rosh Hashanah.

We at NACOEJ (and SSEJ) are the source for food for this community and together we can do all of this – saving both bodies and souls - but only together.

With all my heart I thank you for all you've done – and I pray you will continue to do - for this ancient community of Jews who are so dear to all of us.

They are suffering so much as they wait with endless hope – and yearning hearts - for the aliyah that is so dear to them. ■

Barbara



Making matzah in Ethiopia

Is There Any Aliyah from Ethiopia Now?

There is. But it's a far cry from the aliyah the Israeli cabinet voted unanimously on in 2015.

That aliyah was to bring all the then-9000 Jews left behind in Ethiopia at once. That aliyah never took place.

What we have now is an aliyah structured to bring 1000 people over a year, month by month, and only those who already have children living in Israel. Those "children" are usually adults, so the eligible candidates for this aliyah are old.

It is doubtful that there are 1000 old Jews who qualify still alive in Ethiopia. Given the miserable shacks in which they live in Ethiopia, the poor food, and no medical care, 1000 may not have survived. But the numbers can apparently be swelled by letting some

of their remaining families come with them.

Please note two words: "survived" and "some". After only two monthly planes have brought eligible Jews to Israel, one elderly man was missing because he had died just days before the plane left.

Another brought an old grandmother who said she'd dreamed of Israel all her life, but was now sorry she came, because her two married daughters in Ethiopia were not allowed to come. She was told in Ethiopia that they would follow her to Israel. That did not happen.

So, today we have an aliyah that prohibits married daughters from joining their mothers in Israel, that comes too late for some of the eligible, and that is tearing Ethiopian-Jewish families apart.

We know Israel can do better than this. It has done so many times in the past and we hope it will do so again now. ■

Honored as a Pioneering Woman...

By Yehudit Abramson, long-time NACOEJ/Israel Coordinator of the NACOEJ/Barney and Rachel Landau Gottstein Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program and of the Barney's Books Program which provides books for young Ethiopian-Israeli children.



▲ Wuvit addressing an Emunah organization celebration

Over the years that I have been running the Barney's Books Program, I have come to realize that the most popular book we ever had is "Almaz Walks on the Path of her Childhood".

This book was written by Dr. Wuvit Mengistu. She was personally sponsored by the Gottsteins in our NACOEJ/Barney and Rachel Landau Gottstein Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program while she was earning her first and second degrees at Bar-Ilan University.

These days, Wuvit works at the Ministry of Education as a supervisor. She also gives lectures in the Education Department of Hebrew University and at Achva College in southern Israel.

Since this book is so popular with the children, I decided to meet with Wuvit and buy more copies for the Barney's Books Program.

We met at her home and we spoke about the importance of this book to Ethiopian-Israeli children who were born in Israel and need to know their parents' history in Ethiopia.

When I asked Wuvit what motivated her to write "Almaz Walks on the Path of her Childhood", she talked about empathy and getting every Ethiopian-Israeli child involved with their own family story.

Even more, she said, when fathers or mothers read this book aloud to their children, it brings back memories of their own childhood in their village in Ethiopia.

She hopes Almaz's story will make children ask the first and second generations in their families about their childhood in Ethiopia, about their culture and heritage, about the reasons they left Ethiopia, and about the difficulties they encountered on the journey from Ethiopia to Israel.

Wuvit wants to raise the issues of accepting those who are different, brotherhood, and the relationship between Ethiopians and Israeli culture.

We've discovered that this book is being taught in several Israeli colleges' education departments as an example of an immigration story for many immigrants from many other countries - especially in terms of their memories of the country they left behind.

We celebrated International Women's Week during March. I am so happy to say that Wuvit was honored as a pioneering, innovative woman.

You can experience the joy of sponsoring a bright Ethiopian-Israeli college student. Just contact Karen Gens at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or email: education@nacoej.org. ■



The Limudiah 2018-2019 – First Semester



- ▲ This photo was taken during a recent visit by the Ministry of Education to the Noam Ha'Meiri Girls' School in Lod.

These second-grade girls are enjoying a game with their NACOEJ Limudiah teacher, Shoshi Klausner. She also works with them on language expression and how to use a dictionary. She is a very professional and dedicated teacher who invests a lot of thought and resources into maximizing her lesson plans for the children.

During our visit we saw exciting learning material that she has developed and which she uses to teach the students via play.

By their smiles you can see that Shoshi's students love learning with her! ■



- ◀ The Ha'Ma'apilim School in Lod had a special celebratory Certificate of Excellence ceremony for the first semester of this current academic year.

We are very proud that four students from the Ethiopian community who participate in our Limudiah program received awards from the school principal for their academic excellence and achievements.

A 7th-grade student, who participated in the Limudiah for five years, also received a Certificate of Excellence.

The NACOEJ Limudiah City Coordinator, Adaya Zerfati, said the 7th-grader's impressive achievements are the result of the professional and long-term work that the Lod Limudiah has been doing these many years, three times a week. ■

New Ethiopian-Israeli Party Joins Knesset Race

Excerpts taken from an article in the *Jerusalem Post* by Ben Bresky, January 25, 2019.

A new Ethiopian-Israeli party is joining the Knesset race in the upcoming April national elections.

Headed by former MK Alali Adamso, who has served in the Ministry of Industry, Trade and Labor, the party is called *Kol Yisrael Achim Leshivion Hevrat* ("All Israel are Brothers for Social Equality").

It is focusing on eliminating racism and promoting equal rights for new immigrants.



▲ Knesset - Photo Credit: Beny Shlevich

MK Adamso immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia in 1983.

He earned degrees in Economics, Political Science, and Public Policy at Tel Aviv University. He served as MK with Likud from 2012-2013 and was also the Prime Minister's advisor on Ethiopian affairs

Michael Corinaldi, a professor at both the University of Haifa and Bar-Ilan University, holds the number two spot on the new party list.

He advocated in the late 1970s and the early 1980s to bring the Jewish community of Ethiopia to Israel.

He authored "*Jewish Identity: The Case of Ethiopian Jewry*," and is an expert on the Law of Return.

As well, he is the chairman of the International Institute for Secret Jews (Anusim) Studies at Netanya Academic College. ■

They're Both Smiling...



▲ Danielle Symonds

They're both smiling happily because they've participated in a Mitzvah Project at NACOEJ, a very rewarding endeavor.

Whether it is to honor a Bar or Bat Mitzvah or for any other occasion, you can combine your simcha with a project to raise sorely-needed funds to help Ethiopian Jews in Israel and in Ethiopia.

To get some exciting ideas, go to: nacoej.org/project-ideas-and-materials or call Danielle Ben-Jehuda at 212-233-5200, ext. 227.

She'll be happy to help you get started. ■



▲ Hannah Beemer



When Ethiopian Jews Tried to Save European Jews from the Holocaust

Editor's Note: This article, written by Seth J. Frantzman, and appearing in the Jerusalem Post on January 27, 2019, recounts a little-known story of Ethiopian Jews' concern for European Jews during World War II.

In August 1943, at the height of the Holocaust, Ethiopian Jewish leaders approached the Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia with a daring proposal. They asked him to help Jews in Europe flee to Ethiopia and assist Jewish refugees by hosting them in Ethiopian Jewish villages.

Three months after the Warsaw Ghetto uprising and two months after all four of the Auschwitz crematoria were functioning, The Palestine Post, as today's Jerusalem Post was then called, published an article detailing Jewish immigration to Ethiopia.

"Possibilities of Jewish immigration into Abyssinia were discussed by the Ethiopian Minister in London with Mr. Harry Goodman and Dr. Springer of Agudath Israel," the August 8, 1943 article says. "A leading member of the Falasha (black Jewish) community expressed the desire to assist European Jewry and to welcome them in Falasha towns." Falasha was the term used to describe Jews in Ethiopia at the time.

Discussions were ongoing in Addis Ababa where the emperor, who had returned to Ethiopia in May 1941 after it was liberated from Italy with British help, was showing support for the plan. 1,500 Greek refugees, among them Greek Jews, had arrived in Ethiopia in 1943, the article says.

Selassie had stayed at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem in 1936 and was familiar with the Jewish minority in his country. He also worked closely with Orde Wingate, the British officer who was a passionate Zionist and who led the Gideon Force, which defeated the Italian fascist army in Ethiopia.

Ethiopian leaders and the Ethiopian Jewish community were therefore familiar with the local Jewish community and the plight of Jews worldwide at the time.

...By 1943 they were able to reach out to the emperor to suggest hosting Jews fleeing Europe. By that time, it was too late for many of the Jews of Europe ensnared in the Nazi noose.

...Italian dictator Benito Mussolini even briefly considered resettling Jews in Ethiopia in the 1930s during the Italian occupation. At the time there were estimated to be more than 50,000 Jews in Ethiopia, many of them living in villages near Gondar province.

The full story of the 1943 effort to convince Ethiopia to re-settle Jews fleeing Europe has not been researched and many details about it remain unknown. ■ **Editor's Note: Looking for a thesis topic? How about this?**



▲ *Donald Robinson, who passed away at age 91 in 2017, was an internationally celebrated photographer. He was on the boards of many international charities. While chairman of the JDC, he traveled to Ethiopia to visit a Jewish community. There he took one of his favorite photos: the procession of Ethiopian Jews in traditional robes carrying a Torah and ritual parasols to the site of a Sigd celebration — a scene that was very meaningful to him.*

Photo credit: Jerusalem Post/Donald Robinson

Jews in the News (Ethiopian Israelis)

- **Girma Amara**, born in Ethiopia, arrived in Israel with his family in 2006. Now 36 years old, he broke the standing record for the Israeli Marathon by finishing the hard-fought race in two hours, two minutes, 12.35 seconds, which was 25 seconds faster than the previous record.
- After years of struggle for formal recognition as part of Israel's religious leadership, the venerable **Kessim (Ethiopian religious leaders in Israel)** have finally received the formal status that entitles them to hold positions in a variety of religious councils, gain full-time employment and have authority to offer their services to all Israelis rather than only to the Ethiopian community. However, the recognition of the Kessim does not yet include authorization to officiate at weddings and other religious functions. Funding to preserve in writing the oral religious traditions of Ethiopian Jewry has also been offered.
- **Bialin Elazar**, newly appointed to the Israeli Jerusalem Magistrate's Court, is the first male Ethiopian Israeli to become a judge (two female Ethiopian judges were appointed two years ago). Bialan was sponsored in our NACOEJ/Barney and Rachel Landau Gottstein Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program (AAS) by Sam Croland from 1999 to 2003. Bialan was studying law at Bar-Ilan University. His wife, Merav Gedamu, was also an AAS student. She holds a doctorate in biology and works at the Volcani Institute. They have five children.
- **"Nevsu"** (an Amharic term of endearment) is an Israeli TV sitcom about a family with an Ethiopian-Israeli father, an Ashkenazi mother, and a young daughter. It has won an international Emmy for best comedy. A projected American version is expected to star a white midwestern woman and an Ethiopian man.
- **Lt. "Yod"** became the first Israeli Air Force (IAF) pilot of Ethiopian origin. His name, like those of all IAF pilots, is not released because of security concerns. After graduation, he will begin service as a navigator for IAF fighter jets. Ethiopian Jews participate fully in the Israel Defense Forces but only recently have a select few begun to enter the very highest ranks of the IDF. ■

Condolences

by **Barbara Ribakove**

Lucille Geller, who passed away in March, is mourned by many – her dear husband Robert, her sons Howard and David, and David's wife, Miki and their children, and by many of us at NACOEJ who honored Lucille as one of the most active members of our Advisory Board. Lucille's work on behalf of Ethiopian Jews was tireless. She raised awareness, compassion and funds in synagogues, parlor meetings, and dinners with friends in Fort Lauderdale and surrounding areas.

I think what motivated her was a moment we shared during a NACOEJ mission to Ethiopia. Our group had been visiting Jewish villages, bringing funds, clothes, school supplies, first-aid materials, and above all, hope. In a slum in Addis Ababa, we had just left an

appalling hovel in which a mother and her children struggled to survive, when Lucille burst into a storm of tears, telling me over and over again, "It's not right - not right, not right!"

I think she pledged herself then to do whatever she could to help, and even as years went by, she never forgot to try to right the wrongs she had seen. Among many of her efforts, she was responsible for hundreds of local families near her displaying beautiful Ethiopian embroideries and other artifacts, encouraging donations to NACOEJ, and she and Bob were essential in the donation of a Sefer Torah to an Ethiopian synagogue in Jerusalem.

Our hearts go out to all of Lucille's family and friends, and to all those to whom she was an inspiration and a model of good works. May all of us be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem. ■



Three Generations Committed to NACOEJ

Hans and Marion Seidemann were exceptional people. Their commitment to Ethiopian Jews – and other worthy causes – ran deep in their souls.

Marion, who passed away before Hans, was a volunteer extraordinaire at the New York office of NACOEJ. For years, she was in the office two full days a week. She always came in right on time and rarely took a break. And she was a “whiz” at data entry work. She loved NACOEJ and always brought a smiling presence to the office.

Hans was also deeply involved in NACOEJ for many years, often stopping in at the office to get updates and discuss the status of the Ethiopian-Jewish community.

Together Hans and Marion visited Jews in Ethiopia on a NACOEJ mission, and sponsored six Ethiopian-Israeli high school students every year beginning in 2004.

After Hans passed away in 2017, his children sent us a beautiful letter accompanied by a very generous bequest. Here are the lovely thoughts they conveyed:

“Our father greatly enjoyed his work with NACOEJ (as did Marion). Thank you for giving him the opportunity to help people in need. It is very fitting that Marion and our father chose to leave this gift to NACOEJ.”

Then, this past November, we received a letter from Shelly Seidemann, one of Hans’ grandchildren. In it she spoke very touching words about her “Saba” and his influence on her.

“...Life without my Saba will never be the same, but I also know that the time I had with him made me grow into the woman I am today. It is now my time to carry on his legacy and bring honor to his memory by upholding the values he instilled.

“...it is with much pride and joy that I enclose a donation in his memory. May it be a testament to the charitable, yet humble life he lived, and may it support the NACOEJ community in achieving the important cause each of you represent.”

Hans and Marion lived a life of giving and left a legacy of commitment to their children and grandchildren.

Please consider making a bequest to NACOEJ yourself, to carry your own dedication to the Ethiopian Jews into the future. You have been – are – and will continue to be – a lifeline to this ancient community of Jews. Thank you. ■



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