

OFFELINE

NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY

SUMMER 2008



FEEDING CENTER OPEN –



AND CLOSED

The Hardest Letter...

**My Dear Friends,
This is the hardest letter
I have ever had to write.**

It looks as if the worst things I feared are all coming true.

The aliyah from Ethiopia has been called off by Israel.

Major funding for programs in Ethiopia has disappeared.

Hunger, misery and fear now stalk the remaining Jews.

The Feeding Center, that has changed the lives of thousands of babies, young children and pregnant and nursing women, has closed.

By the time you read this, the dreadful cycle of malnourished pregnancies, underweight infants, early childhood deaths — that old cycle, which we were so effective in breaking — will have begun again.

The regular food distributions that provided the community with beans or grain to cook at home, have ended. The old, the sick, the housebound, the blind, the crippled, have nowhere to turn.

Some men are still seeking temporary day labor, some boys still go out every day with a grubby little shoeshine kit, some tired women still spin cotton to sell for pennies. They have always done these things to pay the rent on their hovels and buy a bucketful of water for cooking, washing and drinking.

But what will they have to cook now? They can not possibly earn enough to feed their families, especially now when widespread crop failures in Ethiopia are causing food prices to soar.

Without our help, the old will wither, and the children will

become as frail, stunted, thin and silent as they used to be before we were blessed with the money to open a Feeding Center.

That money is long gone now.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

As I have said over and over, the best — indeed, the only — real solution to this terrible Jewish tragedy, is for Israel to reverse its decision to abandon these Jews. Israel should check the credentials of the 8,700 people not yet fully examined, and bring home those who qualify, as rapidly as possible. We have good reason to believe that the great majority will qualify. We also have reason to believe that if the examination process begins again, funds to maintain that part of the community will promptly materialize.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

HARDEST LETTER CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Of course we will go on urging the current Israeli administration to bring these Jews, these true Zionists, home to their relatives already in the Promised Land.

We have support for this longed-for change of heart.

Prime Minister Olmert now wants to keep the aliyah going. Many members of the Knesset want it. Rabbis here and in Israel, leaders of the Israeli people and the Ethiopian-Israeli community, ordinary Israelis and American Jews, want it – but some powerful members of the Israeli government are opposed.

As I write this, the decision to end the aliyah is still in place, so we are now in desperate need of funds. Without help from many Jewish federations and foundations, we can not possibly support a Feeding Center – and many institutions that used to help have told us they “will go along with Israel’s policy,” which means discontinuing funding. (The Boston and New York Federations have continued to help, bless them.)

But, thank heaven, with your help, there are some things we can do.

We can proceed with creating the new school for which the UJC gave us money.

And that’s very important.

If Israel persists in abandoning these Jews, a school that preserves and enhances the Jewishness of the children and their families will help maintain a viable Jewish community as nothing else can.

And of course the school must have a lunch program. If we can raise the money we need for that program, we will not only feed the school children but ensure that their younger siblings get a bigger share of what’s available at home.

Maybe we will even be able to send the school children home with a bag of lentils or grain for the whole family. That would be very good for everyone, including pregnant and nursing mothers.

For this, we need your help.

To have a school lunch program, we need a simple lunchroom, and a kitchen – very simple – and of course, the food. We need community members to buy the food, cook and wash up – with a small but greatly needed salary for their work.

Please send whatever you can to make these things happen.

I know very well how difficult things are in America now. Reading this letter, you may be thinking of how uncertain jobs have become, how gas prices are going up and incomes are going down, how pensions and investments are shaky from one day to the next.

Yet, because we are a family that has been together for a long, long time, I have the temerity to ask you anyway, to do whatever you can, as soon as you can, for our Ethiopian Jewish families, who are far worse off.

Any help you can give now, in these hard times, may well be just what staves off a catastrophe for a family or a death sentence for a child.

Any gift you can make will certainly help stave off what might otherwise be the final, tragic end to a journey of so many thousand years. A journey that should not – must not – end this way.

So please, send what you can. We will use it to keep children alive, to keep the community together and keep the hope of aliyah from disappearing.

Thank you, as always.

With hope and love,

Barbara

Condolences to...

- NACOEJ Vice President **Richard Tell** and wife Ann on the loss of Ann’s beloved mother, Nathalie Leiterman. Our hearts go out to the whole family.
- **Diz Adelman**, Trustee of British Friends of NACOEJ, on the loss of her beloved mother, Mollie Triffitt. Our thoughts are with Diz and all the family.
- The family of our dear friend **Mildred Brecker**, who was a very special NACOEJ volunteer. Our hearts go out to Mildred’s son Mark, a long-time NACOEJ supporter, friend of Ethiopian Jews, and former Peace Corps teacher in Eritrea. A few years ago, Mark and Mildred went together to Ethiopia and Eritrea, where they reunited with some of Mark’s students.
- **Herbert Rudnick**, on the loss of his beloved wife, Augusta, and to children Judith and David, and five grandchildren. Augusta and Herb have been long-time supporters of NACOEJ.



GONDAR’S MAYOR VISITS NACOEJ IN ISRAEL

The Honorable Megabaw Tassew, Mayor of Gondar City, visited the NACOEJ office in Jerusalem, where our Israel Director, Shoshana Ben-Dor, showed him photos taken in Gondar years ago on NACOEJ missions. The Mayor also visited the Yeshurun School in Rishon LeZion, meeting Ethiopian children from our *Limudiah* classes there along with their non-Ethiopian classmates.

For Educators, Students, Parents and Everyone: A Curriculum at Last!

American teachers have long urged NACOEJ to produce a school curriculum enabling them to teach their students about Ethiopian Jews.

So we were thrilled when Eadie Shanker, the former director of CUNY’s Mentoring and Pre-College Programs, agreed to assemble a blue-ribbon, volunteer committee to create the curriculum.

Over several years, the volunteers (committee members Naomi Greenberg, Grace Guy, Judith Jaffe, Lore Rasch, Niki Silberstein, and advisors Nicola DeMarco, Richard Sheftman and Sherri and Robert Steinberg) met in our office and elsewhere, under Eadie’s leadership, to share their outstanding professional skills, their creative thinking, and their tireless research. Gary Metzger represented NACOEJ.

The curriculum is now available on the NACOEJ web site at www.nacoej.org. Its objectives are to enable North American youth to:

- Learn about the unique 2,500-year history of the Ethiopian Jewish community, called Beta Israel (The House of Israel).
- Recognize that the Beta Israel community is a member of the worldwide Jewish community.

- Learn about the struggle of Ethiopian Jews to maintain their commitment to Judaism while living in isolation from other Jewish communities for centuries in Ethiopia.
- Learn about the cultural and religious practices the Beta Israel share with world Jewry as well as their African-influenced music and dance.
- Consider how to put Jewish values into action, and recognize that helping Ethiopian Jews is a Jewish value.

Please note that although the curriculum is designed for sixth grade through high school, much of the material can be adapted for younger children, college students or adult education.

Our heartiest thanks and congratulations to the committee and advisors (credentials are noted on the web site) for this tremendous contribution to introducing the history and culture of the Ethiopian Jews to the next generation of North Americans, and for encouraging them to put Jewish values into action on behalf of the Beta Israel.

We look forward to hearing from many of you, with comments, questions, suggestions and stories about teaching Ethiopian Jewry in North America! Contact Gary at 212-233-5200, ext. 228, or at gmetzger@nacoej.org.

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In Israel: Glowing with Pride

On a recent trip to Israel, Orlee Guttman, NACOEJ Director of Operations, visited a number of schools where Ethiopian teenagers in the Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program are studying.

Orlee came back glowing with pride over the way our more than 1,000 students are progressing.

She also came back worrying about many more un-sponsored students who can not participate in required school trips (no money for fees), don't have needed textbooks (schools don't supply them), can't pay science lab fees, and are seriously deprived of important academic and social activities.

Two stories brought home both the great successes and the great challenges Orlee saw.

THE SUCCESS: The beautiful young woman in the photo at right is Rachel Samani, a student in the Katzir High School in Rehovot.

Orlee remembered Rachel from a previous visit to the Katzir School: "She was the girl answering all the questions in a Bible class. I thought then that she was headed for great things because she was so poised and brilliant. I wasn't surprised to learn now that she is one of just 20 students in the whole city of Rehovot selected for a special leadership training program. The group uses their skills to work with children in a local community center."

One of Rachel's four younger sisters, who has cerebral palsy, is in a special course; the others, walking in Rachel's footsteps, are all enrolled and doing well in NACOEJ *Limudiah* (after-school education). We expect them all to qualify, as Rachel did, for a good academic high school.

Rachel is one of a number of lucky girls whose high school careers are sponsored by Lois and Dick Gunther of Los Angeles in memory of their granddaughter, Eva Leah Gunther. A bright future lies ahead for Rachel.



Rachel Samani

THE CHALLENGE: This story is about a student Orlee met in a high school in the impoverished town of Lod. It's a good school, but located in a very bad neighborhood – so bad that the concerned principal walks the girls home after school because the streets are so dangerous.

Nonetheless, many of the girls go out after school to work in local markets and shops to earn a little money to help feed their families.

During Orlee's visit, one of these girls kept staring at a tall, well-dressed, dark-skinned Israeli, who had come to the school with Orlee.

When this man addressed the students in fluent Amharic (the national language of Ethiopia), the young woman burst out in astonished disbelief: "Are you Ethiopian?" she demanded in wonder.

The answer, of course, was yes; the man was Yeshayahu Yasu, NACOEJ-Israel Board Chairman, and an official of the Israeli Ministry of Education.

The astonishment?

Our student had never in her life seen a successful Ethiopian man in Israel! And yet, there are many. Despite the challenges of absorption, language barriers,

and cultural gaps, there are male and female Ethiopian doctors, lawyers, scientists, artists, social workers and more, all over Israel. Yet this high school girl did not know they existed.

We learned a lot from this shattering incident.

We learned that we must bring many more Ethiopian-Israeli college students, graduates, and dignitaries to meet with our high school students, not only to give them role models, but to afford them a glimpse of what the future can hold for them, too!

We can't leave it to chance any more.

There are many successful Ethiopian-Israelis, and we want our students to know it!



Israela Elias, top row, fourth from left, at the famous International Space Camp

Here are two high school students in need of immediate sponsorships. Can you help?

ISRAELA ELIAS, who is going into 11th grade at the Ramla-Lod High School, is a brilliant girl who won a scholarship to the International Space Camp because of her high marks in English and astronomy! Until this year, Israela was sponsored by a wonderful couple who called to tell us, with tears, that illness had struck them both and they could no longer sponsor her. Without a sponsor for her last two years in high school, Israela, whose parents have no jobs, will not be able to get her textbooks, take part in necessary educational school trips, or finish school with the full education she deserves. It would be a blessing not only to Israela but to her former sponsors to know that someone is stepping into the breach. Could you be that person?



Zehava Teshele

ZEHAVA TESHELE is going into 11th grade in the ORT-Guttman high school in Netanya. Both of her parents are low-paid laborers, and to help her family, Zehava works after school and full time every summer. Last summer, her excellent grades qualified her for the Summer University for Youth program at Tel Aviv University, but to accept, Zehava had to quit her summer job. The lack of her small income caused problems at home. Now, in her last, crucial years in high school, Zehava really needs a sponsor. Did we mention that in 9th grade Zehava wrote an essay that won a contest and earned a cash award – not for Zehava, but for a local community center because she was so grateful for its programs. Will somebody in America help this smart, gutsy teenager?

PLEASE NOTE: FOR ONLY \$350 A YEAR, YOU CAN SPONSOR AN ETHIOPIAN HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT IN ISRAEL. FOR INFORMATION, CONTACT LISA KOVITCH AT 212-233-5200, EXT. 232, OR AT HIGHSCHOOL@NACOEJ.ORG

Warm and Wonderful Thoughts from Adopt-A-Student Sponsors

Editor's Note: Several very special Vidal Sassoon/NACOEJ Adopt-A-Student Program sponsors recently visited their students in Israel. Yehudit Abramson, AAS Program Director in Israel, accompanied them.

FROM JOANNE HOFFMAN

Dear Yehudit...I want to thank you again for all you did for me and our two students during my February visit to Israel. It made such a difference in the quality of our lunch to have you translating our conversation.

It was so exciting to meet them in person. They are such lovely and accomplished young women. My husband and I are so proud to be associated with them and your wonderful program. We want you to know how appreciative of your work we are. Thank you again.

There's a P.S. When Joanne's grandchildren went to Israel to celebrate their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, they brought along school supplies they had collected for Ethiopian schoolchildren!

From our Mailbag:

Just before Passover we received this lovely note from a donor:

Hi! NACOEJ Staff...

I hope everyone has a great Passover season coming up, including all those in the Gondar Region Compound in Ethiopia. I hope they are in Israel before too long and can celebrate Passover in the homeland. I always look forward to getting Lifeline and seeing the fine accomplishments you and the Ethiopian Jews have made over the past 25 years. G-d willing all the Beta Israel will be home in a short while and able to accomplish many good things...

Thank you. The Seder in Gondar was great. We echo these sincere wishes that the entire Beta Israel community will soon be together in Israel!

FROM JANE AND ALAN CORNELL

On Sunday, May 4th, while staying at the Intercontinental Hotel in Tel Aviv, we had a gathering of some of our Ethiopian students. My husband Alan and I have been involved with NACOEJ for several years and have had the pleasure of having 22 students graduate with different degrees.

Currently we are helping to support nine other students. We were thrilled that 13 students came to see us on a busy Sunday afternoon. They are all involved in different areas of study and professions – i.e. teaching, counseling, nursing, administration, etc.

They are also all involved in giving back to their Ethiopian communities, thereby enabling and helping many other Ethiopian students to have the same opportunities they have had.

It was so rewarding for us to see the success of these worthy individuals. Life is difficult enough in Israel, but these students face even more challenges. They work extraordinarily hard without family financial support; most having to work at part-time jobs while in school. Their commitment and dedication to their work is evident in their academic achievements.

Each person told us what they were doing now, whether studying or working, and expressed their thanks to us in the most heart-warming way. Some students shared pictures of their children with us, indicating that we have actually helped their children to have better futures as well.

This was such a rewarding experience for us to know that by just helping with a little financial support, we could make such a difference in these individuals' lives. Alan and I were both filled with emotion and so proud of everyone. It was a wonderful experience that we will never forget.

We were lucky enough to be in Israel to celebrate Israel's 60th Anniversary, but we were also very lucky to be in Israel to "shep naches" about some wonderful young people!

FROM DAVID AND AVIVA RUBIN

Yehudit...it was wonderful to visit with you and all of the students. Aviva and I have often said that the project of supporting these marvelous young people is among the most rewarding things we have undertaken.

It is a privilege to be associated with NACOEJ and its important work. Kol Hakavod!

Thanks for setting up everything! It was all great.

FROM BARBARA CARTER

While living in Baltimore, I learned of NACOEJ and contributed to projects frequently. Soon after making aliyah to Beer Sheva in December, 2006, I went to the NACOEJ office in Jerusalem to see what projects might be of interest to me here.

With Yehudit Abramson's help, I decided to sponsor students at Ben-Gurion University (BGU). This project provides the students with money for food, rent, books and other necessities. One thing I like about this in particular is that when Yehudit comes to BGU every month to distribute the checks, I can join her.

An American visitor of mine recently asked what my role is when Yehudit and I meet with the students at BGU. I decided that I am a cheerleader. In this capacity, I let students know how proud I am of them and their desire to better their family conditions.

One Ethiopian-Israeli young lady said she is sure she would be better off economically in the United

States, where she has spent some time.

But, as a Jew, she feels a responsibility to remain in Israel.

One young woman feels she is standing in for her whole family as she is the first to attend college here.

Others tell me of their desire to help their community as social workers. One young man has traveled to Canada and the States

as a shaliach promoting aliyah to Beer Sheva.

A future doctor shared her wedding plans with us.

These shy, proud, beautiful young people have given me so much more than I could possibly give them. I urge you to join me in the joy and mitzvah of sponsoring one or more Ethiopian college students in Israel. I'm encouraging all my friends in America to do so.



Barbara Carter with Ethiopian students at Ben-Gurion University in Beer Sheva, Israel.

To find out more about sponsoring an Ethiopian college student, please visit our website at www.nacoej.org or call Evelyn Deitchman at 212-233-5200, ext. 226. It's a lot less expensive than you may think, and you can sponsor as part of a group if you like!



Anyone Going to Israel from the Chicago Area?

If so, we have four duffel bags in your area, filled with school supplies for Ethiopian-Israeli children, all packed and ready to go with you.

If you can take one or more, please contact Gary at the NACOEJ office at 212-233-5200, ext. 228, or at gmetzger@nacoej.org and he will make arrangements for you to get them.

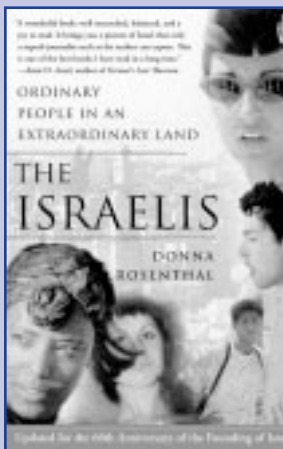
Thanks so very much to anyone who can do this great mitzvah!

From America...



...to Israel!

TWO SPECIAL OFFERS



“The Israelis”: A SPECIAL BOOK

With this *Lifeline*, we are offering you “The Israelis”, by internationally acclaimed, award-winning journalist Donna Rosenthal, in a brand-new edition up-dated for Israel’s 60th anniversary.

Your volume will be personally inscribed to you by the author.

The beautifully written book is sometimes controversial, always fascinating (like *Israelis*), and gives long over-due credit to NACOEJ Board member Solomon Ezra, an Ethiopian-Israeli to whom I introduced Donna.

In her new preface, Donna calls Solomon her “adopted brother”; I call him my “Ethiopian son”; and we both call him a great hero of the secret Ethiopian aliyah during the years when Ethiopia was under communist tyranny. Read about it in “The Israelis”...BRG

King David Composing a Psalm: A SPECIAL EMBROIDERY

We are also offering, with or without “The Israelis”, one of our most beloved embroideries: King David Composing a Psalm. Why this embroidery at a



time of such great uncertainty?

Because of the great line in Psalm 126: “Those who sow in tears, shall reap in joy.” Let us, like King David, never give up hope.

Further details on “The Israelis” and the King David embroidery can be found on the enclosed reply card.

Do You Have a Bank Account?

You probably do – but you may not know that every bank has a Charitable Giving Department. (I didn’t know until some NACOEJ Board members told me!) This can mean support for programs helping Ethiopian Jews. Here’s how:

Go to your bank and ask to see your Account Manager (if you have a business account there) or the Branch Manager (if you have a personal account). Discuss a gift to NACOEJ with the manager.

The manager may ask for a letter, which will be passed on to the appropriate department. Write a personal letter to the manager, thanking him or her, and briefly describing the materials you are enclosing.

What materials?

Gary Metzger will be happy to send you a package of materials describing our programs as soon as you ask. Deliver your introductory personal letter and the materials to the cooperative manager.

Will it work? Not always – but often!

When you contact Gary, be sure to tell him the name and address of the bank you are approaching, so when the bank check arrives (!) at our office, we’ll be able to recognize it, and to thank you, too!

Contact Gary at 212-233-5200, ext. 228, or at gmetzger@nacoej.org.

BRG

Congratulations to...

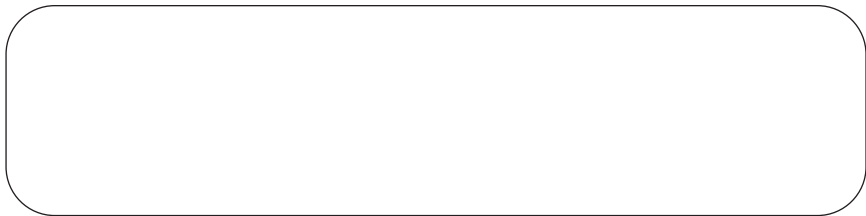
- **Rabbi Mazor Bayana**, who has become the third Ethiopian-Israeli member of the Knesset. (Addisu Mesala was the first, Shlomo Molla is the second.) Rabbi Bayana immediately announced that his first priority is to expedite the aliyah of the remaining Jews in Ethiopia!



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Gondar Feeding Center Shuts Down.



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NORTH AMERICAN
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ETHIOPIAN JEWRY

A contribution to NACOEJ, as a memorial gift or in honor of a special occasion, will help provide education and other aid for Ethiopian Jews.

All NACOEJ programs are designed to aid Ethiopian Jews in achieving independence and dignity.

PLEASE RETURN THIS ENTIRE REPLY FORM WITH YOUR DONATION.

My E-mail address is: _____
(We will not share your e-mail address with any other organization.)

Please send a free Ethiopian Jewry reading list.

My check, made payable to NACOEJ, is enclosed.

Please charge my gift to: VISA MasterCard AMEX

Name: _____

Acct No: _____ Exp. Date: _____

Signature: _____ Amount \$ _____

- Your gift is tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law.
- Gifts of securities and Israel Bonds are greatly appreciated. **Please notify us of transfers.**

GIVE A GIFT OF LIFE

NACOEJ will send a personalized acknowledgement to the person designated below.

(Please PRINT clearly and include all information. Thank you.)

IN HONOR OF: OR IN MEMORY OF:

NAME: _____

OCCASION: _____

Send acknowledgement to:

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Please sign card from: (PLEASE PRINT AND INCLUDE YOUR ADDRESS AND PHONE NUMBER)

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone (must include): (_____) _____

ENCLOSED IS MY GIFT OF:

\$36 \$72 \$110*

\$190** \$360 \$720

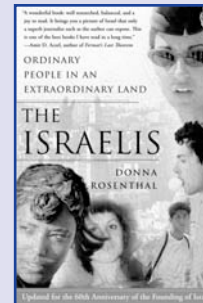
\$1,000 \$1,800

\$3,600 \$5,400

\$7,200 \$10,000

Other \$ _____

TWO SPECIAL OFFERS:



“THE ISRAELIS”:
A Special Book
KING DAVID
COMPOSING
A PSALM:
A Special Embroidery



* With your gift of \$110 or more, we will be happy to send you either Donna Rosenthal's fascinating book, “The Israelis”, personally inscribed by the author, OR the stunning pillow cover,

“King David Composing a Psalm” (choose below).

** With your gift of \$190 or more, we will be happy to send you both the book and the embroidery.

Please send me the personally inscribed book, “The Israelis”

(I am enclosing a check for \$110 or charging \$110 to my credit card).

Please send me the embroidery, “King David Composing a Psalm”

(I am enclosing a check for \$110 or charging \$110 to my credit card).

Please send me both “The Israelis” and “King David Composing a Psalm”

(I am enclosing a check for \$190 or charging \$190 to my credit card).

For each embroidery you order, \$40 (fair market value plus shipping & handling) is not tax-deductible, and for each book you order, \$26 (fair market value plus shipping & handling) is not tax-deductible, but all of your gift goes to help Ethiopian Jews.

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery.

NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY (NACOEJ)

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