

# LIFELINE

NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY

SUMMER 2010



Photo: NACOEJ Israel

## A Torah from Brooklyn Arrives in Jerusalem

Not long ago, a beautiful Torah from Congregation Ahavas Torah (known as the Greenpoint Shul) in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, made its way to a grateful Ethiopian congregation in the Talpuyot section of Jerusalem through the good offices of congregants Harold (Bret, see above, with the Torah) and Carol Bretstein and NACOEJ Board member Sandy Goldhaber.

The Greenpoint Shul is the only synagogue remaining in its part of Brooklyn. Over the years, it has been the recipient of Torahs donated to it from other local synagogues that closed as Jewish communities moved elsewhere.

When Bret and Carol read in a NACOEJ *Lifeline* that there were

Ethiopian synagogues in Israel that had no Torahs, they set to work immediately, making arrangements to have a Torah from the Greenpoint Shul find a new home in Israel. They worked with NACOEJ Israel Director Shoshana Ben-Dor and staffer Kassahun Wonde to set things up at the Israel end.

Last February, during a snowstorm that grounded most flights, Bret and friends Burt Rosenberg of Manhattan, and Bobby Lurie of Staten Island, boarded an El Al flight with the precious Torah.

The flight arrived safely, and according to Bret and his friends, the presentation of the Torah to the Ethiopian congregation in Talpuyot

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## A Storm in Gondar

On June 7, a Monday, a freak storm crashed into Gondar.

June in Ethiopia is not usually a month of storms. It is a month of early, gentle rains – the farmers count on them.

But what descended on our community on that Monday was no June shower. In fact, it was a storm such as no one in Gondar had ever seen.

Terrifying winds and torrents of rain raged over the area. In urban parts of Gondar City, cars washed away in floods.

In our rural enclave, the three one-story rows of classrooms that make up our admired Jewish Day School withstood the blast.

But not a cluster of additional classrooms we had had to add.

Increased traffic on a nearby road had made it dangerous for our children (who attend secular studies and Jewish studies in shifts) to walk to and from our original site for the Jewish studies/Hebrew language program. So we added some space in our school compound.

The additional classrooms did not fare well. When the storm of storms finally passed, walls and roofs were gone – but we were thanking heaven that the space had been empty when the storm broke.

Not a child, not a teacher, not a guard had been there. No one was hurt.

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## A Storm in Gondar

*Continued from Page 1*

**Getu Zemene, our Director of Gondar Programs, emailed us: "No damage on human being in our compound!"**

That was all that really mattered.

We will build more weather-proofed classrooms as soon as we can. If Gondar is going to be subject to such unheard-of storms, we must prepare.

A week before the storm hit, a top-level official from the Jewish Agency in Israel visited Gondar. Like local Ethiopian officials, he told Getu that our school *"surpassed all expectations."*

He added that the children's school experience and especially their growing Hebrew language skills would make it much easier to absorb them in Israel.

To much applause, he also told the community that everyone was going to be examined for eligibility for aliyah. We hope that will actually happen. But we remember that in the past, we've had those hopes disappointed.

So, we will just keep on *"surpassing expectations"* to the best of our ability.

We're scheduling Sunday classes in Hebrew language and Jewish studies for the kids in sixth, seventh, and eighth grades, who have had to attend regular local schools because ours has only gone up to fifth grade.

We'll try to open those upper grades in our own school next fall, but in the meantime, we want to

give those older children as much preparation for Israel as we can. They deserve to be absorbed more easily too.

The Jewish studies/Hebrew language teachers have offered to teach gratis on Sunday, a generous gesture we appreciate greatly.

We don't have the money to give the Sunday scholars (and the teachers) an egg and a roll at midday, but we'll try to find a donor.

This is all I have room to tell you now. We don't yet know the entire extent to which the storm may have affected our children, their families, and their fragile homes – but for the moment at least, the storm has passed.

We pray that the entire community will get interviewed this time, and that those who are eligible will leave for Israel quickly. It could happen. We're working on it.

**In the meantime, as always, we will do whatever we can, as much as we can, and be grateful for our blessings. There was no one in the destroyed classrooms – that's a very great blessing. And our wonderful NACOEJ family – you – are always with us, in any weather. That's a blessing indeed.**

All of us send all of you our love and gratitude.



Barbara Ribakove Gordon  
Founder & Executive Director



## ISRAEL DAY PARADE

**With help from NACOEJ volunteer Sandy Wasserman, an Ethiopian-Israeli contingent under the leadership of Ethiopian-Israeli Bizu Riki Mulu marched proudly in the huge Israel Day parade in New York City.**

Photo: Dalia Rosenthal

## A Torah from Brooklyn Arrives in Jerusalem

*Continued from Page 1*

was one of the most moving experiences of their lives. The rabbi of the Ethiopian synagogue said, *"Last week we read in the weekly parsha about the Torah being given to the Jewish people by Moses, and this week we have been given one of our own!"*

There was joyous dancing, singing, and (of course) a communal meal as the community celebrated this longed-for event (the Ethiopian synagogue had been trying to obtain a Torah for over seven years). According to Bret, *"An everlasting bond has been formed between the Brooklyn synagogue in Greenpoint and the Ethiopian synagogue in Talpiot, Jerusalem."*

Many Ethiopian-Israeli congregations are longing for Torahs. If your synagogue has a Torah to spare and would like an amazing experience in Israel, please contact Sandy Goldhaber at [gldhbr@yahoo.com](mailto:gldhbr@yahoo.com) or call Orlee Guttman at the NACOEJ office, 212-233-5200, ext 224. ■



## Making a Miracle in Gondar

**D**o you remember the heartbreaking photo above?

It was taken in 2008, when famished Jewish children were beating desperately on the doors of the NACOEJ Feeding Center in Gondar, Ethiopia. But the doors never opened for them.

**The doors were locked because we had run out of funds to feed those children and hundreds like them, and to feed pregnant and nursing mothers as well.**

**The day we closed the Feeding Center was one of the worst days of our lives – and of theirs.**

For two years the children hungered in vain. The Feeding Center stood silent and deserted. No trucks or horse carts came, bringing eggs and vegetables and fruit.

No men and women from the Jewish community arrived on foot to cook and serve and to wash up the pots and dishes that provided two hearty, nourishing, all-you-can-eat meals twice every day for the hungry children and mothers. No one filled bags of beans for the women to take home with them, to prepare modest evening meals for their whole families.

The sound of silence in the Feeding Center was deafening to our ears, and deadening to our hearts.

**But today, as I write in June 2010, there is a real possibility that we can open the Center again, thanks to a generous grant from the UJA-Federation of New York and its compassionate Executive Vice President and CEO, John Ruskay.**

Today a miracle has begun to happen.

Life and hope and the sound of children's voices are stirring the dusty air in the Feeding Center.

As soon as the Center can be cleaned and readied, as soon as the Ethiopian authorities stamp their approval on our papers, we can start feeding the children again.

Or at least we can feed the youngest – from six

months through three years – who are the most vulnerable of this destitute population. They, and the pregnant and nursing women whose own bodies must nourish their littlest ones, are the most likely to be wasted and sickened and even to die because chronic malnourishment leaves them defenseless to disease.

With careful management, despite the ravages of inflation, we may be able to feed these children and these women one good meal a day, with just the New York grant.

But we know that it can't stretch far enough to also feed the children just a little bit older – the four, five, and six-year-olds – who are just as hungry.

To feed them all – and to provide each child with two meals a day – and if at all possible to send a little bag of beans home with them – we will need more money.

Not until they reach the age of seven – first-grade entry level in Ethiopia – will those children be eligible for the NACOEJ school lunch.

To fill the gap between ages three and seven we must look for additional funds.

And of course we are looking.

Until 2001, a coalition of federations, led by New York, provided part of the funding for the Feeding Center. So we are appealing to those federations to join in this great mitzvah once again.

But a part is never a whole. Then, as always, the rest of the funds came from you, our NACOEJ family.

So once again, we are turning to you.

*Please help the children – in two ways.*

*Please give whatever you can – and please, call your own federations and ask them to join the coalition at whatever level they can.*

*And when you have called, please let us know whom you have contacted, and we will follow through.*

Can we make this miracle whole?

For two years, I didn't believe we could even make a beginning.

But now I know we can.

Our Scripture tells us over and over that we must not let the poor go hungry. The Jewish women and children in Gondar are the poorest and the hungriest we know.

**So now, with New York's great generosity, and with help from other federations – and from you – I do believe we will be able to open the doors of the Feeding Center to all the young children and the mothers – and never close those doors again until they are all in Israel.**

**Thank you. And thank you, New York, for caring so much... Barbara**

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## SUCCESS STORY!

So many of our Adopt-A-Student college graduates and students are now making names for themselves in business, government, medicine, law, teaching, community service, the arts, professions, and the military, that we don't have room to write about them all. But here is one story we can't resist printing:

### HADAS MALADA MITZRI

Four-year-old Hadas almost died of malaria and measles on her way to Israel in one of the Operation Solomon planes. It took six months of hospitalization in the Promised Land to put her on her feet – and to persuade her that she wanted to be a doctor like the ones who saved her life.

Today, a Ben-Gurion University graduate sponsored by Barney and Rachel Gottstein and Hannah Klein, she's an MD in the Israel Defense Forces, with the rank of first lieutenant. Her husband, an architect, is also a first lieutenant in the IDF. Hadas's dream is to be one of the doctors in a rescue unit, saving Israelis – and she's already "given back" to the land of her birth by doing volunteer work with children with AIDS in Ethiopia. Articles about Hadas have appeared in newspapers in Canada's *The Globe and Mail*, in Israel's *Ma'ariv*, and in English translations in Yonatan Silverman's Sartaba Publications.

This very special young woman is also working on a unique pocket dictionary for medical students. It translates symptoms, body parts, medical questions and instructions for taking various medications from Hebrew to Amharic to bridge the communication divide that often separates Israeli doctors from Ethiopian patients.

Despite challenges in their lives, Hadas's parents have always stressed the importance of education and for this, Hadas and her ten siblings are very appreciative. She is also deeply grateful to NACOEJ for enabling her to pursue her career in medicine. "I am so thankful to NACOEJ," she says, "and to its wonderful donors."

If you'd like to read more AAS success stories – and possibly become a proud AAS sponsor yourself – contact AAS coordinator Judy Dick at [college@nacoej.org](mailto:college@nacoej.org) or 212-233-5200, ext. 230. She'll put you on the mailing list for our special AAS annual newsletter, and let you know how easy, gratifying and inexpensive it is to sponsor a student, individually or with a group. ■



*Dr. Hadas Malada Mitzri*

## THREE SPECIAL S

### A College Student Who Needs You Now



#### HANNAH ELAZAR

When Ethiopian-Israeli Hannah Elazar graduated from high school with distinction, she decided to do

National Service in a health clinic. There she discovered occupational therapy and fell in love with it.

*"I can see myself working in it," she says, "and believe I can contribute a lot. Occupational therapy is a creative, cutting-edge profession addressing the entire life cycle, and treating everything in daily life by addressing complex motor, emotional and cognitive functions."*

Wow! When you read those words, and know they come from a young woman who grew up – along with seven siblings – in a poor, crime-ridden neighborhood, and who has always struggled to help her hard-working father support the family, you get a glimpse of a very special intellect, plus what we often like to call family values.

Hannah's father, who is now 66 years old, has worked for 20 years in a minimum-wage factory job to support his family. He's still working, despite asthma and chronic pain from a four-year-old work accident. When Hannah asks for a NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon AAS sponsorship, she does so not just to make her studies easier but in order not to be a burden on her father.

She is currently a second-year occupational therapy student at Haifa University. A sponsor can look forward to helping a brilliant young woman – and perhaps, on a visit to Israel, meeting Hannah's family in Netanya as well.

# L SPONSORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

## Two High School Students Who Need You



### BAT-EL HAYLU

7<sup>TH</sup> GRADE  
AMIT  
REHOVOT

"My name is Bat-El Haylu. I was born in

Israel. My father is a landscaper at Rehovot cemetery; mom is a caregiver. I have six brothers and sisters, aged 1, 5, 12, 16, 18 and 20.

"At the Sinai School in Rehovot, I studied in the NACOEJ *Limudiah*.

"I like being with friends and watching TV in my free time. I also volunteer raising money for cancer patients and helping kids with family problems, like violence.

"We are many kids in my family and my parents aren't able to pay for everything. I am very happy that there are people like you who are willing to help.

"In the future I want to be an archaeologist and interior designer.

"I hope you enjoy reading this."

*NOTE: At NACOEJ, we are very interested in following the careers of our former Limudiah students, some of whom, like Bat-El, have developed very sophisticated ambitions. Bat-El now goes to one of the high schools run by AMIT, an American Jewish women's organization. AMIT can't cover everything so NACOEJ has helped numerous Ethiopian AMIT students through our NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program.*



### ADISSO TEBEBAL

9<sup>TH</sup> GRADE  
AMIT KIRYAT  
MALACHI

A VERY  
SPECIAL CASE

This is not just a special case – it's about a special kid. They don't make many like Adisso.

He and his little brother came to Israel with their mother as a single-parent family. But before he was even in his teens, Adisso was taking on the role of parent to his younger brother, substituting for his non-Hebrew-speaking mother at parent-teacher interviews while his mother was at work, making sure his little brother did his homework and behaved properly.

In school, Adisso was not only a brilliant student, but sensitive and compassionate. Entirely on his own initiative, he became a mentor to a troubled classmate, helping the other boy in what his teachers described as "wondrous ways".

Everyone at the school he attended loved Adisso and predicted a great future for him.

Even when an accident caused him to miss school for more than two months, and left him with limited sight, Adisso never seemed to feel sorry for himself, and worked so hard to make up for lost lessons that he was able to qualify for college-level courses for high school students (think "advanced placement") at Ben-Gurion University.

Here's the rub: the college program isn't free. Adisso's mother, a cleaning lady in a supermarket, can't possibly cover it. Adisso's very loving high school sponsor, Diana Yacobi, a multiple-student sponsor who covers Adisso's regular high school costs, agreed to let us find an additional sponsor for the program.

We're eager to do so. It means a lot to Adisso. It means that when he finishes high school, he will already be well on the way to a university degree, and the successful future he deserves.

This is, as we said, a very special kid. Is there a very special second sponsor waiting for him? Please let us know.

## FALL SEMESTER COMING UP SOON!

This is an optimal time to help deserving students on the NACOEJ college and high school program waiting lists.

### For high school sponsorships:

Contact Judy Dick at [highschool@nacoej.org](mailto:highschool@nacoej.org).

### For college sponsorships:

Contact Judy at [college@nacoej.org](mailto:college@nacoej.org).

Judy can also be reached at 212-233-5200, ext. 230.

**Be sure to tell Judy you read about the students in *Lifeline*.**

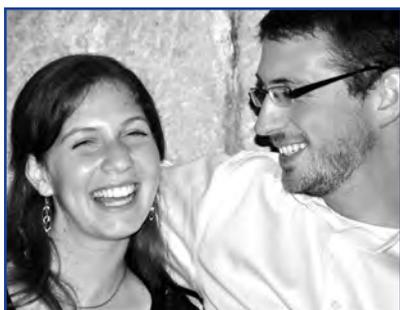
Photos: NACOEJ Israel

## Congratulations!

### Abby Laub and Joseph Finkelstein, a Match Made in Ethiopia!!

Last summer a NACOEJ Young Leadership Group visited Ethiopia and Israel. Meeting Ethiopian Jews in both countries inspired the group to hold a fund-raising Evening of Ethiopian Jewry. They worked in pairs to plan the event – and Abby Laub was paired with Joseph Finkelstein.

The event was a great success, and so was the pairing.



*“We’d known each other for a year and a half,” Abby told us, “but would never have thought to date each other if we hadn’t had the opportunity to work on our Ethiopian event together.”*

After one evening of making plans for the event, Joseph asked Abby out, and six months later they’re engaged! Now they’re planning an August wedding in Israel (with an Ethiopian component, of course).

Anyone interested in joining our Young Leadership Group should contact Lauren Yoked at [lyoked@nacoej.org](mailto:lyoked@nacoej.org) or 212-233-5200, ext. 227. Singles (and couples) welcome! ■

Photo: Dalia Art Photography

## A Mitzvah for the Future...

We may hope to live to the proverbial 120 but, realistically, we need to plan for a future beyond our own years.

We want to thank you for all you do for the Ethiopian Jewish community, and to suggest that you might want to extend this deeply appreciated support into the future by including NACOEJ in your will.

Your future help can enable Ethiopian Jews to have successful and productive futures of their own.

And, by leaving a legacy of caring, you can demonstrate to your children and grandchildren the commitment you have both to the Jewish present and the future.

If you have any questions about leaving a gift to NACOEJ in your will, please contact your legal advisor, and then let us know as well. Contact Orlee Guttman at [oguttman@nacoej.org](mailto:oguttman@nacoej.org) or 212-233-5200, ext. 224. Thank you so much!



## Backpacks Across the Ocean MATAN GAZIT’S MITZVAH PROJECT

This past March, Matan Gazit celebrated his Bar Mitzvah at Hevrah of Southern Berkshire in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. But he didn’t settle for a party. Matan wanted to add an extra dimension of caring and compassion.

Matan’s family has always been very involved with Ethiopian Jews, so he decided that Ethiopian-Israeli children in NACOEJ *Limudiah* programs would be his focus. He set up donation boxes at his synagogue and school. He educated his friends about Ethiopian Jewry.

The result was that \$500 was raised and in addition, tons of brand new school supplies for the children in *Limudiah* were collected!

Matan filled 13 backpacks to the brim with the school supplies (see below). The backpacks were taken to Israel by teenagers who are part of a program arranged by Matan’s synagogue. Supported in part by Matan’s family, the program sends a group of teens to Israel each year to connect personally with the Jewish homeland. Matan’s brother Lior was in this year’s group.

The teens (see above) delivered the backpacks in February to the NACOEJ office in Jerusalem where Shoshana Ben-Dor, NACOEJ Israel Director, spoke to them about NACOEJ’s work, and expressed our warm gratitude for this wonderful gift.

We want to offer Matan a hearty Mazel Tov on his Bar Mitzvah and thank him most gratefully. He has surely learned, both from his Jewish heritage and from his family, that as Jews we are all responsible for one another.

Please visit the NACOEJ website – [www.nacoej.org](http://www.nacoej.org) – to see more Mizvah Projects, and for more information, contact Judy Dick at [jdick@nacoej.org](mailto:jdick@nacoej.org) or 212-233-5200, ext. 230. ■



## Learning and Doing...

Some time ago, we were invited to speak at the Learning Center, the Hebrew School of the Pelham Jewish Center in Pelham, New York.

Their Kitah Dalet (fourth grade) class was kicking off a school-wide mitzvah project to learn about Ethiopian Jews and help fund NACOEJ *Limudiah* classes in Israel. (You can learn about their fabulous project by going to their page on the NACOEJ website – [www.nacoej.org/PJC.html](http://www.nacoej.org/PJC.html) – where every Mitzvah Project participant can have his/her or their own web page!)

When Judy Dick, NACOEJ Coordinator of Educational Programs, and I spoke with the children in Kitah Dalet, we were amazed at how much they already knew, and the excellent questions they asked. (For their part, the children were amazed at the blast that came out when they blew the Ethiopian horn we brought, the shofar-shaped horn Jews used in Ethiopia on festivals. Biblical Jews probably used similar horns.)

But most of all, we were moved when the education director, Ana Turkienicz, told us that she knew all about our *Limudiah* classes firsthand, because she had taught in an Israeli school where *Limudiah* served the Ethiopian children.

She had even written about it, saying: *“During the 10 years I taught in the town of Beer Yaakov in Israel, I had the opportunity to personally observe the impact of the Limudiah program upon my Ethiopian students’ academic success.*

*“Together with the school counselor, I visited their tiny homes, and had to hold my tears back when seeing the bookless shelves, bare walls and empty refrigerators which was the every day reality for my Ethiopian students and their families.*

*“I saw how the Limudiah program provided these children with a hot lunch every day, educational support during school hours, helped them with*

*their homework and provided learning reinforcement in the afternoon. The program allowed my former students to study and perform at grade level as they were nourished in their bodies and souls.”*

You can imagine how Judy and I felt about Ana’s words. Very warmed by hearing how much good the *Limudiah* was doing – and very chilled by realizing that we now have about 150 Ethiopian-Israeli children in *Limudiah* classes we may not be able to continue for lack of funds, and about 180 more on our waiting list in schools where we already have some *Limudiah* classes! And this doesn’t include the kids in all the schools and towns where there is no *Limudiah*, who are pleading for *Limudiah* to come in.

If you want to know more about mitzvah projects that help Ethiopian Jews, please go to our website – [www.nacoej.org](http://www.nacoej.org) – and click on the Mitzvah Project link – or contact Judy Dick at [jdick@nacoej.org](mailto:jdick@nacoej.org) or 212-233-5200, ext. 230.

The mitzvah projects are for anyone, children and adults alike, but they are especially important for kids because they involve learning as well as doing and helping.

In the Pelham Learning Center, children all the way from third grade through Bar/Bat Mitzvah classes participated, with some making and selling lovely holiday cards, others putting on a fair with Ethiopian jewelry, and other activities.

With programs like these, it’s not just the Ethiopian kids who benefit – the American kids who get involved have their lives enriched too.

Interested in a NACOEJ speaker at your school, synagogue, group or parlor meeting? Contact Gary Metzger at [speaker@nacoej.org](mailto:speaker@nacoej.org) or 212-233-5200, ext. 228... *Barbara*

### Teachers:

There is an excellent curriculum available online, free of charge, to teach your students the historic story of Ethiopian Jews and their great redemption in our time. Just go to the NACOEJ website – [www.nacoej.org](http://www.nacoej.org) – and click on the Curriculum link.

### Parents and grandparents:

Please pass this information on to your youngsters’ teachers.



*Barbara Ribakove Gordon (left) and Judy Dick (center) with Kitah Dalet and Staff.*

## GIANT SUMMER MOVING CLEARANCE!

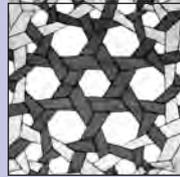
Times are still hard, our rent has gone up, and we want to stretch every penny to meet the needs of Ethiopian Jews. So NACOEJ expects to move to a smaller office space this fall.\*

To help reduce what we have to move and store, we're offering some beautiful embroideries for greatly reduced donations. This is a great time to order 1, 2, 3, 4, or even 5 Ethiopian Jewish hand embroideries with your donation. See the enclosed reply card for further information.

**\* All NACOEJ addresses, phone numbers, etc. will be unchanged until further notice!**



Gem Star  
Pillow Cover



Basket Weave  
Pillow Cover



Jonah & the Whale  
Pillow Cover



Gathering for the Holiday  
Challah Cover  
(with fringe)



Aleph/Bet Wall Hanging (23" x 10")

### A Yahrzeit to Honor

In the spring of 1982, a hero of the Ethiopian Jewry movement in America, William P. (Bill) Halpern, passed away.

A native of Minneapolis, Bill worked with his Reform Synagogue, Temple Israel, not only to raise American Jewish consciousness about Ethiopian Jews, but to help the Jews make their way from (then-Communist-ruled) Ethiopia to Israel.

Bill's brother, Eli Halpern of Seattle, continued Bill's work, first as a volunteer extraordinaire with the American Association for Ethiopian Jews, and then with NACOEJ as well; Eli is still a valued member of the NACOEJ Advisory Board.

NACOEJ Board member Harlan Jacobs has publicized Bill's memory in Minnesota, and has suggested that NACOEJ do so for our national family.

We are very glad to honor the memory of a great man who did so much for a community most American Jews had never even heard of during his lifetime.

Harlan suggests that gifts in memory of Bill Halpern be sent to NACOEJ, to help feed our children in Ethiopia. We will be honored to receive such tributes, and to use them for the community he loved. ■

### Condolences to...

- **Barry and Yehudah Hartheimer**, on the loss of their beloved mother, NACOEJ Advisory Board member Eve Hartheimer. Eve was active in raising funds and consciousness on behalf of Ethiopian Jews, and was always ready to volunteer in the NACOEJ office. Barbara Ribakove Gordon and many other friends will miss her greatly.
- **Hershel and Caroline Barg** and family on the death of Hershel's beloved brother, Melvin Barg. Caroline is NACOEJ's Director of Communications.
- **Rabbi Sybil Sheridan**, active member of British Friends of NACOEJ, and her family on the death of Sybil's beloved father, Kenneth Sheridan.
- Long-time NACOEJ consultant in Israel **Laurie Heller** and family on the death of her beloved father, Clement Kleinman.
- **The family of Charlotte Jacobson**, past president of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, Inc. Long after her presidency ended, Charlotte remained an outstanding Hadassah volunteer and leader of the Jewish people. For years, she came to the NACOEJ office every fall, bringing a list of Ethiopian students at the Hadassah Technological College in Jerusalem, and seeking NACOEJ Adopt-A-Student scholarships for them. We were often happily able to help. We join Hadassah in mourning the loss of a great Jewish woman.