

THE DAY OF 'SIGD'

The Sigd or Mihlella as it has been variously called, is a most significant day in the religious life of Ethiopian Jews, which always constituted the culmination of this community's religious and congregational sentiments.

The observance of this day in Israel can play an important role for the community members who have been privileged to arrive in Israel, and contribute also to the Israeli-Jewish culture in general. Sigd takes place on 29 Heshvan, seven weeks after Yom Kippur.

The day of "Sigd" has three objectives:

1. To remind the congregation of the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai, as the basis of the Covenant with God.
2. To remind the congregation of the renewal of the Covenant by the exiles who returned to Jerusalem in the days of "Return to Zion", as Ezra and Nehemia gathered the people, read the Torah before them, and made with them a covenant. The "Sigd" served as an opportunity to remind the Ethiopian Jews who have been far from the rest of the Jewish people, the obligation of keeping Torah and Mizvot, despite the suffering entailed in their observance.
3. To give the congregation an opportunity to repent of their misdeeds, demonstrate their loyalty to the Covenant, and turn in fasting and supplication to their Father in Heaven, that He bring them back to their Promised Land.

The Sigd Ceremony:

1. In the morning, the Cohanim took the Torah up the mountain as the fasting people followed them. Upon reaching a high spot, a pulpit was erected from which the Cohanim recited special prayers and excerpts from the Bible.
2. The recited passages included Revelation at Sinai (Book of Exodus 19, 20), as well as extracts of prayers from the Books of Ezra, Kings (Melachim), Yerimiyahu, Yehayahu, Daniel and Psalms.
3. The recitation was made in Ge'ez and explained in Amharic, and in the last few years also in Hebrew.
4. After the reading and praying, the High Priest moralized the people and blessed them, that they should keep the Mitzvot in order to obtain the merit of returning to Jerusalem.
5. After the ceremony on the mountain, the Sefer Torah was entered to the synagogue and a festive feast was held accompanied by singing and dancing.