



NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY LIFELINE

SUMMER
2015

Limudiah – Changes to be Made?

For some time, the Israeli Ministry of Education did not pay very close attention to after-school programs like our Limudiah classes. School principals were pretty free to bring in ones they like.

Now, under a more formal registration policy, the Ministry wants to be more involved, and in June, two important officials paid a visit to our Limudiah at the Yeshurun School in Rishon LeZion where we have 85 children.

We felt honored, as did the school principal and faculty, and we were all pleased that the visit seemed to go very well. We're even hoping the Ministry will give us some help with costs, or perhaps a curriculum consultant we want but can't afford.

Of course, with closer involvement we can also expect to be asked to make some changes. It looks as though government policy is leaning toward requiring compulsory integration in Ethiopian programs, maybe as high as 20%.

We've always been happy to take in a few non-Ethiopian pupils – you may have noticed some non-Ethiopian faces in our

It Started Last May...

It started last May with an Israeli policeman beating up a uniformed Ethiopian-Israeli soldier. A passerby took a video and it went viral.

The soldier, Corporal Damas Fikade, a 21-year-old immigrant, had just been given an award for valor in the Gaza War, and had previously been named one of Israel's most outstanding teenagers, which added to the uproar. The incident opened floodgates of long-repressed Ethiopian anger, hurt and despair over issues that included more than police brutality.

The thousands of Ethiopian Israelis who took to the streets, marching in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, were also protesting against inequality in housing, employment, income, social relations and education.

Each of the marches started peacefully and stayed peaceful for hours. But



Photo: EPA.

The protest marches were mostly peaceful - and, as you can see, well integrated.

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LIMUDIAH...

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Limudiah photos, mostly belonging to Russian or South African or American immigrant children – but larger numbers may make the Limudiah experience somewhat different.

Shoshana Ben-Dor, our Israel Director, and her staff feel sure we can handle it. We'll keep you informed – and we are always interested in your comments.



In one of the last Limudiah classes before the Yeshurun School closed for the summer, Shirley Kandelker and some first-grade pupils played a matching/opposite-similar card game as part of a language lesson. Gila Croll, the new Education Ministry Director of Learning Skills in Elementary Schools, and Yael Nagler, National Advisor on Language Teaching in the National Religious Stream Schools, sat down to watch. Yeshurun School Principal Revital Nahami stood behind them. Everyone enjoyed the game.

IT STARTED LAST MAY...

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some ended in violence.

There are still questions about whether the violence was begun by Ethiopians, or by others whom the Northern Tel Aviv Police Chief called “anarchist groups”.

However it started, the results were ugly, with police using tear gas and water hoses, and some marchers throwing bottles and stones.

Government officials could have blamed the protesters and cited Operations Moses and Solomon, the great rescues of Ethiopian Jews in the 1980's and 90's, as evidence that Israel was anything but racist - or cited its laws against discrimination and hate speech. Instead, they agreed that something had gone very wrong and must be righted.

Israeli President Reuven Rivlin said, “In recent weeks we have all seen and heard the cries and pain of Israelis of Ethiopian origin. The protesters uncovered an open wound, alive and bleeding, within Israeli society... We have erred. We have not seen or listened enough. Our country must do better.”

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said: “Racism contravenes the ethos of the Jewish people. We cannot accept this in the Jewish State and we will fight it.” He called an emergency cabinet meeting, and formed a new ministerial committee, chaired by himself, to look into Ethiopian grievances and solutions.

Many Ethiopians applauded the protests but denounced the violence; Corporal Fikade went on IDF radio to say, “I am opposed to violence against citizens – and against police. It's important that they hear our side, but violence would not solve the problem.”

Ethiopian-Israeli leader Avraham Neguise (long-time NACOEJ friend and co-worker on aliyah and social issues), now a new Knesset member, was soon elected Chairman of the Knesset Committee for Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora Affairs, getting an important official position



New Knesset Member Avraham Neguise at the Israel Day Parade in New York in June.

Photo: Tali Blankfeld.

from which to speak out.

So good things may come from the whole painful business.

Perhaps the new mood may include reviving the apparently dead aliyah of 6,000 Jews left behind in Ethiopia. The Committee of Exceptions, which NACOEJ helped to establish to look into rejections of Jews with family already in Israel, has been painfully silent.

Indeed, it seems that even Damas Fikade, the decorated soldier whose encounter with a policeman started the whole wave of revelation and protest, has relatives left behind in Ethiopia - and other Ethiopian IDF heroes are demanding that their families must be made whole again.

Stay in touch with us. In these troubled times, our advocacy efforts on behalf of aliyah, and our educational efforts which affect so many social issues and determine future success or failure, matter more than ever.

A personal note from Barbara:

Watching the recent Ethiopian protest marches on TV, I couldn't help remembering the Ethiopian protests I participated in a few years ago in Jerusalem. Even then we were protesting against agonizing delays in aliyah.

Then, too, the marchers carried

banners, but most read: "Bring My Mother Home!" Protesters held up photographs of their left-behind relatives – mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings.

When we passed through residential areas, local Israelis leaned out of their windows to cheer and encourage the marchers.

On one blazing hot day, when we finished up near the Knesset and stood still for speeches, IDF soldiers who had been posted there shared their water bottles with the weary, thirsty Ethiopians.

Nobody threw anything at anybody.

I hope that with Avraham Neguse in the Knesset, the broken Ethiopian families will not get forgotten among the many other issues now being discussed.

The endless delay in family reunification is not only a continuing cause of heartbreak and anger in the Ethiopian-Israeli community, but it even exacerbates the poverty in which so many Ethiopian families still live, and still scrape together a few shekels every month to send to relatives in Ethiopia. It is our fervent hope that this tragic situation, too, will be righted quickly.

Barbara

P.S. I'm adding this in late June, having just returned from ten intense days in Israel. I bring some good news: one of the IDF heroes, Chalachew Mekonen, has finally welcomed home his left-behind brother, Alemneh. Other news: an internal police investigation has cleared the police officer who beat up Corporal Fikade! An agreement between police and some Ethiopian-Israeli leaders is supposed to bring about better relations, but it's not accepted by all Ethiopian Israelis, and protests have continued. ■

Life in Israel: Friends Forever at the Dead Sea



The five young women pictured above met in the Ramla/Lod High School as teenagers almost a decade ago. They've remained close friends ever since.

This "selfie" was taken recently when they were on a holiday together at the Dead Sea.

Three of them are Ethiopian, one is from the Former Soviet Union (FSU), and one is a Sabra.

From left: this is Irma Hitibashvili. She studied behavioral science and is now working in manpower/human resources in Ramla. She's 27, and came from the FSU.

Nurit Biyadgilin, next in line, studied mechanical engineering and is now a Captain in the Israel Defense Forces ground forces. She's 26, and was sponsored by NACOEJ in high school and college. She's from Ethiopia.

Ricki Goshu works at Atgar, a human resources agency, and had a NACOEJ sponsor (Karen Gens, our NACOEJ Director of Sponsorship Programs!) in both high school and college. Ricki is 27 years old and from Ethiopia.

Tikva Azaria works as a team manager at Shlomo-Sixt, a car rental and towing company, and simultaneously is studying for a business administration degree at MLA College in Or Yehuda. She's 26, from Ethiopia.

Tzili Cohen is a student of industrial and management engineering at Ruppin Academic Center. She's 26, and a Sabra.

For a dozen different reasons, but especially in troubled times, we **love** this picture. ■



From a Most Grateful Father



Etti and Tzlil Leijashel are sisters who have had NACOEJ sponsorships. Recently their father, Ilan, met Shoshana Ben-Dor. Ilan sent her the following lovely note:

To Miss Shoshana Ben Dor,

I was happy to meet you yesterday at the seminar day. Enclosed are pictures from my daughter Etti's graduation ceremony. She completed her degree with honors and she is now a doctoral student.

You are the head of an organization that supported my daughters ever since they got accepted to the school of arts, from elementary school and until Etti began to study at Hadassah Ein Kerem.

I have no words to describe the appreciation and thanks that I owe you and your organization. You have a significant part in my daughters' achievements, Etti is a proven fact to it and Tzlil, who placed the goal of studying architecture at the Technion University, provides the second proof.

In order to make the picture clearer I would like to say that Tzlil had a meaningful service in the army for 3 years in the position of a flight supervisor at an operational base. She was released on March 2, 2015 and three days later she already registered for a psychometric* course.

On this opportunity I want to note that every shekel that came from the aid you have

given to my daughters throughout the years went solely for their education, I am always thinking how to advance my daughters toward high and challenging education, on my own first of all and with the help of good people like you in addition.

With great appreciation to you and the wonderful staff of your organization, which is contributing greatly to the Ethiopian community.

Ilan Leijashel, Etti's and Tzlil's father.

* Course that prepares students for college admission tests. ■

"...I would like to open this letter by saying..."



Over the years, there have been many, many lovely letters exchanged between Ethiopian-Israeli college students and their NACOEJ sponsors.

This one, sent by Yafa Kabeda to her sponsors, David and Aviva Rubin, is very moving:

"First of all I would like to open this letter by saying thanks. Thank you for giving me the sponsorship. Thank you for the will to help the future of a student that you don't know personally.

"Thank you for the personal and close connection that you have with the Ethiopian-Jewish community in Israel, even though you are not physically here. Thank you for simply caring for others.

"With your permission, I will share with you how I felt when I received the notice that my request for a sponsorship on behalf of the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry has been granted – the notice...came during the exams period of the winter semester.

"Besides feelings of joy it caused motivation and a great desire to succeed and invest more for the sake of the future.

"I wish for myself to be able to give others...without expecting anything in return, just as you are doing. I appreciate your activities. Yafa"

This kind of "nachas" can be yours also! Just contact Karen Gens at Education@nacoej.org or call her at 212-233-5200, ext. 230. ■

A New Answer to an Old Question

After Israel was born in 1948, someone suggested a new answer to a complex question, "Who is a Jew?"

The new answer that was proposed at that time was: "Someone who has a grandchild in Israel!"

Not everyone agrees, of course, but if you like that answer, but don't have your own grandchild in Israel (or even if you do!), why not "adopt" an Ethiopian-Israeli high school or college student as your Israeli grandchild?

If you choose a high school student, you'll have the pleasure of corresponding with a bright teenage girl or boy who will deeply value your help and support.

If your choice is a college student, you'll be in touch with an exceptional young man or woman who's overcome many challenges to qualify for college (after three years in the army or national service) and is now

preparing for a career in medicine, law, science, education, government work, architecture, engineering, social work, the arts, etc.

Either way, your relationship really matters.

To your student, your sponsorship can make the difference between success and failure. For a high school student, your \$350 yearly donation provides the textbooks, school supplies, carfare, special courses and school trips Ethiopian parents can't afford. High school kids can feel lost without those things. They feel "different" – in a bad way.

But many of our students have written to their sponsors, "Because of you, I feel like all the other kids at school."

For college students, the cost of sponsorship is higher - \$1320 a year – because expenses are much greater.

The Israeli government generously covers many immigrants' tuition, but

college students still have to pay for their own rent, clothes and food, books and carfare, and other basic essentials.

Parents often can't help. Part-time jobs are hard to find. The modest monthly stipend you provide through our Adopt-A-Student program takes off much of this heavy burden. It greatly reduces the number of bright, hard-working Ethiopian students who have had to drop out because they can't feed or house themselves.

Relationships that begin in college with a sponsorship can continue through graduation (you may be invited), a wedding (you're an honored guest), parenthood and (great) grandchildren.

So, if you want "adopted grandchildren" in Israel, please email Karen Gens at Education@nacoj.org, or call her at 212-233-5200, ext. 230.

A "grandchild" is waiting for you! ■

It All Adds Up!

At NACOEJ we cherish each and every donor. Every single donation is a blessing to the many Ethiopian Jews we assist in Israel.

We have a special place in our hearts for donors who make the choice to give to NACOEJ monthly. They provide added value by being a specially *reliable* blessing we know we can count on month after month.

Consider the following: let's say you give \$18 a month. That comes to \$216 a year. Ten donors just like you will bring that to \$180 a month, and \$2160 a year. It all adds up!

We've used \$18 as an example because that amount will pay for four lunches for four hungry children about to start in our NACOEJ Limudiah after-school classes of intensive education.

Knowing that the money is coming in, rain or shine, really helps with budgeting so we know how many children can receive our nutritious lunches. Monthly donations also help **you** budget, and are a great way to keep track of your charitable giving.

Here's a real (but anonymous for privacy) example. One of our monthly donors has been giving generously to NACOEJ since 1988, often three to four times a year.

She's now in a nursing home, living on a fixed income. Recently, she chose to make her donations monthly, chose a comfortable amount, and arranged with our office to set it up. We streamlined the process for her.

She's a very special lady, who traveled by herself from Europe to Palestine at age 14, back in 1936. She

understands the challenges of being an immigrant in a new world and relates to the experiences Ethiopian Jews have in adjusting to life in Israel.

We're so grateful to her and happy to be a regular part of her life. Please give thought to becoming a monthly donor too. The amount can be small or large, whichever suits your life.

Please call us at 212-233-5200 ext. 0 or email nacoj@nacoj.org. We'll help you plan for monthly giving and smooth out the details. We look forward to hearing from you.

If you wish to set it up online, please go to www.nacoj.org, and select the large green button at the top. You'll then see, right away, that you can select a recurring donation.





“...my opponents were unable to catch me, I left them all behind!”



Azaunt Teka arrived in Israel in 1990 at age five. While in high school she participated in athletic competitions and her PE teacher, seeing her potential, suggested she begin a serious training program. So she joined a local athletic club.

After high school, she joined the IDF and served as a fitness coach. She trained for running with combat soldiers. When she became an officer, she didn't have as much time to train but still did so on weekends.

After the army, she studied physical education at the famed Wingate Institute, where as she put it, “...I took the training another step forward...” While still a student, she won a 1500 meter race and 5000 meter sprints and was named Israel's national champion!

She was then given the opportunity to train in Ethiopia, which she described as “...absolutely amazing.” She trained with a team, unlike in Israel where she normally trained alone. She was assisted by a coach every day and found it very important.

Describing the training in Ethiopia, Azaunt said, “...we would usually run in the surrounding fields and once

a week at a stadium of 220 meters, and we trained at different heights [altitudes].”

She found the training in Ethiopia challenging but the terrain was magnificent, which aided her training and her motivation.

Azaunt came back to Israel, finished school, and ran in an Israeli half-marathon, which she won – “I decided to run with all my force and my opponents were unable to catch me,” she said, “I left them all behind!”

She has since gone on to compete in Berlin.

Sponsored by Ita Marcus during her critically important years of study at Wingate Institute, Azaunt is a champion runner in Israel. At some point in the future she hopes to teach as well, but right now she is concentrating on training and races.

Her NACOEJ sponsorship helped pave Azaunt's way to her success as an international Israeli runner. ■



“The unbroken chain of the Jewish people...”

We often receive touching letters from you, our dear friends. This one struck a special chord and we will let it speak for itself:

“Dear Ms. Ribakove Gordon,

“I have always read and followed the plight of the Ethiopian Jewry with tremendous interest. In fact, in the 80/90s I heard you speak several times and read your NACOEJ letters diligently. I remember with a smile walking on the upper West Side in NYC one Shabbat morning and seeing you walking. I think you were likely quite late to your Shabbat lunch due to my having 'just one more question'.

“I read your current mailing and in particular your tribute to the Giesberg family. I am enclosing a copy of Jonathan Giesberg's ethical will that was in a

mailing that I received from NACOEJ, I am guessing some 25 years ago. I was so touched by the words in that 'will' that I have kept it all these years and have periodically quoted from it or showed it to others. The words have touched me so during my life. They often resonate and remind me of the unbroken chain of the Jewish people and to 'use your time wisely. It goes so fast.'

“While I never knew Jonathan or any member of the Giesberg family that you mention, I wanted to thank them for their contribution to the cause of Ethiopian Jewry. May their memories be for a blessing.”

Sincerely, Erwin Mevorah

Thank you, Erwin, for your warm and kind words. How well we remember Jonathan's message. It's framed and

hanging on the wall in our New York office. Now we want to share it again with you. Several years before his untimely death from cancer, Jonathan, NACOEJ's first President, wrote this "ethical will", following a Jewish tradition of passing on one's insights and advice. Jonathan's could have been written today - or a thousand years ago:

Learn about yourself. Who you are, what you think, what you want – to do, to know, to be.

Love who you are and respect yourself.

Reach out to those you love and to your neighbors, and when you can, to those you do not know.

Don't be afraid of silence, the dark, lack of words or losing your thoughts – relish the pause.

Cultivate friends but don't crave them. Be sensitive that pressure from the crowd can lead you astray. Be yourself – don't sell yourself.

Share your talents with your community. Moving the world ever so slightly off center will bring you more than collecting all the world's treasures.

Of great importance, be proud you are a Jew and love your religion and your G-d, for it teaches all I have learned and much more I have yet to understand. You are part of an ethical past and present. You are part of a people, a history, a law. You are part of the flow of life.

Use your time wisely. It goes so fast.

Jonathan Giesberg ■

My Name is Shai Demetu



Shai's story is so heartwarming, we've decided to include his entire bio from when he applied for an AAS sponsorship in 2009,

through his thank-you letter to his sponsors today.

If ever there was a story that told you why NACOEJ college sponsorships are so vitally important to Ethiopian-Israelis, this is it! Even more so because Shai is not a 20-year-old. You'll see below.

2009: My name is Shai Demetu.

I immigrated to Israel in 1991 with my mother and 6 siblings. My father had passed away in Ethiopia before we immigrated, and left me with the responsibility of the family's livelihood and security (I am the oldest son). When we immigrated I had just been married.*

After immigrating we lived in an absorption center in Ashkelon for two years. The absorption center gave us three hot meals a day - for anything else we had to manage ourselves. I realized that me and my family can't go on like that, because we couldn't even get us some new clothes, so I went to work in all kinds of works in order to provide for my family.

I went to the Ulpan for only three months - too short a time to learn good Hebrew. After two years in the absorption center we moved to a permanent apartment in Ashkelon.

Since then I have been working in any work possible, and I am trying to absorb into Israeli society. Two years ago I won a contract of the Ashkelon municipality to be the community coordinator on behalf of the city. In my job I am doing what I can to absorb the Ethiopian community in Israel, while preserving its tradition. I am working in this job for more than 6 years, and despite my seniority and wide range of services I provide, I am still paid minimum wage.

My father always educated us for acquiring knowledge and studying. Despite the financial difficulties I decided to "go into battle" and study for a first

degree in the Beit-Berl College. Today I am a 2nd year student of community coordination and management.

Despite my motivation to study, there are financial, social, and mental difficulties, and I shouldn't mention that with minimum wage it is hard to study and provide for a family.

No institution supports an old student like me, so I pay my tuition myself - what puts me on the edge of a breaking point. My current situation is intolerable, and even though I work full time I still can't close the existing gap.

Therefore I decided to address you with a request for a stipend so that I can pay my tuition and fulfill my dream of becoming an educated person.

Thank you in advance, Shai Demetu.

**The year of Operation Solomon.*

2015: To Mr. & Mrs. Faust Halley and Ruth Anne

Shalom and greetings,

Dear family, thanks to your sponsorship I am a university graduate. Despite the difficulties that I had with the English and Hebrew languages.

I want to inform you that I finally completed my studies; I completed all of my obligations for the degree except for one assignment. I made it against all odds at the age of 47.

Dear family I didn't let you down, on this opportunity I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for supporting me throughout the years. I also want to thank dear Yehudit for making the connection between us.*

As I mentioned in my previous letter I will graduate at the end of June, I will receive the grade for the internship in mid-June, and with that I will complete my long journey. I want to thank you dear family once again for helping me during a long period. Your help has taught me not to give up.

Sincerely, Shai Demetu and his family

** Yehudit Abramson is the NACOEJ/Israel Coordinator of College Sponsorships.*

To have the very special opportunity of helping a deserving Ethiopian Israeli, no matter the age, to receive a college education, email Karen Gens at Education@nacoej.org or call her at 212-233-5200, ext. 230. ■



Condolences

From Caroline Barg/NACOEJ Director of Communications:

The year was 1984. NACOEJ had become a client of a marketing firm specializing in Jewish direct mail, where I was working. NACOEJ was one of my clients. Our on-staff designer was CC Krohne, who began a long career of representing NACOEJ's image to the world in countless different incarnations. CC designed the first direct mail packages sent out for NACOEJ and did so with a talent and competence that helped us to achieve great success. Her ideas were innovative and stood apart from the rest of the direct mail world. She was creative and willing to try many new ideas.

When I became the Director of Communications for NACOEJ in 1992, CC had moved on to freelance work and continued designing for NACOEJ until her untimely passing at age 60 this past March 2015 – over 30 years.

Throughout that time CC came up with the designs that you now recognize – Lifeline, brochures, letters, reply cards – virtually everything you receive in the mail from NACOEJ.

Even when she was struggling with the terrible effects of cancer, she kept working. And even in March, when things sadly took a dreadful turn for the worse, she assured us that she would be back at work very soon.

We want to publicly offer our deepest gratitude for all CC did for us and for Ethiopian Jews over all those years, and send our heartfelt condolences to her husband, Martin Krohne.

Congratulations to...

- NACOEJ Board member Dr. Ruth Gruber who, at 103, is still receiving well-deserved accolades. The latest is the Eugene J. Keogh Award for Distinguished Public Service, from the New York University Alumni Association, citing Ruth as a "Renowned journalist and humanitarian who helped transport 1,000 Jewish refugees to America, and documented 4,500 Holocaust survivors aboard the Exodus 1947" during the "illegal" post-war immigration to Palestine. Mazel Tov, Ruth, and many more!
- NACOEJ Board member Caryn Huberman on her marriage to Michael Morganstern. We are so happy for two dear friends!
- NACOEJ friend Pastor Demusani Washington, a founder of the Institute of Black Solidarity with Israel, on being named by the *Algemeiner Press* as one of the 100 top people positively influencing Jewish life. Among other things, he gives powerful speeches defending Israel on college campuses.

- **Former NACOEJ President Elsie Shemin-Roth and sister Ina Bass, on accepting, from President Obama, a posthumous Medal of Honor, on behalf of their late father, Sergeant William Shemin, for extraordinary valor in World War I.**

Sergeant Shemin and Private Henry Johnson earned the nation's highest military honor by saving the lives of many wounded American soldiers during a battle with German troops, though wounded themselves.

France, where the battle took place, honored both men with their *Croix de Guerre with Palm*, but the two Americans were denied our country's highest award, apparently because Sergeant Shemin was a Jew, and Private Johnson an African American.

During the ceremony in the White House, President Obama said, "It's never too late to say thank you."

It's also never too late to say it again! After her term as NACOEJ President, Elsie, a nurse, was honored for having led a team of Hadassah nurses, under fire, in the besieged city of Sarajevo in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1993, 1994 and 1995. She was named a national hero then, and remains one still to all of us at NACOEJ.

Thanks again, Elsie, and *Yasher Koach* (job well done!), to you and your father.

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