



NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY **LIFELINE**

SPRING
2018

Dear NACOEJ Family,

I hope your preparations for Passover are coming along well.

I am in the thick of things but I want to take a moment right now to talk with you.

As we all know so well, Passover is our holiday of freedom, when we made the Exodus from the enslavement of Egypt to the freedom of Israel.

Passover has especially poignant meaning for Ethiopian Jews who have made their own personal Exodus in our time as they journeyed painfully from Ethiopia, many via the horrific refugee camps in Sudan, to the Jerusalem of their dreams. Tragically, some 4000 died along the way.

As you read the stories in this Lifeline – stories of pain for those still suffering in Ethiopia and stories of hope and triumph for those who’ve reached Israel – know that it is your partnership with NACOEJ, the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry – that’s helping to keep the Jews in Ethiopia alive and enabling those in Israel to achieve lives of meaning and purpose.

It is your partnership with NACOEJ that enables us to run our critically important (and highly acclaimed) educational programs in Israel from grade school through college.

Programs that enable children, teens, and young adults to break out of poverty and take their proper place in Israeli society.

It is your partnership with us that is enabling Jewish children still suffering in Ethiopia to get nourishing, life-sustaining meals.

And your partnership gives all those still in Ethiopia –

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In Addition: A Last-Minute Report on Ethiopia: **A Mixed Bag of Good-Bad and Good-Good News**



▲ Feeding the children in Ethiopia. February 2018

Shortly before we went to press, the Israeli government announced that in 2018 about 1000 of those left behind in Ethiopia would be allowed to come to Israel. Most would be parents who already have children in Israel.

That's the good-bad news.

It's good because 1000 is better than none at all, bad because it is 300 less than last year's skimpy quota and still leaves some 8000 in Ethiopia.

It's also bad news because so far there is no official budget for the 1000, and delays in that critical area could shut the whole 2018 project down.

Finally, it is good - in fact very good - to reunite parents and children. But is it the best way to go? I remember a time (in the 1990's) when Israel was forced by the then-communist Ethiopian government, to restrict aliyah, and Israeli policy then was to prioritize the neediest, the very sick, the very old, the most fragile.

And when it turned out that when these very fragile people found themselves alone in Israel, some died of loneliness,

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Dear NACOEJ Family...

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young and old – hope that they are not forgotten.

That they may yet live to be reunited with their loved ones in the Israel they have longed for.

As you celebrate Passover with those most dear to you, please keep our Ethiopian-Jewish family in your heart just as you have done – with so much dedication and love – over the years.

We are enjoined in the Haggadah to let all who are hungry come and eat.

By making a special Passover gift to NACOEJ today, you're helping Ethiopian Jews on both sides of the Red Sea to get the nourishment – physical, emotional and educational – that they so urgently need.

It is NACOEJ – and you – that, for the past 36 years, have helped sustain this ancient community of Jews.

And we must continue to do so because, in 2018, we continue to be their lifeline.

I want to wish you and yours a meaningful and beautiful Passover.

And I want to thank you ahead of time for the generous Passover gift I hope with all my heart that you will send.



With love and best wishes,

Barbara

Founder,
Executive Director,
and proudly your
partner in NACOEJ

Ethiopia Update...

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so the Israelis, bless them, changed their policy and took the whole families along with the neediest!

That was sensitivity, humanity and Jewish values at their best, and I heard no complaints that it would cost too much! There were no price tags on Jewish lives then.

Now let us come to the good-good news I promised.

The latest word is that at least 150 (the number may change) malnourished Jewish children, age three and four, have started getting nourishing meals funded by NACOEJ. ▼



Their menu is based on the same meals the littlest malnourished children (age two and under) get - eggs, milk, vegetables, fruit, bread, and fafa (the fortified porridge everyone loves).

Thanks to you and all our generous friends, the three-and-four-year-old kids will no longer have to wait outside the feeding center, hungry and bewildered, while their mothers are inside, feeding their littlest siblings.

We'll send you progress reports as soon as possible.

Meantime, in partnership with our sister organization SSEJ, we are helping with the cost of the medical evaluations for "our" three-and-four-year-old children, and also with a modest meal for the community members who purchase the children's food, cook and serve it, and clean up after the children are through.

So that's all good-good news and so is the fact that our other major partner, the philanthropist, is now covering all the Jewish children in Gondar under age five, for full medical care.

I can say that it is truly good even though there are still huge gaps

unfilled in Gondar and Addis. I can say it because we are doing the best we can. Now we call on Israel to do the best it can. I know Israel can do better than bring only 1000 people in one year, and I know they can do better by prioritizing sick children as well as reuniting parents and children. I know they can do better, because decades ago I watched with awe and admiration while they did it.

So, please ask your Rabbi, your local Federation, your local Israeli Consul to tell Israel to bring all our people home now!



MAKING MATZAH in Ethiopia



Photo Credit: Lior Sperandeo (2017)



THE NACOEJ LIMUDIAH PROGRAMS

“It’s Like Going Back 20 Years.”

Bat Yam is a small Israeli city with a sizeable population of new Ethiopian-Jewish immigrants. It urgently needs the new NACOEJ Limudiah program we have opened there.



▲ NACOEJ Staff member and educational specialist, Aviva Oune, working with one of the 5th graders on math.

Our city coordinator, Frida Magen, a NACOEJ veteran of over 20 years, says that the situation there is “like going back 20 years” because the children are so far behind.

She noted that in a 5th grade group, every child is on a different level and each one has different needs. Some of the children, she said, have gaps of two, three or even more years.

The city has not been able to figure out how to close these children’s learning gaps and has welcomed our Limudiah program with open arms.

Our many years of work with Ethiopian-Israeli children in urgent need of educational support has given us the tools needed to do the job.

Of course, our Limudiah program is urgently needed not only in Bat Yam, but in many other struggling communities all over Israel, and it is only the partnership of caring friends like you that enables us to meet as many of these needs as we can. ■

A Limudiah teacher reads a story with two upper-grade girls, working on their reading comprehension skills.

The story is on a 3rd-grade level because that is what the girls need at this point. The teacher will help bring them, gradually and comfortably, up to their class level.



Tu B’Shevat in the Limudiah

On the Jewish calendar, the 15th of Shevat marks the beginning of a “new year” for trees. Commonly known as Tu B’Shevat, this day opens the season in which the earliest-blooming trees in Israel emerge from their winter sleep and begin a new fruit-bearing cycle.

In America, we mark the day by eating dried fruit, particularly the kinds that are singled out by the Torah in its praise of the bounty of the Holy Land such as grapes, figs, and dates to name a few, plus, fresh fruits, (as Israelis do).

In the Bar-Ilan School in Ramla, the children learned about the holiday’s significance, and then chopped apples, made fruit salad, and enjoyed eating it. ▼



In one of our newest Limudiot, Har-El in Bat Yam, our teachers and students celebrated the day with a variety of activities.

In 4th grade, the children learned about

ARE CHANGING LIVES IN ISRAEL!

Thinking Outside the Box

In all our Limudiot, we encourage teachers to be creative.

At our Limudiah program in the Noam HaMeiri School in Lod, a very creative 3rd-grade teacher, thinking outside the box, helped students who were having difficulty learning math.

Using a standard game board, she created her own version of the "Chutes and Ladders" game. ▶

Each time a child solved a math problem, it enabled her to move ahead on the game board, getting points for various answers.

It engaged even reluctant students to learn math concepts and solve math problems.

Another Limudiah teacher in the same school created a special "Bingo" game for her 1st-graders who were struggling to learn to read. ▶

She gave the children "Bingo" cards with the names of animals written on them.

As they were called out by the teacher, those who could read their card, could place it on the proper picture.

The children with the best scores were the winners!

As Shoshana Ben-Dor, our NACOEJ Israel Director, has said:

"An element of play and competition goes a long way to encourage learning at this age.

"Understanding this shows again why our Limudiah programs are special and important". ■



citrus fruits: what varieties there are, what characterizes them, and what distinguishes them from other fruit.

Then they juiced oranges and drank the juice.

In a combined 2nd and 3rd grade group, the children learned an old Zionist song about reclaiming the land by planting it, drew pictures, and produced a crop of "leather" made from apricots.

In a 5th grade group, the teacher and the class read about various medicinal plants in their science book.

In another 5th grade group, the teacher taught the children word games which they played with the names of various fruits and vegetables.

They then made fruit kabobs on sticks to take home to their families. ■

The Joy of Reading

Barney's Books is a special program, developed and sponsored by Barney and Rachel Landau Gottstein, who also sponsor the NACOEJ Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program (AAS), as well as many individual students.

Barney's Books provides beautiful children's books for AAS students to read to their own children, to young siblings, to school classes, or children in shelters. Through this unique program, children from Ethiopian-Israeli families are introduced to the joy of reading. The children keep the books and enjoy them over and over again.

AAS student Ilanit Almenach reading one of "Barney's Books" to her children and neighbors' children in her home. She is sponsored by Barney and Rachel Gottstein and studies Communication Disorders at the Kiryat Ono Academic Campus. ▶



A Double Mazel Tov – and a Wonderful Meeting!

Sandy Goldhaber, long-time NACOEJ Executive Committee and Board member, and his wife Miriam, recently flew to Israel to celebrate the birth of twin great grandchildren.

We are delighted to wish them a double Mazel Tov!

While there, they met with their NACOEJ AAS student, Nurit, and her husband Tal. The night before they were to get together, there were near hurricane-force winds in

Israel but Nurit was determined that the meeting should take place. She wanted to see her sponsors because she is so grateful for their help.

"Sitting and talking with Nurit was like talking to an old friend," Sandy said.

The Goldhabers and Nurit have been corresponding for a year and a half.

"But hearing Nurit's story face to face," he continued, "reinforced our admiration for her determination to pursue higher education despite the hard family circumstances of her early years.

"She served in the Army and went to work afterwards. Many people say they will go back to school after working a few years, but don't carry through. Miriam and I are happy that we played a small part in making her dream come true.

"Nurit is in her last year of studying Special Education and, in a few months, will be working with autistic and developmentally delayed children.

"Can we ask for a better return on our gift to the Adopt-A-Student program?"

You too can have this kind of nachas. Contact Karen Gens at 212-233-5200, ext. 230, or email: education@nacoj.org.



▲ *Left to Right: Tal, Nurit's husband, Nurit, Sponsors Miriam and Sandy Goldhaber*

“It's clear there is a strong connection between a student's feeling of security at school and their achievement in the classroom.”

The words above are from Ram Babai, the Vice Principal of the Amit Kiryat Malachi High School, to NACOEJ AAS sponsor, Diana Yacobi.

Ram Babai wrote to her about the students at his school, some of them Ethiopian Israelis, who come from low socio-economic backgrounds and whose families struggle financially – how this affects their self-image and their studies.

“As matriculation exams approach...in 11th grade,” he wrote, “students begin to feel a lot of pressure to succeed and achieve a full course of matriculation exams, which for them, is a ticket to higher education in the future, and the chance to get out of the cycle of poverty.”

Diana Yacobi, a NACOEJ Board member, sponsors ten students in this high school and Vice Principal Babai sent her quotes from some of her students.

It becomes very clear from their own words how vitally important the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program truly is.

Chen Wasi (12th grade):

Thank you, thank you generous Diana. I wish I could meet you and give you a hug to thank you for your help over these years. May G-d repay everything that you give to me and my friends. I am graduating this year and I hope that you will continue to help because there are a lot more students in my situation. Thank you so much.

Shani Tekele (11th grade):

Thank you for helping me and my family pay for my schooling...I think that without people like you we wouldn't be able to manage. I really want to succeed in life so that I can help my family. I love them a lot. Thank you very much.

Ortal Neguise (11th grade):

It is very important to my mother that I invest in my studies – not only me, but also my siblings. She always says that she is willing to do anything so that we can all graduate. Thank you Diana for helping us so much. I will always remember that there was someone who cared for me and helped. It makes my soul feel good. Thank you.

Yosef Sanbatu (12th grade):

My biggest dream is to be a soccer player. I am good at it and everyone knows it. But I also want to invest in my studies because I want to have another profession – something that will allow me to support myself and help my younger siblings. Thank you. You are wonderful for helping me... this year. It moves me to think there are people like you who help. Thank you very much.

You too can make a difference in a young person's life. Call Karen at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or email: education@nacoelj.org.

A Beautiful Speech



On Jerusalem Day, NACOEJ AAS student Kasa Gentoo was chosen to give a memorial speech to thousands of Ethiopian Israelis.

They assemble on this day every year in memory of the thousands of family members who took “the walking way” from their mountain villages via Sudan to Jerusalem, but did not survive the journey.

In her talk, Kasa spoke movingly of the love that sustained her parents, Adna Avraham and Baynesay Gentoo, as they struggled to reach the Jerusalem of their dreams.

Here are excerpts from her very personal memorial. Her

brother, Abateh Gentoo, did not survive to see Jerusalem.

“One Friday,” Kasa said, “my mother told me a story of her endless journey [to Sudan, en route to Israel].

“...How they [bandits] dragged my father out to stand in front of the truck, the Kalashnikov pressed to his temple, a finger on the trigger...

“...How she [Kasa's mother] jumped [down] even swollen with pregnancy; how they looked at her, my brother and myself with exhausted eyes; how she stood in front of the rifle; how the guide spat at them; how she held my father's hand and stood at his side...

“...They walked side by side in the cold, in the heat,

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From Shoshana Ben-Dor, NACOEJ Israel Director:

Last night I attended the launching of the autobiography of Qes Imanu Tamayat, with whom NACOEJ had a lot of contact at one point. He was the Qes in the Abba Antonius village in Ethiopia.

With the help of his family and an editor (Amsalu Mahari), he wrote an autobiography and last night was the launching ceremony. About a hundred people attended, including many members of the Qes's family.

When Amsalu noted that I am the NACOEJ Israel Director, the organization was applauded

As I mentioned, we've had an on-going relationship with Qes Imanu's family. He was, at one time, one of my teachers on Ethiopian-Jewish religious practices and history.

Mulualem, one of his sons, who was an AAS recipient in university, worked for us for some years as a NACOEJ spokesperson. Qes Imanu's grandson, Or, is at the Elyashiv High School Yeshiva and receives a NACOEJ scholarship.

It was a very festive evening, with lots of speeches. I was among those asked to speak as I wrote a short introduction to the book.

Shoshana



▲ Qes Imanu making a blessing over the festive bread.

A Beautiful Speech...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

through deserts and forests, in deep understanding because their lives were tied together...

"...My mother knew that together with my father, she was walking in a desert, but it was the Promised Land...

"...on this note," Kasa ended, "may the memory of all those who died on the way to make their sweet dream to return home to Yerushalayim a reality, be blessed.

"...And as we remember them, let us memorialize their lives, their loves, and together dream of a new Yerushalayim."

Kasa is sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Robert Zinn. She is a student at Tel Aviv University, majoring in Political Science.

In her speech, she captured well the pain and longing the Ethiopian-Jewish community has suffered for so long in their quest to reach the Promised Land. ■

We welcome...

At NACOEJ, we welcome donations of stocks.

For ease of transfer, please use the stock donation form on our web site at:

http://nacoj.org/images/Stock_Transfer_Form_Fidelity.pdf

And please notify us of transfers by phone or email. Please call Danielle Ben-Jehuda, 212-233-5200, ext. 227 or email: donors@nacoj.org.

And thank you so much.

We've noticed recently...

...that some checks in response to Lifeline mailings have been made out to Lifeline. Unfortunately, we cannot cash checks made out this way, so please be sure to make out your check to NACOEJ. And thank you so very much for all you do to help Ethiopian Jews in Israel and Ethiopia.

Interested in learning more about Ethiopian Jews?

Then sign up to receive monthly e-newsletters and special notices from NACOEJ, in addition to your print Lifeline. Email Caroline at communications@nacoj.org. Include: "Please enter me into your email list." in your message.

We will not share your email address with any organization or individual.

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