



NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY LIFELINE

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In Gondar: Food for the Holidays, with a Little Help from Friends

We know pictures are worth a thousand words, but some are worth even more to those of us who enabled a food distribution to Jews in Ethiopia for Rosh Hashanah.



We felt that three kinds of food distribution were needed. First, bags of tef grain, the nutritious basic food that keeps poor Ethiopians alive from day to day.

Then food for a communal Holiday meal (with local honey) to celebrate Rosh Hashanah and give hope for a sweeter year ahead. Most important, special take-home food for the

littlest children, too young for communal meals, but most vulnerable to malnutrition and its deadly effects.

We started to provide food for the littlest children during the summer. Look at the woman above, on her face a smile of great joy as she receives a separate pink bag of food for each of her children age three or younger. You can just see the precious little hard-boiled eggs through the bags.

It's as if we'd given her a fortune. I wish we could, along with a ticket to Israel, but for now, it's joy enough.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

In Israel: A First Step!!

Ethiopian Israelis often complain (with justification) that most Israelis don't really know anything about them, their history, their culture, or especially the determination they showed, and the suffering they endured, to reach the Jerusalem of their dreams.

For some time, Ethiopian Israelis have been urging that their story should be taught in every Israeli school, just as the stories of other ethnic groups are taught.

Happily, the Israeli government just took an important **first step** toward meeting that goal.

This coming school year, the literature curriculum for students in middle schools and high schools will feature "A Dream at the Price of Honor" – an award-winning short story about the Ethiopian aliyah by Dr. Germaw Mengistu, who survived the dangerous trek via Sudan with his family.

The elderly couple in the story, whose painful trials on the journey and difficulties in Israel are vividly depicted, represent the thousands of Ethiopian Jews who gave up everything (including 4000 lives) to make aliyah.

In an interview with Ynet News, Dr. Mengistu says: "This short story is a picture of an important moment in the history of the Ethiopian community, and opens a window through which the children of Israel will be able to look at us and see our longing to go to Jerusalem and live a free and meaningful life."

And Naftali Bennett, the Minister of Education, calls the story, "...a wonderful depiction of the vast Zionist journey our Ethiopian brothers endured on their way to Israel".

CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



In Gondar: Food for the Holidays, with a Little Help from Friends

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

We managed to fund big bags of tef (below) for the holidays but even so, we had only enough for a few meals per family, and wanted to make sure it was well distributed. Years ago, in a non-Jewish area in Ethiopia, I saw an AID grain distribution. Every woman was getting the same size bag to take home.



At NACOEJ, when we distributed grain or beans years ago in Ethiopia, we knew the size of every family and weighed out just the right amount for each. No waste of food, just enough for the families.

So I was glad to see a photo of a man (right) using an ancient scale to weigh bags in this distribution. It was entirely in the hands of the local Jewish organization. The community elects their own leaders. (In Gondar, the leader is a woman!)



Of course, we don't have pictures of the Rosh Hashanah prayer services. But we know they were full of heartfelt prayer, full of song, full of thanks, and in every note of

the shofar, every one of the thousands assembled heard hope as well as tears.

We will try to keep helping until the tears dry and the hope is fulfilled.

This year in Jerusalem!

Barbara

A Report From Ethiopia:

A survey of Jewish children in Ethiopia a few years ago found that over 60% were malnourished.

Since then, with periods of famine, inflation, and now deadly violence, things can only have gotten worse, making it even harder for these Jews to feed their children.

Malnourishment in young children is especially dangerous. It can lead to stunting, diminished I.Q.s, weakened immune systems, vulnerability to opportunistic infections and diseases, even to death from such ailments as bronchitis, measles, and malaria.

For a brief time, we've been able to help at least some of the families, some of the children.

Will we be able to continue to do so and still maintain our essential

educational programs in Israel?

We can't sacrifice the Israel programs. They're a matter of life and death for the future of the Ethiopian community in Israel. But, the Ministry of Education says it can't help with the costs of the integration they demand and the expansion of our Limudiah programs they want.

Our budget is too small for all this. Will the big organizations help?

Well, JDC (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee) refuses to assist in Ethiopia now, and JAFI (the Jewish Agency for Israel) says it will only help the few Jews allowed to make aliyah now. Yet both are now doing humanitarian work for non-Jews in Ethiopia.

So we are asking: If not now, when? And if not JDC and JAFI, who? ■

A Report From Ben-Gurion Airport:



Photo credit: Zed Films

With mixed joy and sorrow, the first 63 of the 1400 Ethiopian olim Israel agreed to bring arrived at Ben-Gurion Airport this past October.

Some families, clad in new clothes from the Jewish Agency, were joyously reunited with relatives not seen for years. But some were in mourning for a baby who died in Addis Ababa only days before.

Others were still bewildered and frightened for relatives yet again left behind in now-dangerous Gondar. The Ethiopian government has declared a national state of emergency due to violent clashes among anti-government protestors, police, and soldiers.

At least 800 people have been killed,

many in Gondar, including two Jews.

The new olim, assigned to an absorption center in Sfat, were assured by Absorption Minister Sofa Landwer (center, with blonde hair) that they would be supported in their entry into Israeli life. Knesset Member Avraham Neguise (in white cap, back row), a leader in the fight for Ethiopian aliyah, pledged that he and Knesset Member David Amsalem (blue shirt, far right) would not forget those left behind.

But no one can guarantee their safety in Ethiopia. ■

In Israel: A First Step!!

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Germaw Mengistu, we're proud to say, had NACOEJ Adopt-A-Student sponsors, Jane and Alan Cornell, in his undergraduate years in college. Today he holds a doctorate from Haifa University and the rank of professor of communications.

NACOEJ congratulates our former AAS student on his success. We are also proud to have participated in the advocacy that inspired the Israeli government to take what we hope is the first, but not the last, step toward greater recognition of Israel's Ethiopian citizens.

Dr. Mengistu's story has not yet been translated into English. When it is, we hope to make it available to you.

A Second First Step!!

We're also delighted to report that the Israel Bar Association, "in order to promote quality legal minds" and "equality within the Israeli legal system" just appointed the first Ethiopian-Israeli women as judges!

One of the two, lawyer Esther Tafata Gradi, who is now a Traffic Court Judge, had an AAS sponsor in college, Honey Kessler Amado, who is also a lawyer. She and Esther, now married and the mother of two, have remained close friends.

We congratulate Esther and also new Ethiopian-Israeli Court Judge Adenko Sabhat Haimovic.

We are thrilled that important areas of Israeli society are opening their doors to members of the Ethiopian-

Israeli community. Those doors, and others, should stay wide open. There are lots of other brilliant Ethiopian Israelis ready to walk through them – some with help from NACOEJ. ■



From left: Yannai, Esther Tafata Gradi's baby, Honey Kessler Amado, and Esther.

Where are They Now?



Janet Heetner and Peter Silverman began sponsoring students in the NACOEJ Adopt-A-Student College Sponsorship Program in 2000.

Early this year, Janet and Peter went to Israel and met with their current students, Esayas Mengisto (pictured above with them) and Worku Kassa.

Yehudit Abramson, NACOEJ-Israel Coordinator of the AAS Program, arranged the meetings, and, at Janet's request, also promised to

find out what some of their former students are doing today.

Here are excerpts from responses Yehudit received:

Daniel Basufekad graduated in 2011 and now works with a partner at a planning construction office. He spoke warmly of his sponsors, calling them part of his success. He sent Janet and Peter his wishes for health and long lives.

Bativa Ermias graduated in 2006 and is now a dental assistant in Ashdod. She says, if it had not been for Janet and Peter, she wouldn't have been able to overcome the difficulties she had when studying. She is getting married soon.

Habtam Gete graduated in mechanical engineering from Ben-Gurion University in 2002 and now works for the electricity company as the head of a production field. He is married and is still "so grateful" for the help he received in college.

Sara Dankau graduated in social work in 2011 and is now a social worker in the Welfare Department in Petah Tikva. She remembers clearly how important the support of her sponsors, Janet and Peter, was to her, and feels that "...contributing and helping people who are in the beginning of their way is not to be taken for granted".

Oshrat Ambau graduated in Nursing Studies at Kaplan Rehovot in 2015 and now works at prestigious Shaare Tzedek Hospital in Jerusalem. She is married and is still warmly appreciative of the help that she feels brought her to this day.

Like Janet and Peter, you can have the joy of helping a young Ethiopian Israeli realize a successful future. Just call Karen, NACOEJ Director of Sponsorship Programs, at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or Email education@nacoej.org. She's a long-time sponsor herself! ■



Condolences

It's sad to begin a New Year by saying goodbye to three very significant people, but in doing so, we also remember and celebrate their lives, and what they meant to Ethiopian Jews.

Shimon Peres: A Founding Father of Israel, two-time Prime Minister, long-time President, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize, organizer of the IDF – we also value Shimon Peres immensely for his exceptional ongoing outreach to, and recognition of, Ethiopian immigrants and achievers, and his personal dedication to making their lives in Israel better.

Robert Meltzer: Long-time NACOEJ consultant, friend, and donor, Bob brought to NACOEJ a wealth of experience in administration, Jewish organizational life, and fundraising. A great believer in our importance to Ethiopian Jews, he continued to work on a new NACOEJ project during the last

weeks of his life. He is greatly missed.

Irene Goldman: A NACOEJ donor since 1987 and an AAS sponsor since 2002, Irene gave her heart as well as her support to Ethiopian Jews. An immigrant herself, unable to go to college as a young woman, she wrote to one of her last students: "It makes me very proud that I am blessed to be able to help young people to get a good education, to make a good life for themselves, and to help Israel as well".

Our hearts go out to the families, friends, and admirers of these three special people. May the mourners be comforted among all the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem, and may we never forget the kindness, generosity and dedication manifested so beautifully in the lives of President Peres, Bob, and Irene.

"If you smile at the world, the world will smile back at you..."



Rivka Wobanech, born in Ethiopia, was sponsored in the Edward G. Victor/NACOEJ High School Program in the Yavne School in Holon.

Thanks to the sponsorship, Rivka had the same books, supplies, and other necessities as her classmates.

In her last year in high school, Rivka was invited to join a school trip to concentration camps in Poland. At first, she says, "I didn't know if I should go. I told myself I'm not really connected

to it [the Holocaust] because it didn't reach Ethiopia".

But then she decided that, as a Jew, it was important to go. Her family could not pay for the trip so Rivka spent a summer working hard to pay for it.

The experience was overwhelming. Before, Rivka said, she'd heard the story of the Holocaust only "from outside", but the trip to the camps gave her a strong connection.

"We saw a mountain filled entirely with human ashes," she recalls. "It was very difficult to see it because it is so difficult to imagine these were people

and now only their ashes remain. There are no names, and nothing is left..."

"At the end of the journey" she says, "I felt very proud for being Jewish and being in Israel, the Promised Land they dreamt of coming to. Thanks to them we could establish it."

When Rivka was in 8th grade, her motto was: "If you smile at the world, the world will smile back at you. Everything is for the best."

With the help of a NACOEJ High School sponsorship, Rivka has done well and has a "smiling" future ahead of her. ■

Planning for the Future...

As the end of 2016 approaches, and you review your financial decisions, please consider aiding Ethiopian Jews through a gift to NACOEJ.

Your current support makes a real difference today in the lives of the Ethiopian Jews whom we serve.

You can also ensure that this ancient Jewish community will thrive in the

future by including NACOEJ in your will now. A simple instruction in your will, naming NACOEJ, can change the future for many Ethiopian children and their families.

Or you can name NACOEJ as a beneficiary of an insurance policy, an IRA, or other qualified retirement fund.

Your gift – for today, or for the future,

or for both – will help Ethiopian Jews succeed in Israel. You will be a blessed partner in their lives, making their future bright.

For more information, please call Danielle Ben-Jehuda at 212-233-5200, ext. 227 or Email donors@nacoej.org. She will be happy to work with you. And, thank you! ■

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Oops!

Our summer issue of Lifeline included a beautiful photo of Rivka Bayech, our NACOEJ sponsored high school student who is aiming for the Olympics in 2020. We inadvertently left off the photo credit. Here it is: Photographer: **Oren Aharoni**, courtesy of **Yediot Aharonot**.