



NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY LIFELINE

SUMMER
2018



A Mixed-Up Message from Barbara

This summer message started off happy.

Word from the little town of Bat Yam in Israel told us that the school faculty was absolutely "over the moon" about the progress the Ethiopian children were making since our Limudiah opened there.

They said they couldn't believe the children had moved so fast in such a short time!

We can believe it. We already know the Limudiah program can turn children's lives around. We want to share the kudos with the school, which has been so cooperative – **and with you, our dear friends, who make everything we do possible.**

Then there was the very exciting news about Sintayehu Shifaraw, the 18-year-old Jewish boy from Ethiopia who qualified for the finals in the prestigious International Bible Contest.

Sintayehu's story starts at the right and if you scan the QR code on page 4, you will see an exciting video about him.



▲ Photo: Struggle For Ethiopian Aliyah

A Bittersweet Ending, So Far...

Some stories have a happy ending, some do not. Some do not even end. Then there is this story.

Sintayehu Shifaraw (above), 18, arrived in Israel on April 9 from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia where, by studying very hard and achieving high test scores, he reached the final stages of the world-famous International Bible Contest (*Chidon HaTanach*), which takes place annually in Israel on Independence Day.

The contest has two competitions: one for students living in Israel, and the other for those in the Diaspora.

These competitions are very stiff. Just making it into the finals is an exceptional accomplishment for anyone. For a boy living in poverty in Ethiopia's left-behind Jewish community, it is astonishing.

In Addis, Sintayehu has lived with his brother, sister and mother. His father and his other siblings were allowed to make aliyah 17 years ago, breaking up the family. (Most of the Ethiopian Jews waiting in Addis and Gondar also have first-degree relatives in Israel.)

Sintayehu has been very active in his community. He's in a choir that sings Jewish songs and he leads activities with the Bnei Akiva youth movement. Now, he also represents nearly 8000 people desperately waiting to make aliyah to Israel.



▲ Israeli Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked (left) receiving a NACOEJ embroidery from Alem Geremew (right), mother of Sintayehu Shifaraw (see story at right). Rabbi Menachem Waldman is at the center.

Photo: Struggle For Ethiopian Aliyah

Then, Israeli Minister of Justice Ayelet Shaked traveled to Ethiopia and met with the Jewish community there. She promised to do all she can to bring them home.

In Gondar, where we've raised funds to feed malnourished 3-and-4-year-olds, the program is up and running. That's also good news.

But, suddenly, we were bombarded with bad news.

In Ethiopia, we find some

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Mixed Up Message

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of our malnourished children are unable to get to the Feeding Center because their families live too far away to make the long walk with toddlers. We have to find remedies, undoubtedly expensive.

In Israel, the budget for 2019 was passed without a single shekel for the aliyah of the 1000 Ethiopian Jews who were supposed to come to Israel this year. There is talk of a special meeting to discuss this, but we are not holding our breath. Bad news. Without funding, there is no aliyah.

Then there are children who arrived in Israel from Ethiopia a few months or years ago. Too many are not getting the educational help they need in local schools and are falling further and further behind.

Teachers, principals and government officials are begging us to open new Limudiah programs for these

children but we don't have the funds.

You can read the story (on page 3) of what happened to one immigrant boy whose family lived in an absorption center for three years.

So, this is a mix of good news, bad news, joy and sorrow.

The one blessed constant in the lives of the Ethiopian Jews is you – your partnership with us at NACOEJ. You enable us to "keep all the balls in the air" as much as possible. We cannot do it without you and we are deeply grateful to you.

By the time this message goes to the printer, things may have changed and if so, I'll try to add an update.

Meantime, thank you again – for your constancy, for your devotion, for your generous compassion for Ethiopian Jews. You are their unfailing lifeline of hope and help in both Ethiopia and Israel. ■

Barbara

"The Time has Come to Stop and Say Thank You..."

Among the beautiful letters that college students write to their sponsors in the NACOEJ/Barney & Rachel Landau Gottstein College Sponsorship Program, some express perfectly the relationship that can form between students and their sponsors.

This moving letter was written by college student Zion Menase to his sponsor Samuel Gelfand.



Hello! I've been enjoying your support for a few months now and the time has come to stop and say thank you.

Thank you for helping me meet the challenges ahead of me with my head held higher.

There is no doubt that I am surprised at how high the hurdles in front of me are, how the experiences that I have

undergone shake me, and how much your contribution makes things easier for me.

Every good biography starts with the story of a difficult childhood – a poor family in a small unknown town.

Until the subject of the biography finds his purpose with the help of good people along the

way and from there the path to success is paved.

The biography goes on to tell of the roadblocks and resistance the hero experiences, but through his own inner strength he can overcome everything and focus on his goals.

If the biography is really good, the hero will thank all those who helped him on the way and will never forget that he came from the bottom, and so will always hold out a hand to help.

You are one of the people that I am meeting along the way. In giving me this scholarship you give me a sense of how much generosity can be pure.

You "compel" me to continue the circle of giving to the other, and for this I will also say thank you.

In great thanks, Zion Menase.

In writing to another one of his students, sponsor Samuel Gelfand expressed this beautiful thought:

"I have found as I've grown older that I get greater pleasure in giving than in receiving; I thank you for the opportunity to help you in a small way."

You too can change a young person's life – and your own – by becoming a NACOEJ college sponsor. Contact Karen Gens at 212-233-5200, ext. 230, or email: education@nacoej.org. She'll be happy to help (she's a sponsor too!). ■



▲ A Limudiah teacher working with a group of students.

Shmuel's* Story: From 3rd Grade to 6th Grade in One Year...

His family came from Ethiopia in 2013. They spent more than three years in an absorption center, and then moved into permanent housing in another city.

Shmuel arrived at his new school at the start of the 2017/2018 school year, a sweet, quiet and polite boy, old enough to be assigned to the 6th grade.

But he had a massive gap in his learning. He was at 3rd grade level! Everyone agreed he wanted to learn. But the principal of his prior school said he'd been in 3rd grade for three years!

And his home situation was a difficult one. His mother did not know how to read or write. There was little money and no set time for meals. There were only a few chairs so what homework was done by the children, was done on the couch or bed. And Shmuel and his siblings came to school looking disheveled.

At the start of the school year, our Limudiah teacher, Elka*, consulted with Shmuel's homeroom teacher, Liora*, who was aware of his situation. They decided Elka should work intensively with Shmuel, setting aside many hours for him.

Elka said: "The goal was to bridge the gaps that were created and prepare him, as much as possible, for middle school."

Elka developed an individualized plan for Shmuel that included many work sheets in language and math, starting at his level, and working up.

She also worked with Shmuel's mother, encouraging her to make sure the children did their homework before television was watched. Elka told her that even if she didn't really understand the work the children were doing, she should still be responsible for making sure it was done.

Everyone still agreed that Shmuel wanted to learn, but saw that initially he was wary of creating relationships that might help. Elka had many talks with him to help strengthen his self-confidence and self-perception.

By mid-year, their relationship was solid and Shmuel's previously suppressed ability to learn was emerging.

Elka often used her tablet to show him educational programs he wouldn't have access to at home. For instance, working on science, she showed him a program on how a volcano works in detail as well as a real volcano in action. He was captivated.

By now his language and math skills have increased substantially. He's also progressed significantly in handwriting and in organizing his work.

Shmuel still has a way to go but as Shoshana Ben-Dor, our Director in Israel, noted:

"Shmuel would have been lost in his 6th grade homeroom class. But having a devoted, conscientious, and extremely experienced Limudiah teacher who could spend hours working with him individually, has helped him fill in the gaps between what he learned in 3rd grade and what any 6th grader should know."

"His growing command of reading comprehension and math have also increased his confidence so that he can continue to catch up. And his self-image and motivation have increased as well."

And that's just one way the Limudiah program has been – and continues to be – a life-saver for those Ethiopian-Israeli children whose parents can't help them in school.

Without its individualized instruction, these children would always be at an educational disadvantage, leading to failure in higher grades, in high school, and in life. ■

* All names have been changed for privacy.



Bittersweet Ending

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But in Israel, Sintayehu was told that to participate in the contest, he would have to put down a substantial sum of money to ensure that he wouldn't stay on in Israel afterward!

This seems to be required of all members of the Jewish communities in Ethiopia whenever they come to visit relatives in Israel.

Sintayehu, of course, had no such money - but, after strong protests from Ethiopian Israelis, the decision was reversed.

On the day of the contest, Sintayehu placed second out of 12 finalists in the Diaspora section!

Later, Sintayehu was made a permanent resident of Israel.

We are thrilled for this bright and charming young man and even more thrilled that Minister of the Interior Aryeh Deri said that Sintayehu's mother and his siblings in Ethiopia can join him in Israel.

But the bittersweet part of the story is that a special arrangement for one family does not mean that 8000 other Jews waiting in Ethiopia (some for 20 years) are any closer to making aliyah.

It's our prayer that all those Jews waiting in Ethiopia will have their prayers answered, and join Sintayehu's family in Israel very soon. ■



You can scan this QR code to access a video about Sintayehu. Or you can go to the NACOEJ website: www.nacoej.org/lol-38

Can You Help Me? A Letter to a Hoped-For Sponsor



Hello, my name is Ofek Tekele. I'm in 7th grade at the Religious High School in Yavne.

My mother works. My father does not. He is sick. My mother came to Israel in 1992 with her parents. She was just a little girl. My father came to Israel in 1991 with his mother and siblings. He also came with his daughters from his first marriage (he is a widower).

This year I am studying Bible, English, math, Hebrew, science, geography, Talmud and grammar. My favorite subjects are Bible and English.

In my free time I do homework and then go out to play. I like to play soccer, listen to music, dance, and go out with friends.

In the future I would like to be a doctor and save lives. I would also like to be a father and have children and a wife... and to be the Rabbi in a synagogue.

I would like you to know that I don't know you, but this is the first time I have loved somebody before I have met them. You are really helping me and my family.

Ofek really needs a sponsor for the 2018-2019 school year. Can you help him? Call Karen at 212-233-5200, ext. 230, or email: education@nacoej.org. ■

LIFELINE • SUMMER 2018 • ISSUE NO: 91 • LIFELINE IS PUBLISHED THREE TIMES ANNUALLY.



NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY

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Congratulations to...

- **NACOEJ Advisory Board member Cyrus Abbe and wife Judy** on the marriage of their daughter Rivka to Yehoshua Szafranski. Mazel Tov also to Rivka's sister Hava, brothers Elihu and Moshe, and all the family, who've been devoted to Ethiopian Jewry for many years.
- **NACOEJ Advisory Board member Rabbi Lynn Goldstein and husband Jack Dougherty** on the upcoming wedding of Lynn's daughter Jenny Kushner to Will Prah. Mazel Tov also to Jenny's sister Becky.
- **Long-time NACOEJ friends Steve and Barbara Blank** on the engagement of daughter Cynthia to Gal Zilberman of Israel.
- **Long-time NACOEJ Executive Board member, Sandy Goldhaber and wife Miriam.** We've told you about the birth of their twin great grandchildren in Israel, a first for NACOEJ!



They sent this darling photo of Shaked and Zvi to share with you.

Refuah Shleimah (Speedy Recovery) to...

NACOEJ founding Board member Peachy Levy on a swift recovery from a recent stroke.