



NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY LIFELINE

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From the Desk of the Executive Director:

I want to bring you up to date on the situation we discussed in a previous mailing about the new integration ruling that is affecting our Limudiah program.

As I write, in every school where we have a Limudiah, a committee of school faculty and NACOEJ staff are assessing non-Ethiopian children for entry into Limudiah.

They are looking for non-Ethiopian children who have "similar needs" to those of the Ethiopian children in our classes. Exactly how many children will have similar problems with cultural gaps, Hebrew language, and academic issues, remains to be seen.

But it seems clear that our classes must be enlarged by 25% to meet the new requirements.

So far, we have no evidence that any outside source, such as the government or local municipalities, will cover the costs, even of the new children's lunches, although in the past, that was always a requirement for the few non-Ethiopian children who joined our classes.

So we will have to bridge a budget gap of 25%. We will keep you posted.

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What Makes the Limudiah So Different and So Necessary?

Our after-school Limudiah classes differ from our children's morning classes in school for a lot of reasons:

- Our classes are so small (8 children to one teacher) that there is plenty of time for one-on-one.
- We give special consideration to cultural differences and needs.
- We serve hot lunches that give hungry kids a happy start to the program as well as energy to learn and the nutrition they badly need.

And one of the critical differences is that Limudiah teachers have more freedom than regular teachers to explore a variety of ways to deal with their pupils' challenges.



Photo: Win Robins

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FROM THE DESK...

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Just to remind us all of how important the Limudiah is, here is a message from Shani Barzilai, Principal of the Yechidani School in Yavne:

"I made it clear to the municipality that no group other than NACOEJ will come into the school to work with our Ethiopian first-graders [from now on]. All of them became proficient in reading by the end of the year. That has never happened in my experience before." ■

LIMUDIAH...

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Here are two brief examples. The children are real, their problems are real, and the solutions are real. The only things not real are the names we've given them.

"Moshe": he's a first-grade Ethiopian student. Learning the basics of reading is a major first-grade goal. A child who can't reach it is in trouble in second grade and everything that follows. Moshe came to the Limudiah in first grade with a big reading problem.

The Problem: Moshe's paralyzing problem was confusion about vowels. No matter how he tried, he couldn't grasp how they fit into words, what sounds they made, or even how to recognize them. So he couldn't read a word.

His Limudiah teacher consulted with his homeroom teacher (such consultations have been called "revolutionary"!). Both teachers agreed that he was only getting more confused by the first-grade reader the whole class was using.

Unlike Moshe's homeroom teacher, who had to stick with the assigned reader, our Limudiah teacher was free – and encouraged – to look for one that would work better for this particular child.



Photo: Win Robins

The Solution: Limudiah budgets allow for special materials, so she hunted up a series of workbooks that did a better job of presenting vowels. She worked with Moshe one-on-one till he grasped the vowels well enough to go back to the reader his morning class was using.

The Outcome: At last report, Moshe can now read pretty long texts, pronounces the words correctly, and in fact, he reads with enthusiasm and interest!



"Micha": his problem was very different.

The Problem: Micha had been doing well in first grade, but in second grade he started to regress. Suddenly he couldn't even do the things he had done the previous year. His speech deteriorated. He sucked his thumb and became so babyish that his friends stopped playing with him. Both of his teachers were distressed.

The morning class teacher was stymied, but Limudiah teachers are encouraged to consult not only with the children's homeroom teachers, but with their parents as well. Paying home visits is something they do frequently.

So Micha's teacher went to his home and had a warm and friendly conversation with Micha's mother. And she learned that Micha's younger brother was a "special needs" child, who required most of

their mother's time and attention.

Now, it was clear: big brother Micha was turning himself into a little child like his brother in hope of more attention from his mother.

Micha's effort was, of course, futile. Nothing could change the fact that his brother needed extra care. But a solution to Micha's school problems had to be found.

The Solution: Micha's Limudiah teacher considered that stories that echoed his feelings might help. She bought some books to read to Micha.

In addition, she used music, and encouraged him to write his own little stories about himself. Both of these effective ways to express and deal with emotions started to work.

After a while, Micha began to share his feelings with his Limudiah teacher, and then he began to recapture the skills, motivation and success he had had the previous year.



Photo: Win Robins

The Outcome: "Last Friday," Micha's Limudiah teacher told us, "Micha gave a presentation on the Torah section of the week. He taught it and explained it to his classmates in an exceptional manner."

Even though his home situation has not changed, Micha is coping. At the end of the school year, he took home a certificate of excellence. His Limudiah teacher says she is proud of him. We are proud of her, too. ■

Mission to Ethiopia 2015



The community in Gondar met the Knesset Mission to Ethiopia in the old NACOEJ Compound synagogue – still in daily use for prayers and meetings.

Left to right: Rabbi Menachem Waldman, Jewish Agency Director of Ethiopian Spiritual Absorption; MK David Amsalem, Chair of the Knesset Committee that oversees the Ministry of the Interior; MK Dr. Avraham Neguise, Chair of the Knesset Committee on Aliyah, Absorption, and Diaspora; MK David Bitan, Chair of the Committee that oversees the Knesset; Ambanesh Tekeba, Head of the Gondar Jewish Community; and MK Revital Swid, a lawyer, representing the Knesset Committee on Law and Constitution.



The elderly man with a cane (on the right), shaking hands with MK David Bitan, has eight children and 43 grandchildren in Israel!

Left-behind Jews in Gondar and Addis survive in airless, mud, single-room shacks, paying rent, buying every drop of water, coughing painfully when their meager meals are cooked and fill their dwellings with smoke. Life here is far worse than in their mud-huts farming villages – but this is the last stop on the way – they hope – to Israel. Some have been waiting here for ten years.



A painfully thin Jewish girl carries her little brother, who clutches his one possession: a remnant of a plastic doll without arms or head. They are in a cooking shack in Gondar.



To avoid rats, a large family in a tiny space hangs a small bag of food from a nail and their only blanket on a rope. They have no electricity or other light in their dark room except for the occasional ray of sunlight that slides in through the doorless entrance.



In a dusty ravine below a nice Gondar City house, displaced Jews live in mud-walled huts without sanitation, heat, floors, beds, or windows. Clothes are washed in the shack at the left, and those who have no other garments borrow or stay inside till their laundry dries.



What Does It Really Mean to Be a Sponsor?

It means that somewhere in Israel an Ethiopian student is saying:

"Far away, there are people who believe in me..."



Rachel Gottstein of Alaska visiting her AAS college student, Hadas Malada, in Israel.

And another is writing:

"All of this could have been so much harder if it weren't for you..."

And yet another is sending an email:

"The work that you do is blessed, and I wait for the day in which I will be able to give and help others just like you, you are an example for me."

There is little in this world more precious, more worthy, more needed, and more heart-warming, than enabling a young person – in high school or college – to become a self-sustaining, self-respecting adult, with a career that supports a family and a society.

Thousands of Ethiopian Israelis have already achieved that goal, thanks to their intelligence, ambition,

hard work – and a NACOEJ sponsor.

The partnership is unbeatable!

Hundreds more are asking now, this year, for their own chance to succeed.

Join us, please, as a sponsor in this "blessed work" that makes a young person in Israel say: "Someday, I want to be like you."

It costs less than you imagine – and it buys the world for a boy or girl, a young woman or man. You will never make a better investment.

For more information, or to sign up for a student, please contact Karen Gens at 212-233-5200, ext. 230, or email: Education@nacoej.org.

How do some sponsored students feel? Read on! ■



Diani Yacobi of New Jersey visiting her high school student, Leah Mekonen, in Israel.

"I'm the One Who Should Thank You..."



The beautiful letter below was written by Fekade Kebede to his AAS sponsor, Karen Gens, who is NACOEJ's New York Director of Sponsorship Programs:

Dear Karen Shalom,

...You don't need to thank me for the letters I am sending. I'm the one who should thank you, and that is for a few reasons. The first one is that it is the least I can do for your sponsorship.

Secondly I feel that writing and communicating with you enables me to take pauses in my life and... to create a reflection - to see what I've been through and how. In addition, in the letters I see the goals I set for myself...what I have achieved, what I have yet to achieve, and in this way I'm going through a process of self-examination.

...For a long time I've had the...wish to have a "pen pal". It is...a dream come true... In the letters that I receive it seems like you care about me. You give the sense of a genuine desire for me to develop and succeed.

Regarding the protests that took place recently...I... agree with you that it can be troublesome...on the other hand, I feel it is our opportunity as a community and nation to grow by bringing the problems to the surface, and making "calculations" and seeing how we can act in order to improve the situation of the Ethiopian community in the Israeli society, and out of it to develop as a society.

...three weeks ago I finished my work at the hostel. These days I am looking for an internship in teaching...I haven't found one yet, but I'm looking with the hope to find it. With appreciation, Fekade Kebede ■

From Yosi to his Future Sponsor



Yosi Derabe Jambar is now sponsored for a degree in Pharmacy at Hebrew University by Alan Sieroty, a long-time NACOEJ friend and sponsor of many students. Here is the letter Yosi wrote that prompted Alan to become his sponsor:

My name is Yosi Derabe Jambar; I am 21 years old and live in Beit Shemesh. I am a second year pharmacy student at the Hebrew University.

In 2003 I immigrated to Israel with my family. I have 7 siblings, 3 married and 4 at home. Two of my sisters also study at Hebrew University, one in nursing, the other in a pre-academic program. My younger brothers are in high school.

I was born in a village in the north of Ethiopia and lived there until I was 4, when we moved to Addis Ababa. I began to study at a school called "Beta Israel". Staying in a foreign city was difficult...especially for my parents who were forced to give up their belongings from the village and to manage with what was provided by institutions that helped Jewish people there (in Addis Ababa).*

During that time, two of my brothers died, one in an accident, one of sickness. After six years of waiting, finally we were able to come to Israel. My married sisters needed separate immigration permission and came later than we did.

First we lived in an absorption center in Be'er Sheva and went to Ulpan. I learned enough vocabulary to be

transferred to a regular class at school and so did my brothers. My parents were older and their acclimation was hard. To this day they struggle with Hebrew.

After two years in the absorption center, we bought a three room apartment in Beit Shemesh. I had to get used to a new environment. By 10th grade I had studied in three different schools.

I was looking for a school that will provide me with a good education and values to help me pave my way into the academic world. In 10th grade, I studied at Kfar Hasidim in the north. I was an honor student and managed to graduate high school successfully with a matriculation certificate.

After high school I decided to apply for the academic reserve [delaying of military service to get a degree]. I got accepted to study pharmacy and will join the army having a profession.

My ambitions for the future are to complete the degree with dignity, to serve my country in the most appropriate manner, and to try to help the people of my community to acclimate to Israel and with their other needs.

I also want to study for a master's degree in clinical pharmacy and contribute my part to a society that contributed to me greatly.

I will thank you from the bottom of my heart if you will grant me this sponsorship and help me with my financial burden. Yosi Derabe Jambar. ■

*NACOEJ provided food, education, and religious services. The JDC gave medical care.

Osnat Goel: A Graduating Student Writes to her Sponsor



Dear Charlotte,

How are you?

I'm writing to you my last letter since I finished my studies at the university - I am happy to inform you that I received my first degree!!

The ceremony was at the beginning of the month and my family was present, my fiancé and a good friend. I was very excited...knowing they are proud of me, and also from the thought that I finished a meaningful chapter in my life.

Next month I am leaving Haifa and going back to Afula. I have so many new beginnings and it is scary

and exciting at the same time. I still have the internship left, meaning that I need to find a school where I could intern in order to get a license from the Ministry of Education.

I'm looking back and thinking to myself that all of this could have been so much harder if it weren't for you. I don't have enough words in order to thank your generous deed of contributing from your heart and money to help one simple person that you don't know.

I am grateful for the connection that was made between us, and I wish you a happy life filled with light and joy. I will be happy to keep in touch, and maybe meet one of these days. Wishing you blessed work, with great love and appreciation, Osnat ■



L'Dor VaDor From Generation To Generation



Two Generations – One Sponsor Family

This year, long-time sponsors Alan and Jane Cornell are helping nine college students through the NACOEJ AAS (Adopt-A-Student) program, including Shirli Desta. They also sponsored Shirli's father, Yossi Desta, when he was in college. This is a story of two generations – and one sponsor family.

Here is a letter that Shirli wrote to the Cornells:

Shalom, my name is Shirli Desta. I live with my parents in Kfar Saba. Both of my parents immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia. My father Yossi came in 1984 when he was 20 years old from Gondar. He came with no family. He went on the journey to Sudan...a dangerous one, together with his best friend.

When he reached Israel he faced the difficulties of acclimation, a new language and culture, and loneliness because his family was still in Ethiopia, and also as the result of a lack in communication, which was very difficult. My father reached the absorption center in Pardes Hana and began to work at a factory.

From all the stories he told us, he was always hardworking, curious and ambitious which helped him acquire both an academic education and a

respectable job.

My mother immigrated in 1982 as a young teenager. She also came to Israel without her family. She was sent to a boarding school in the north of the country, she was educated there, gained values, command of the language and skills.

Today we all live together in Kfar Saba, and I have a sister who serves in the army.

I studied at a high school in the city, and with the completion of the studies I joined the army. I served in the education corps as a soldier-teacher in the track of immigration absorption.

I worked at Ulpan classes in Be'er Sheva and taught Hebrew. I also guided youth at risk at different places in the city. After the army I worked as a waitress and at the phone company, while planning what I would like to study and taking the psychometric exam.

Now I'm about to begin my studies of occupational therapy at the Hebrew University. I know that I would like to work with people, and to start a family in the future...Shirli



Alan and Jane Cornell (middle) are surrounded by some of their graduated students in 2012. Yehudit Abramson (left) is the Israel Coordinator of the NACOEJ/AAS program.



Yossi Desta, Shirli's father, studied Education and Education Counselling at Bar-Ilan University between 1988 and 2004.

Today, he teaches Special Education for children with special needs. He is also a teachers' counsellor employed by the Ministry of Education.

Both Yossi and his daughter Shirli have Alan and Jane Cornell as their NACOEJ college sponsors! Two generations – one sponsor family!

In Yossi's words: **"Without the support of NACOEJ and without the support of Alan and Jane Cornell I would have never come to this position and success in my life". ■**

"...far away there are people who believe in me..."



From Mali Ayechow to her sponsors, Mark and Analee Reutlinger:

Four years have passed since you have been accompanying me, and it feels like time flies...

...during this time I had countless experiences, ups and downs,

successes and disappointments, excellent feedbacks and some that were less good. During these four years I feel that I matured, changed, and shaped for the better.

There is no doubt in my mind that you were meaningful to me!

Life in Jerusalem, studying art, the chase after study hours balanced with work hours, living far from home, paying bills... all this wouldn't have been easy at all.

The financial support you provided gave me a light in all this.

Besides the financial help, corresponding with you was great, to receive reinforcement and to feel that somewhere far away there are people who believe in me. It gives a lot of strength.

Every correspondence was used to stop for a moment and see where I am, how I advanced and what has changed...thanks to you I did not forget to do this.

So I will conclude with lots of thanks, thank you for everything! I...don't take it for granted, the work

that you do is blessed, and I wait for the day in which I will be able to give and help others just like you, you are an example for me!

...I will always be happy to hear from you and keep in touch...

I wish you all the best, happiness, success and blessing in every way...Mali ■

Securing the Future...

It is our wonderful friends – you – who have assisted, sustained, and encouraged the Ethiopian-Jewish community from the day NACOEJ began its historic work.

You have changed their world.

Your support of NACOEJ continues to make a profound difference today in the lives of the Ethiopian-Jewish children and young people whom we serve.

Your dedication can be carried into the future by making a bequest to NACOEJ now.

There are several easy ways you can do this.

You can leave a specific bequest in your will, in the form of cash, securities, or property.

You can specify a percentage of your estate.

You can consider a residual bequest: all or a portion of what remains of the estate after specific and general bequests are distributed.

You can name NACOEJ as a beneficiary of an insurance policy or as the recipient of an IRA or another qualified retirement fund.

Any of these ways will carry your legacy of dedication, compassion, and caring to this ancient Jewish community into the future.

You will be helping them on their continuing journey to become full members of Israeli society.

For more information, or to discuss these or other options, please call Danielle Ben-Jehuda at 212-233-5200, ext. 227 or email to her at donors@nacoelj.org.

She will be very happy to work with you.

And, thank you! ■



Condolences to...

...NACOEJ Advisory Board member **Marsha Croland**, on the loss of her beloved mother, Jeanne Croland. Jeanne and her late husband Samuel founded the first Ethiopian synagogue in Israel, through NACOEJ, and in recent years, Jeanne and Marsha generously supported our Limudiah summer programs. We have all lost a very dear friend.

...long-time NACOEJ friend **Esther Levy Symonds**, husband Garth, and children Daniella and Jonathan on the passing of Esther's beloved mother, Mollie Levy, a lover of Israel and friend of Ethiopian Jews.

...NACOEJ-Israel staffers **Yaakov and Esther Liberti** on the loss of their 20-year-old son Avishai, in a tragic road accident. Yaakov is the long-time city coordinator of our Limudiah classes in Yavne and Kiryat Ekron. Esther is a Limudiah teacher in Kiryat Ekron. Both are beloved by students, faculty, and all of us at NACOEJ.

...**Tzvika Slonim** on the loss of his beloved wife, Rachel. Together with her husband, Rachel founded and personally directed an extraordinary Israeli program for Ethiopian young women who had arrived during Operation Solomon. The program gave these new olim continuing education, outstanding vocational training, and mastery of Israeli life-skills. NACOEJ was a sponsor of the program for some years, and many of us became close friends and great admirers of Rachel and her work. Among the mourners will be many Ethiopian-Israeli women who lead professional lives in elder care and early childhood care because of Rachel's love and care.

Our hearts go out to all these bereaved families and friends. May they all be comforted among the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.

We also mourn for all those innocent people around the world cruelly murdered by terrorists in recent weeks.

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NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY

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Sigd 2015



Photos: Wim Robins

The great Ethiopian Sigd celebration took place as usual in Jerusalem in November, commemorating the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile, and the reading of the Torah to the assembled thousands.

And, as usual, NACOEJ Israel Director, Shoshana Ben-Dor, a long-time student of Ethiopian-Jewish religious texts, taught the Sigd liturgy to Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians alike.

This year, her partner teacher was new NACOEJ staff member, Aviva Oune. Our program takes place in the NACOEJ Tent on the festival site where everyone who wants to understand the ancient liturgy, join the prayers, and grasp the significance and history of the Sigd, comes to learn

Above: Shoshana gives a one-on-one lesson to a student with many questions.

Below: Shoshana (back to camera) and Aviva (seated, facing camera) prepare for a mixed group of soldiers, Sabras and tourists, who will be taught in Hebrew, English, and Ge'ez (the ancient Semitic ritual language of Ethiopian-Jewish prayer).

Shoshana is currently completing the first Sigd Siddur in Ge'ez. It will include Ge'ez, the Ge'ez text transliterated into Hebrew and Hebrew translation.



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Visit NACOEJ on Facebook and receive news about our programs, plus updates of immediate interest relating to the Ethiopian-Jewish community.