Out of Poverty – in One Generation?

We recently reported that 72% of Ethiopian children in Israel are living below the poverty line; then along came another study that said that 65% of Ethiopian-Israeli children are living below the poverty line.

That sounds hopeful. “But,” said Shoshana Ben-Dor, our Director of Israel Programs, “the poverty line is set so low that if you are a little above it, you’re still very poor. So the numbers don’t matter so much.”

What does matter is getting up and out of poverty, no matter where the line is.

If you listen to some people, you’ll hear that Ethiopian Israelis are not only poor, but going to be poor for generations to come, caught in what is called a “cycle of poverty”.

But that doesn’t have to be true – and in fact, for Ethiopian Israelis in NACOEJ programs, just the opposite is often true: a lot are making it out of poverty in just one generation!

We have teachers in our Limudiah programs who were once pupils in those programs – high school kids headed for good colleges even though their immigrant parents are on welfare or in low-level jobs – college graduates moving directly into professional careers.

Some are, or will be, making a lot of money; some may still need some help with

The Battle Over Ethiopian Aliyah Moves to the Streets

On Sunday, November 27, 2011, Ethiopian Israelis marched in protest through the streets of Jerusalem, some of them angry, some in tears, many carrying photos of family members whose aliyah was being delayed – perhaps for years – even though they had been approved to come to Israel.

The barrier to their arrival wasn’t a religious question, family history, or even politics. According to a government committee, headed by the Israeli Ministry of Finance, as of January 1, 2012, there would not be any more room for newcomers in the Jewish Agency’s absorption centers where new immigrants spend their first years.

Why not? Because money the government usually provided to buy immigrants their first apartments had run out, so Ethiopians already in the centers weren’t leaving.

So, the aliyah from Ethiopia had to be cut from 200 a month to 110 a month –
Caring for the Future Today...

To each of you reading this newsletter, we extend our thanks for your unceasing generosity and compassion. You are the backbone of NACOEJ’s ability to assist Ethiopian Jews.

For those Ethiopian Jews who have reached Israel, and for many born in Israel to immigrant parents, your support means the opportunity to achieve the education that will enable them to forge productive futures. It makes it possible for them to become independent, to care for their families, to be the kind of citizens of Israel they want to be.

Together we have achieved so much. But there is still a great deal of work to be done to ensure that this ancient community of Jews, many of whom are still arriving, can fulfill their dreams in modern Israel.

As you continue your generous support of NACOEJ’s work today, we ask you to give thought to extending your partnership into the future.

By remembering NACOEJ in your will, you enable Ethiopian Jews who are still on their way to Israel to get educational opportunities when they arrive. You ensure that those already in Israel can achieve their tremendous potential.

A simple instruction in your will can effect great change. As you continue your generous support of NACOEJ’s programs in Israel, consider adding NACOEJ to your will.

OUT OF POVERTY! CONT. FROM PAGE 1

their children’s education — but neither they nor their children will be “cyclying poverty”.

What makes the difference? We all know the answer: education. NACOEJ programs in Israel give, enhance, and enable education, and do it effectively.

At a recent Knesset meeting, someone complained that the government doesn’t spend enough on Ethiopian absorption. Knesset member and Deputy Speaker Shlomo Molla, himself an Ethiopian immigrant, responded that the government spends more on Ethiopian absorption than on any other community of Jews, many of whom are still arriving, and enhances their dreams in modern Israel.

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NACOEJ former Adopt-A-Student, Knesset Member Rachamim Elazar, on being named as Israel’s next Ambassador to Ethiopia. Rachamim, one of the earliest Ethiopian Jews to reach Israel, has been a prominent leader of the community, a respected journalist, a broadcaster and producer of Amharic radio programs, and an early advocate for the rescue of the community in Ethiopia and for recognition of Jews who suffered as Prisoners of Zion in Ethiopia. He has now become the first Ethiopian Israeli to be named an Ambassador.

www.nacoej.org. If you have legal questions, please consult your attorney, accountant or financial advisor. Thank you so much.

LIMUDIAH: Where Learning is Fun!

Limudiah is a voluntary program: the children stay after school because they want to, and of course, their parents want them to, too.

A delicious, nourishing hot lunch is always a motivating factor. So is getting help with homework because in most Ethiopian homes, the parents can’t help.

Most important, as the children start to learn successfully in Limudiah, they can also enjoy success in their regular classes. But they also like Limudiah, because as Esther Kasah says (see box, right) “they’re “do fun stuff”.

Our teachers are encouraged to use games, songs, stories, colorful supplies and everything of their own creativity suggests they do making learning (one-on-one or as a class) fun. Happy children like to learn, and keep coming back for more. And your support of the NACOEJ Limudiah program will help us create more and more happy children who love to learn and who will succeed in school, paving the way to bright futures.

THINGS WE LIKE ABOUT LIMUDIAH

CHILDREN IN GEDERA, REHOVOT, RAMLA, AND KIRYAT EKRON

In a Limudiah class, there’s time to think through a problem, and someone to help if you get stuck.

In Limudiah, if you give an excited yelp when you get an answer, no one scolds you.

Sometimes help comes from a friend who speaks both of your languages! (Ed. Note: Sarah Getahun, once a junior counselor in our Back-to-School program in Ramla, is now a student-teacher at our Kiryat Ekron Limudiah. Two Ethiopian-Israeli certified teachers are on our staff there, too.)

And in Limudiah, you find out what your parents mean when they talk so wistfully about the “joy of learning”.

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High School Success Stories

TIGIST BITAUA: She Wins Again!

Remember Tigist, the little girl who made big headlines when, in fourth grade, she won a 2.5 km race in which she had mistakenly been put in competition with much older, bigger girls?

Tigist was in our Limudish after-school educational program in Nes Ziona back then! She was the smallest girl in her school in eighth grade and, along with nine Ethiopian-Israeli friends, she’s in the NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorship Program in the Elizer Ben-Yehudah High School in the same town.

This past spring, then in seventh grade*, Tigist competed in the national track championships for Israeli schools in the girls’ seventh-to-eighth grade group.

Again she won first place, defeating older and stronger competitors from all over Israel!

Tigist has been called a “sports great” in Israeli newspapers, and was highly praised by athletic trainers at the competition. They say it’s vital to do everything possible to help her develop as a runner, and be a credit to Israel.

Tigist just says: “I get a lot of compliments and my family is proud of me.”

What Tigist is proud of is her eight amazing achievements. Four of them are in Yehudah High School were in our school, they come home for weekends and they have high marks in all their subjects. “I’m the youngest runner, and be a credit to Israel.”

After putting in a 2.5 km race in which she had mistakenly been put in competition with much older, bigger girls?

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Tigist was a winner – but it was surprising that she applied to the Faculty of Dentistry rather than continuing in music.

Music had been her great love as a young girl, and NACOEJ sponsorships had helped her (and her talented younger sister Tadil) go to Askhelon’s High School for the Arts. Etti played the piano, sang in a choir that toured internationally, participated in a TV show, and flew to Munich to make records, all while making top grades in physics and other academic subjects.

She later went to her high school sponsor, author and “Purple Lady” Barbara Meslin, that, “The security situation in Israel is very bad. Playing helps me to go on and function.”

Etti graduated high school with grades that entitled her to go to college immediately, rather than do mandatory military service first, but decided to go into the military instead.

“I did this,” she explains, “because I didn’t feel ready for academic studies. I wanted to complete my army service and learn more about myself.”

She served with distinction in the Israel Defense Forces’ prestigious intelligence program, received commendations, and did learn more about herself. “My military service period shaped and changed me. I learned a lot about the importance of maintaining Jewish tradition and the protection of the State of Israel.”

After the military, Etti got a high-tech job, but soon applied for dental school. Etti says, “The arts have shaped my personality and caused me to be more intelligent and sensitive to my environment. But I have also been very attracted to medicine and health. I knew that I wanted to work in those fields.”

As a NACOEJ Adopt-A-Student sponsor, Barbara Meslin will continue to help Etti. Given the serious dental problems Ethiopian Jews experience and the importance of maintaining Jewish tradition and the protection of the State of Israel.

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A VERY SPECIAL FAMILY

Tsega Melaku came to Israel in 1984, an ambitious teenager who knew her mind and was determined to succeed. A NACOEJ/ Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student sponsor helped her through Bar-Ilan University. She then earned an MBA from Touro College in Israel, and is now the Director of Israel Radio, Channel 1, the first Ethiopian to hold that position.

Tsega is also a single mom with two extremely bright sons, Immanuel and Yonathan, whose high intelligence gives call for a specially good education for both.

With help from NACOEJ/Edward G. Victor High School sponsor Lois Levy, Yonathan has been able to attend a good school and participate in a basketball program for talented players. He plays on the Hapoel Jerusalem Youth Team and fits long practice hours in with his schoolwork.

In high school, with sponsorships from our High School program sharing the cost, Yonathan’s brother, Immanuel, participated in the Alberto program for gifted students. According to Yaniv Gabai, Program Coordinator, he was one of the highest achieving students in the program. He now attends the prestigious Hebrew University High School with the help of NACOEJ high school sponsors: Richard Adelman and Loren Greenberg.

But Immanuel has medical issues that have kept him out of school for some time. After two years of wearing a brace for scoliosis, this year Immanuel had to have major back surgery.

During his long recovery at home, Immanuel worked hard to keep up. But now he needs to take the course Israelis usually attend to pass the required “Psychometric” college entrance exam. It costs more than his mother’s pay, but it is Immanuel’s only hope of getting into college now, as he cannot serve in the Army with his back still healing.

With help from NACOEJ sponsors, the Melaku family has achieved great success. Might you be the person to give this family member, a bright star of the future, the helping hand he needs now? Please contact Judy Dick (see the box on page 6).

As mentioned earlier, Immanuel and Bareket aren’t the only exceptional Ethiopian-Israeli students who have been accepted to the Hebrew University High School. There are five more: Seniel Radai, Netanel Desta, Salomon Shiffera, Haya Tegegne, and Binyamin Guruma. They also urgently need sponsorships. To sponsor any of these brilliant young people, see the box on page 6 with contact information for Judy Dick.
was a bright, ambitious law student at Tel Aviv University and a recipient of a NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student stipend from Alan Serota. She is also the first person in her extended family to study for a university degree.

Recently, Yehudit had the honor of speaking on behalf of Ethiopian-Israeli students at the unveiling of a monument on the Tel Aviv University campus. Created by sculptor Ron Arad, the monument memorializes thousands of Ethiopian Jews who set out for Israel but never arrived.

Yehudit’s grandfather was one of those. He and Yehudit’s grandmother left Ethiopia in 1984. As Yehudit said in her speech: “They left their home… and help other immigrants through the difficulties she knows personally.

AVIV GETHUN: An Asset to Israel

AVIV GETHUN knows why Israel needs Ethiopian-Israeli social workers. With a little help from her friends at NACOEJ, she intends to become one and help other immigrants through the difficulties she knows personally. Aviv was born in Ethiopia 22 years ago, and spent four of those years in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital, waiting with her family for permission to leave for Israel. Young as she was then, she still remembers those years. “Hard. Poverty, persecution and alienation plagued us,” she says, “but we were determined to make aliyah—and we did make it”.

The family started their new life in Israel in an absorption center in Haifa. Eighteen months later they moved to an apartment in the city where they received the usual help from a government mortgage program.

Aviv had language difficulties in elementary school, but by high school was able to work as a teacher’s assistant in a program for preschoolers. She graduated high school with full matriculation and entered the Medical Service in a hospital and as a camp counselor.

Now at Haifa University, she wants to qualify for admission to the Faculty of Social Work so that she can turn her own experiences into a career of helping immigrants with all the professional skills and knowledge she can absorb.

If you would like to provide a modest stipend that will help this loving young woman get her degree, please consider sponsoring her. Go to: box 4 on page 9 for contact information.

Editor’s note: Those “hard” years in Addis Ababa are still fresh in her memory. “We were there too, doing everything in our power to assist the struggling community to survive and live in dignity until they could leave for Israel.” Social workers who remember those days, speak Amharic as well as Hebrew, and know first hand the difficulties of absorption for Ethiopian immigrants, are an asset to Israel.

NATAN DASTA: Growing Up with NACOEJ

The good-looking young man with the big smile in this photo has literally grown up with NACOEJ. Natan Dasta, like his older sister Ashegau, came to us while still a child in Ramla. In NACOEJ’s Limudah program, Natan stood out as bright, sociable, with every sign of leadership abilities—and an extraordinary aptitude for picking up the general knowledge which so many Ethiopian immigrant children lack, and which our Limudah program works hard to supply.

Eighteen months later they moved to an apartment in the city where Shoshana teaches Ethiopian liturgy. When Natan, who is religiously observant, graduated from high school, he spent a year and a half studying in a top-flight yeshiva before entering the Israeli Defense Forces in the high-risk Golani Brigade as a combat soldier.

It’s often hard to keep track of our students during their years of army service, so when our Israel Director, Shoshana Ben-Dor, heard that Natan Dasta was on the office phone, looking for an AAS sponsor to help him through medical school at Hebrew University, she was ecstatic—first to know that Natan was safe and sound, second that he had been accepted into a very selective program at a top-ranked university—and also because, like the devoted family member he is, he was coming to NACOEJ for the helping hand he needed.

Natan is married (he describes his wife, Hodaya, as “the most wonderful woman in the world”) and has a one-and-a-half-year-old son, Shilo. Like most of our recent graduates who are married with children, Natan really needs two sponsors to help the family survive. We have one splendid sponsor for Natan, and we’re eager to find an equally splendid partner-sponsor. To establish a beautiful relationship with this terrific family, please see the box on page 6.

Editor’s note: We have written before about Natan’s sister Ashegau, who also grew up with NACOEJ. To update you, Ashegau has graduated as a registered nurse from Shavyer Zedek Hospital in Jerusalem and is now an AAS sponsor. We treasure this family, all of whom “give back”.

A SINGULAR HONOR

YEHUDIT KABADA is a bright, ambitious law student at Tel Aviv University and a recipient of a NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student stipend from Alan Serota. She is also the first person in her extended family to study for a university degree.

Recently, Yehudit had the honor of speaking on behalf of Ethiopian-Israeli students at the unveiling of a monument on the Tel Aviv University campus. Created by sculptor Ron Arad, the monument memorializes thousands of Ethiopian Jews who set out for Israel but never arrived.

Yehudit’s grandfather was one of those. He and Yehudit’s grandmother left Ethiopia in 1984. As Yehudit said in her speech: “They left their home…
WHAT’S IN A NAME?

A lot, if it’s on a NACOEJ program.

Naming a NACOEJ program in Israel is a beautiful way to honor family, friends, or departed ones, or to perpetuate your own name as one who cares about fellow Jews in the Promised Land.

We are proud to list the following named programs assisting Ethiopian Jews in Israel:

- Vidal Sassoon
  Adopt-A-Student
  (college sponsorships)
- Vidal Sassoon Soccer
  (middle/high school soccer)
- Edward G. Victor High School Sponsorships
- Rachel and Barney Gottstein
  Limudiah Literacy
- Barney’s Books
  (for AAS students to read to pre-schoolers at home)
- Morris and Sylvia Trachten
  Girls’ Empowerment
  (HaMeiri School, Lod)
- Peachy Levy Back-to-School
  (summer educational day camp)
- Teichman Family
  Limudiah Class
  (following one class as they progress, Yeshurun School, Rishon LeTzion)

New naming opportunities available (see reply card for two of them):
- Limudiah School Lunch
- Limudiah Schools/Classes
- Bar/Bat Mitzvah Twinning

To discuss, please contact Danielle Ben-Jehuda at 212-233-5200, ext. 227 or email dbenjehuda@nacoej.org.

BATTLE | CONT. FROM PAGE 1

or even stopped altogether. On October 1, 2011, the rate of aliyah was indeed reduced. If the lower rate continues, it would add at least an extra year onto the three-year aliyah the government, the Agency, and NACOEJ had agreed to back in 2010.

But according to some Jewish Agency officials, in fact there would be many hundreds of beds available on January 1, 2012, certainly enough to continue the aliyah at a rate of 200 a month for many months. And indisputably, many beds were available on October 1, 2011, the date the aliyah was reduced.

So why has the aliyah rate been cut? Honestly, we don’t know. An even better question is why the aliyah rate is not being increased to the rate of 300 per month, the rate which prevailed for almost a decade in the past. At that rate, certainly sustainable, all of the Jews would be out in a year.

We have been told that the Jewish Agency Board has passed a resolution that the aliyah should be completed on schedule – in three years, not four – which would be impossible at 110 a month.

So the battle goes on, while thousands of Ethiopian Jews, fully approved and longing to join their families in Israel, live in fear and uncertainty in mud huts in Gondar, while the months roll by, famine stalks some regions of their country, and the next rainy season and the malaria season that follows, lie ahead.

Mitvah Projects!

Have a Bar or Bat Mitzvah coming up? Or an engagement, wedding, or any other life cycle event? A wonderful way to celebrate is to establish a special Mitzvah Project on the NACOEJ website and help Ethiopian Jews achieve successful futures.

Just go to www.nacoej.org and click on Mitzvah Projects in the top right hand corner. Or call Judy Dick at 212-233-5200, ext. 230 or email mitzvah@nacoej.org. You can create your own custom project on-line at no charge and see your thermometer go up as gifts come in!

CONDOLENCES TO…

- NACOEJ Advisory Board member Marsha Croland, and Marsha’s mother Jeanne Croland, on the loss of Robert Croland, Marsha’s dear brother, Jeanne’s beloved son. The Croland family have been dear friends and supporters to NACOEJ and the Ethiopian-Jewish community for many years, and established the first Ethiopian synagogue in Israel, in Beer Sheva, through NACOEJ. Our hearts are with the whole Croland family.
- UJA-Federation of New York President John Ruskay on the loss of his beloved mother, Edith Neidenberg. John’s compassion and support for Ethiopian-Jewish families has warmed our hearts, and now our hearts go out to him, wife Robin, and the whole family.
- The family, friends, colleagues, and students of Dr. Howard M. Lenhoff, and especially to the Ethiopian-Jewish community, at the loss of a most devoted friend. Howard Lenhoff, in addition to his extraordinary achievements in science, music, and scholarship, was a leader in the American Association for Ethiopian Jews. He considered the rescue of Ethiopian Jews as one of his greatest joys. We extend our warm sympathy to Howard’s wife Sylvia, daughter Gloria, and son Bernard.
- The family of Hanan Porat, a Knesset member and strong and compassionate supporter of Ethiopian Jews and their aliyah. Our hearts go out to his wife, children, and grandchildren.

Sefer Torahs Wanted

Sefer Torahs are needed in Israel for Ethiopian congregations. To make arrangements, contact NACOEJ past-Vice President Sanford Goldhaber at goldhaber@gmail.com or staffer Danielle Ben-Jehuda at 212-233-5200, ext. 227 or email dbenjehuda@nacoej.org. Thank you so much.