

# OFFLINE

NORTH AMERICAN CONFERENCE ON ETHIOPIAN JEWRY

SPRING 2010



*Dr. Avi Yitzhak (far right, wearing a cap), treating a patient in the Israel Defense Forces field hospital in Haiti. Photo: Natasha Mozgovaya for "Haaretz".*



*Rachel Gottstein looking over the shoulder of a young student in the Barney Gottstein Literacy Program in a NACOEJ Limudiah class in Lod. Photo: Gary Teasdale*

## An Ethiopian-Israeli Doctor in Haiti

We've written in these pages about many of our former Adopt-A-Student (AAS) graduates who have gone on to illustrious careers in government, science, teaching, social work, journalism, the arts, medicine and more.

Today, with the eyes of the whole world on devastated Haiti and the international teams of rescuers and medical professionals who are risking their lives to help, we want to introduce you to one of them, Dr. Avi Yitzhak, an Ethiopian-Israeli physician who, as we write, is treating a never-ending stream of terribly injured people in the Israeli field hospital in Port-au-Prince, doing amazing work.

The future Dr. Yitzhak was 20 years old when he arrived in Israel in 1991, the year of Operation Solomon.

At that age, he knew all too well what it meant to need – or give – medical care in one of the world's poorest countries. He told Israeli journalist Natasha Mozgovaya, who interviewed him in Haiti for "Haaretz" newspaper, that he feels a special connection to the patients flooding into the emergency tents his team has hastily erected in a soccer field.

The day before the interview, Dr. Yitzhak was not in the tent, but out in the risky streets of the destroyed

## WE ARE HONORED TO ANNOUNCE The Barney Gottstein Literacy Program

The teaching of language and literacy – reading, writing, speaking, understanding and using the words that express our thoughts – is the first and most critical area in which our *Limudiah* teachers work with our Ethiopian-Israeli children in every school where we hold classes.

This program, essential to all children, and especially to children from immigrant homes, will henceforth be known as the **Barney Gottstein Literacy Program** in all NACOEJ *Limudiah* classes from first grade through sixth, in grateful recognition of Barney's support and concern for the achievement of literacy among Ethiopian-Israeli children.

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*Continued on Page 3*

## How Things Stand...

In Ethiopia we are currently feeding and educating about 1,000 Jewish children in grades one through five with a double curriculum of secular and Jewish studies. We are also providing Jewish education for 300 older Jewish children we cannot afford to feed. Some of these older children attend local schools when they are not seeking work.

Sadly, there are more than 1,370 Jewish babies, toddlers, pre-school children, and pregnant and nursing mothers we cannot afford to either feed or educate.

In Israel we feed and educate just under 800 elementary school children, down from over 1,000 because of lost funding.

We are hoping, praying and soliciting donations from our whole NACOEJ family to increase the numbers in the fall. A generous grant to help us do so has come from the Levy family in California, in honor of NACOEJ

Board member Peachy Levy's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday – it has already enabled us to reopen our *Limudiah* (after-school education program) in the Efrati School in Bnai Ayish, which serves children from Gedera.

In the 2008/9 school year, we provided support to about 1,200 high school students, and approximately 380 college students, enabling them to attend good schools and get the education they need. The college students use part of their living stipends from our NACOEJ Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student sponsors to buy basic foods.

Our waiting lists of students needing help at all these stages run into the thousands. Stories about some of these high school and college students are on pages 4 and 5.



## Ethiopian-Israeli Doctor in Haiti

*Continued from Page 1*

capital city as part of a rescue team, searching for, digging out and treating survivors buried in heaps of rubble. Bodies lay unattended in the streets; after-shocks and the rescue efforts themselves threatened to send blocks of concrete down on survivors and rescuers alike.

Later in the tents, working to save survivors who were barely alive, he was painfully aware that once it was clear that a patient would live, he or she would get only two weeks of care at most, and then be discharged "...into the street, in effect, because they have no home. But you have to make the right decision."

The hard-pressed Israeli team's decision was to limit the length of care they could give to any one patient in their facility, in order to make room for more. "To try," as Dr. Yitzhak said, "to save as many as possible, to at least stop the primary injury."

The Israeli team of 40 doctors and 24 nurses were doing surgery and providing intensive care before other medical aid groups were able to go much beyond first aid. CBS called their service "the Rolls Royce of medicine in Haiti."

But the pressure the Israelis felt in the face of overwhelming numbers and needs was difficult to bear. Could they keep going? Dr. Yitzhak was asked.

"It's obvious the work is very intensive," he said, "and I assume that we could burn out at a certain stage. But for now we're full of energy, and we're thrilled by our ability to help."

At NACOEJ, we're thrilled too.

Many of our Adopt-A-Students talk about wanting to use their education to "give back". Avi Yitzhak was in our program as a medical student. We were there when he needed help, and now he is heroically there when his help is needed in Haiti.

As *Lifeline* goes to press, five medical students are currently sponsored in AAS, of whom three are about to graduate as doctors.

As always, we have many aspiring nurses, and a host of other terrific students who need sponsors to enable them to get their degrees and to "give back" in a hundred ways.

Want to know more? Turn to page 4. ■



### AT THE GOTTSTEIN DINNER:

**Hundreds of current and former Ethiopian-Israeli college students sponsored by Barney Gottstein (protecting his eyes from camera flashes) and wife Rachel (embracing two students) came to the annual dinner the Gottsteins held in Israel. This year Rachel and Barney were joined by their own children and grandchildren, including some who are also sponsors. One after another, the impressive students and graduates took the mike to tell the Gottsteins what their help – and their genuine personal interest in every student – means to them, and how they are progressing in their studies and their careers, which include law, medicine, political science, education and more. Photos: Gary Teasdale**

### The Barney Gottstein Literacy Program

*Continued from Page 1*

Barney and his wife Rachel are leaders among the philanthropists supporting NACOEJ education programs for Ethiopians in Israel, with special concern for the critical early years in elementary school and the decisive young adult years in universities and colleges all over the country.

For the Gottsteins, caring does not begin and end with writing checks, however generous.

Every year, they travel to Israel from their home in Alaska to visit their college students and the elementary school children whose Literacy Program now bears Barney's name. This year, they brought their own children and grandchildren with them.

They support about 125 college students in the NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student program in Israel every year, Rachel writing personal letters to every student, and Barney making phone calls from Alaska to students who need comfort and encouragement in especially hard times.

In 2010, a new exciting program – **Barney's Books** – is opening as well.

Conceived by Barney, it will provide the Gottsteins' sponsored college students with Israeli children's books to take home and read to their pre-school siblings and other little Ethiopian-Israelis, who may never before have experienced the joy and mind-expansion of listening to – and owning – a book! The books will be left with the children to help them toward early literacy!

Barney, who expanded and maintains a wholesale grocery empire founded in Alaska by his father, Jacob B. (Jake) Gottstein, inherited his love of education from his mother, Anna Gottstein, a schoolteacher who started the first PTA in Anchorage.

Barney has been active in social action and philanthropy in Alaska as well as in Israel, where he met Rachel, whose family had perished in the Holocaust and who fought in the Israeli War of Independence. Both feel a special attachment to immigrants to Israel, and a commitment to easing their way to success.

NACOEJ is proud and honored to help the Gottsteins express their love for, and pride in, the Ethiopian community in Israel. ■

LIFELINE  
FEBRUARY 2010  
Lifeline is published  
three times annually.  
NACOEJ  
132 Nassau Street  
New York, NY 10038  
Issue No: 67

# 5 EXTRAORDINARY STUDENTS IN S

In the last *Life-line*, we told you about two high school students who urgently needed sponsors to enable them to participate fully in their schools and fulfill deservedly high academic hopes.

Each student was immediately sponsored – and additional generous people promptly sponsored other high school youngsters on our waiting list.

We are so pleased and grateful to you that we are using these pages to tell you about five more students – three in high school, two in college – who are outstanding in their intelligence, their ambitions, and the kind of character that will make a sponsor proud.

The Ethiopian-Israeli physician Dr. Avi Yitzhak (you can read about him on page 1) was once a student seeking a sponsor from the NACOEJ/Vidal Sassoon Adopt-A-Student program. Thanks to our NACOEJ family, he found one, and today he is a source of pride to his country and the Jewish world.

## College Students Hoping to Join THE NACOEJ/VIDAL SASSOON ADOPT-A-STUDENT PROGRAM



### A LETTER FROM BABAY (AVI) TAGADIYA

*Shalom. My name is Babay (Avi) Tagadiya. I was born June 20, 1984 and made aliyah from*

*Ethiopia with my family when I was eight years old.*

*My parents are divorced and my older siblings are married and live in other cities. Since arriving in Israel, I have lived with my mother and younger brother. I am the sole breadwinner. Mom lives on social security, which is not enough to cover household expenses. I have always had to work so that I could help out.*

*Nonetheless, I completed 12 years of school, earned a full high school matriculation certificate and served in the Israel Defense Forces.*

*I am now a second-year student of economics and business administration at Ashkelon College. I also work as an orderly at Soroka Hospital to help make the mortgage payments on my mother's apartment, pay household bills, and support myself.*

*My studies don't allow me to work enough hours to cover my expenses. For this reason, I am asking for help so I can focus on my studies. The most important thing for me is to do well at school.*

*Thank you in advance,  
Babay (Avi) Tagadiya*



### A LETTER FROM LIYA HAILU

*I was born in Gondar, Ethiopia. When I was four years old, my parents decided to try to reach Israel by way of Addis Ababa,*

*but we had to wait there for five years. In 1995 we arrived in Israel and were placed in a trailer camp. Two years later we moved to Haifa.*

*I went to two elementary schools, graduated from high school with distinction, and after serving as a sergeant in the Air Force, I was accepted into Technion, where I am now in my second year going for a BSc in Civil Engineering.\**

*There are thirteen of us in my family, including parents who are elderly and cannot work. Our small home is crowded so I cannot study there, so I moved to the Technion dorms, paying 700 shekalim a month. Studies at Technion are very intense, and I cannot hold a job, and of course, my parents, on social security, can't help.*

*I have great desire to succeed and become an engineer and a role model for other kids in my community. This will help them believe, as I do, in the power of education and its ability to integrate us into Israeli society.*

*But in spite of my great desire, I fight a daily battle with financial challenges, and I don't want them to become a barrier to realizing my dream.*

*Please consider helping me.*

*Thank you in advance,  
Liya Hailu*

\* Editor's Note: Only the best and brightest are accepted into Technion, the M.I.T. of Israel.

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN HELPING ONE OF THESE YOUNG PEOPLE ACHIEVE C**  
please contact Judy Dick at the NACOEJ office, 212-233-5200, ext. 230. Or for a college student, email to  
For a high school student, email to [highschool@nacoj.org](mailto:highschool@nacoj.org). You won't be sorry! P.S. Don't forget to men

# SEARCH OF A SPONSOR

## High School Students Hoping for Help from THE NACOEJ EDWARD G. VICTOR HIGH SCHOOL SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM



**ESTEVEL TEMERET**

Estevel is in 7th grade in the Hamer School in Bat Yam.

He arrived in Israel in 2005 with his parents, and four brothers and five sisters. *"The language was very hard,"* he says, *"but I studied and slowly, slowly, I learned it.\* I am happy to be in the land of Israel."*

Life in Israel, however, isn't easy for Estevel and his big family. His mother recently had surgery, and his father is sick, so neither one can work. Social security payments can't cover their needs – and Estevel can't buy the school books he needs because there isn't enough money.

Nonetheless, Estevel keeps cheerful. He has a bike he loves to ride, he likes English class, Torah and Gemorrah *"...and all the religious subjects in school."*

Estevel's ambitions? We thought perhaps the rabbinate, but Estevel has other plans. *"When I'm older, I want to work in the police!"*

Will some kind NACOEJ sponsor make it possible for Estevel to get his school books and meet his goals? His parents and siblings will be delighted to welcome you to Israel.

\* Editor's Note: Estevel seems to be quoting from a famous Ethiopian proverb about patience and determination: *"Slowly, slowly, the egg will walk on its feet".*



**MAZAL MAHARI**

Mazal, a 10th grader in the Kazir High School in Rehovot, is the only girl in a family of six children. *"We are eight people in our little house,"* she says, but the crowding eased a bit when one of her brothers went off to boarding school. Mazal wants to get her education in a local high school, so she can live with and help her family.

Mazal's parents arrived in Israel during Operation Solomon in 1991, *"without education,"* but her father now has a steady job helping to manage inventory in a shop.

Mazal is on her way to an excellent education – in fact, she is in the "Nachshon" class for exceptional students, and says proudly that she is *"learning to be a leader"* -- but she needs help to buy her school books, pay lab fees, and go on required educational school trips like her classmates.

If you sponsor Mazal, you can visit her and her family in Rehovot when you come to Israel. They will all appreciate your help to the only daughter of the family, who is making everyone very proud.

**ASAF BAYNESI AND HIS FAMILY**



Asaf, a 7th grader at the Religious Junior and Senior High School in Yavneh, comes from a family of famous *kesotch*, Ethiopian Jewish religious leaders, the equivalent of both rabbis and Kohanim.

Their home in Ethiopia was in Semien Malata, a place renowned for Jewish scholarship and leadership. *"Ethiopian Jews saying they're from Semien Malata is like Ashkenazis saying their family is from Vilna!"* says NACOEJ Israel Director, Shoshana Ben-Dor.

Shoshana, an internationally known scholar of Ethiopian Jewish traditions, had the pleasure of meeting Asaf's grandfather, the late *Kes Biyadgilin*. The revered grandfather, a teacher of *kessotch*, was blind, but at Shoshana's urging, he went to an ophthalmologist, and after cataract surgery was able to see again.

*Kes Addisu*, Asaf's father, is also known as an extremely wise and knowledgeable man, much loved for his gentle ways.

Asaf takes after his father, but wants to become a singer, not a *kes*, when he grows up. (Actually, ritual musical chanting are very much a part of a *kes's* traditional role.)

Asaf also likes soccer, basketball and lists "all kinds of things" as his hobbies.

The life of a *kes's* family in Israel can be rich in tradition, honor and good deeds – but not usually in money. Their large families can be poor.

A sponsor would mean a lot to Asaf, who asked our representative to tell him, *"How old will my sponsor be, how many children does he – or she – have, how many grandchildren, and where do they live?"*

Asaf's sponsor will have the opportunity to meet an outstanding Ethiopian family in Israel one day.

## GREAT GOALS,

o college@nacoj.org.

tion to Judy that that you read about the students in the *Lifeline*.

# Come Join the NACOEJ Mitzvah Project!

**A NACOEJ Mitzvah Project is a wonderful undertaking for children or adults. It's a very hands-on way to make a concrete difference in the lives of Ethiopian Jews in both Israel and Ethiopia – and have a great time too, including having your own web page if you like. You can get the details by going to the NACOEJ web site – [www.nacoej.org](http://www.nacoej.org) – and clicking on the Mitzvah Page icon.**

**Right now, please meet two young people who are responsible for terrific Mitzvah Projects, so you can see how they work.**



## HAYLEY WOLF

Hayley's Bat Mitzvah was last November and she wanted a Mitzvah Project to honor this special time. She had learned about Ethiopian Jews in Hebrew School, where her teacher used material from the NACOEJ web site.

Hayley decided to have her own web page, which you can see below and on the NACOEJ web site. Here is her personal message:

*Hi, my name is Hayley Wolf. In Hebrew School we learned about Ethiopian Jewry, and we watched a video about it. I knew right away that I needed to help this cause and work with NACOEJ.*

*I want to feed the school children in the school lunch program [in Ethiopia] because I know that it is really hard to concentrate in school on an empty stomach. For my Mitzvah Project, I would like to feed 10 children for a whole year. In Ethiopia, to feed one child for a whole year is only \$150. In the U.S. \$150 would maybe feed a child for barely a month.*

*I feel that by donating to the school lunch program, I am giving the children food, and also a better education.*

*Sincerely, Hayley*

Many people have visited Hayley's web page – people who know her and also others who don't, but who were taken by her sincerity and compassion. She has already raised over \$1,000 of her \$1,500 goal, and is still counting.

And Hayley, courteous young lady that she is, sends a thank-you note for every gift received, whether she knows the donor or not! Mazel Tov, Hayley, on your Bat Mitzvah and on your heart-warming kindness.

## ELIYASHU BENMOSCHE

Eliyashu is only two years old. So, you may ask, how could he be responsible for a Mitzvah Project?

Well, the answer is simple but requires going back in time a bit.

Eliyashu was adopted from Ethiopia by Nehama Benmosche and Jacob Lieberman. He was converted to Judaism and is a happy part of this loving family.

Nehama received an email blast from NACOEJ about a crisis in Ethiopia and her concern about the community translated into starting a web page through NACOEJ for Eliyashu's second birthday.

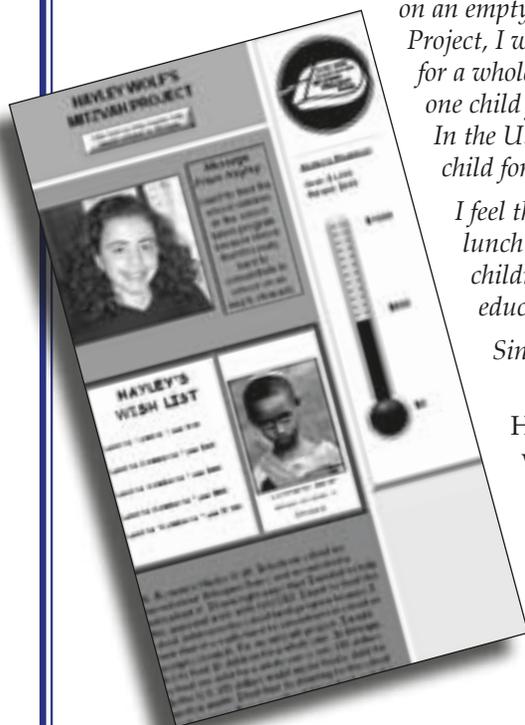
Here is what Nehama told us:

*I've known about NACOEJ for a while now but only just got involved. I have bought challah covers and pillows before, but this is my first real experience with the organization.*

*As a Jewish family raising a child as a Jew who was born in Ethiopia, we feel deeply connected to work with children in the Ethiopian community both in Israel and in Ethiopia. Knowing that Ethiopians suffer from severe poverty in both countries, we want to do what we can to help.*

*Also, since we have more than enough resources as a family, it seemed silly to have people buy more things for Eliyashu... This seemed like the best way to offer something to give back, if what others felt compelled to do was to give.*

*Jacob and I are both rabbinical students at the Reconstructionist Rabbinical College. We teach Eliyashu about giving tzedakah and being a good Jew. This is just another of what we hope will be many examples in his life of how to give instead of getting.*



At the top of Eliyashu's web page, besides the absolutely adorable picture of Eliyashu and his wish list, it says:

*I want to give back to where I came from because I already have enough clothes and toys in my life right now.*

Eliyashu and his family have already raised over \$2,500 of their \$3,600 goal to feed school lunches to children in the NACOEJ Beta Israel Elementary School in Gondar. They would love to meet their goal and welcome all donations, as does Hayley.

Imagine being so young and already starting to learn a lifelong lesson from your family. Mazel Tov to Eliyashu and Nehama and the whole family on this wonderful project.



**You can get the details about the NACOEJ Mitzvah Project by going to the NACOEJ web site – [www.nacoej.org](http://www.nacoej.org) – and clicking on the Mitzvah Page icon.**

**Want personal information on Mitzvah Projects? Please contact Judy Dick at 212-233-5200, ext. 230, or email to [mitzvah@nacoej.org](mailto:mitzvah@nacoej.org)**

## A Capital Opportunity

**D**id you know that you can use Capital One credit card reward points to make a gift to NACOEJ? You can! Just go to [www.capitalone.com/give/](http://www.capitalone.com/give/) and fill in NACOEJ's name and zip code (10038) and it will direct you how to donate. And check in with your other credit card companies to see if they have similar programs. Thanks so much. ■

## A Mitzvah for the Future...

**W**e may hope to live to the proverbial 120 but, realistically, we need to plan for a future beyond our own years.

We want to thank you for all you do for the Ethiopian Jewish community, and to suggest that you might want to extend this deeply appreciated support into the future by including NACOEJ in your will.

**Your future help can enable Ethiopian Jews to have successful and productive futures of their own.**

And, by leaving a legacy of caring, you can demonstrate to your children and grandchildren the deep commitment you have both to the Jewish present and to the future.

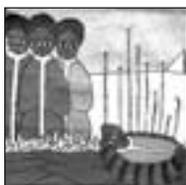
If you have any questions about leaving a gift to NACOEJ in your will, please contact your attorney, and then let us know as well. Thank you so much! ■

## Condolences...

- To long-time NACOEJ supporter **Ron Teichman** on the loss of his beloved father, Eugene Teichman. Our condolences also go to Ron's mother Phillis, wife Susan, and children Hillary and Sarah.
- To Knesset member **Uri Ariel** on the loss of his beloved father, Yitzhak Oppenheim (Ariel). Uri is a long-time leader in the effort to reunite Ethiopian Jewish families, and facilitate their absorption in Israel.
- To NACOEJ Israel staff member **Yehudit Abramson** and husband Yitshak on the passing of Yitshak's beloved mother, Sarah Abramson. Our condolences also go to the grandchildren, No'a, Ori, and Maya.



Moses Parting  
the Red Sea



Baby Moses  
in the Bulrushes



Making Matzah



Moses & Aaron  
Before Pharaoh



Ten Commandments

## Passover Embroideries in Short Supply

**O**n the enclosed reply card, you can order our wonderful embroidered matzah covers, pillow covers and challah covers for Passover in five different colorful, meaningful designs.

**But please be aware: almost all are in short supply, some are in very short supply, and some patterns are no longer available at all in some styles.**

**SO PLEASE PLACE YOUR ORDERS QUICKLY**, and consider ordering multiples if you think you may want to use them, or give them as gifts, in the future.

Please remember, too, that styles are largely interchangeable. The matzah covers have three compartments for the traditional three matzahs at the Seder table, but the challah covers with fringe, or the pillow covers with the back opening can also be used to cover matzah (the pillow covers can also be stuffed, framed, or used as tallit bags).

The embroidery program closed in Addis Ababa years ago, and can not be opened in Gondar for many reasons. Our remaining inventory for Passover is running low. We want our loyal supporters to be able to enjoy their choices now and in the future, so please contact us promptly. ■

## Oops!

In our last *Lifeline*, I goofed.

I absent-mindedly attributed Emma Lazarus' famous Statue of Liberty poem to Emma Goldman – a totally different (though also well-known in her day) Jewish woman.

A number of our supporters promptly caught the error and wrote or called to correct it. Thank you, one and all. I'm red-faced, but delighted to know that so many of our NACOEJ family have long and accurate memories.

Please accept my apologies and by way of compensation, and for everyone's enjoyment – here's Emma Lazarus' whole poem.

*Barbara*

### THE NEW COLOSSUS

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,  
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;  
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand  
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame  
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name  
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand  
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command  
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.  
"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she  
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

### Congratulations...

- To NACOEJ Executive Director **Barbara Ribakove Gordon** on the engagement of her son Joshua Ribakove to Margaret Koppelman of Austin, Texas and to Margaret's children Rachel, Aryeh, and Tali.
- To NACOEJ staffer **Caroline Barg** and husband Hershel on the engagement of Hershel's granddaughter, Rivka Ruchama Wittenstein of Jerusalem to Yekutiel Anise, and to Rivka's parents, Ahuva and Avraham and all the siblings.
- To **Dr. Teruwork Mulat**, former NACOEJ staff member in Ethiopia and Israel for completion of her doctorate at the Weizmann Institute on the teaching of high level math to Ethiopian-Israeli high school students. Mazel Tov also to the whole family on the recent marriage of their daughter Maski.