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Series D: International Relations Activities. 1961-1992

Box 58, Folder 2, Ethiopian Jews and Israel, 1985.

**UJA**

**PRESS SERVICE**

July 1985

Dear Editor:

We are pleased to present what we believe is the most comprehensive set of materials for American-Jewish newspapers on the absorption in Israel of thousands of Ethiopian Jews.

As you know, we have not released such materials because of security considerations. However, the release of the enclosed materials is appropriate at this time as long as the focus of this aliyah is on absorption in Israel.

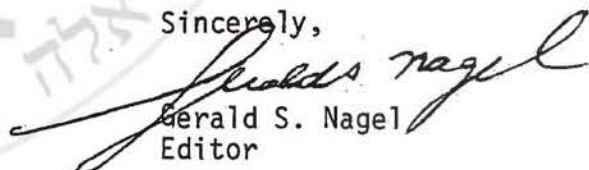
This edition of the UJA Press Service contains 24 written components and 16 photographs. To help you utilize the enclosures now and in coming weeks, we have organized them by type and are keeping the photographs separate. We think this will make it easier for you to select materials based on the need of each issue.

There are six sections:

1. Facts at a Glance
2. Eyewitness accounts of arrivals in Israel
3. Vignettes
4. Background reports
5. Quotations
6. Photographs

Best wishes for the rest of the summer.

Sincerely,

  
Gerald S. Nagel  
Editor

**UJA**

**PRESS SERVICE**



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## FACTS AT A GLANCE ABOUT ETHIOPIAN JEWS IN ISRAEL

By Gerald S. Nagel

Editor, UJA Press Service

### How Many Ethiopian Jews are in Israel?

A clear majority of the approximately 24,500 Ethiopian Jews are in Israel. Several thousand remain in Africa, hoping to be reunited in Israel with their families.

### Where do they Live in Israel?

Most live in absorption centers, and others live in apartments, hotels or other temporary housing. Over 2,000 teenagers live at Youth Aliyah villages. These homes are located across Israel. All are at or near comprehensive Jewish Agency programs to aid their adjustment (absorption) in Israel.

### How are they being Helped?

They receive necessities such as food, clothing and shelter. Most, such as 1,400 adults, are in ulpan, intensive Hebrew-language courses. They are learning about Israel and contemporary life, from Jewish Agency representatives (many of whom speak Amharic, the Ethiopian Jews' native tongue) and Israelis in nearby communities who have overwhelmingly welcomed them. Many are learning contemporary job skills and academic subjects.

### How is this Aliyah Different from Earlier Groups of Immigrants?

While Ethiopian Jews are black, there are two perhaps larger distinctions from earlier aliyah. First, these Jews face the challenge of transition from a primitive culture, to modern times. Many had never before seen machines -- machines that move fast on a paved road, machines that make things rapidly in mass production, machines that fly. Second, most are young, with over 70 percent under the age of 14 and most of these have arrived without parents. The challenge to adjust in Israel is formidable, and these newest immigrants must confront it without parents, whose safety in Africa is always on their minds.

### Is Anything Special Being Done to Help these Youngsters?

Yes, many things. The Jewish Agency has substantially restructured its services, for example providing for group kitchen facilities whereas it used to have kitchens sectioned for use by families. Over 2,000 teenagers have been enrolled in Youth Aliyah, a program that began 51 years ago by saving Jewish youngsters from the clutches of the Nazis and continues to enroll more Ethiopian Jews every month now that they are saved from famine and religious persecution. Youth Aliyah residences provide essentials for survival, as well as education, job-training and counseling services.

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What are other Ethiopian Jews Doing for their Future?

6,000 are in schools  
 500 are in vocational-technical training programs  
 350 are graduating, prepared for vocational-technical positions  
 90 are in pre-college programs  
 70 are in colleges and universities  
 75 are becoming paraprofessionals, to aid absorption of others  
 23 are kessim (spiritual leaders) or learning to become kessim

Who is Financing this Absorption?

Jews around the world, mainly the people of Israel and American Jews who have contributed to Operation Moses. American Jews, through United Jewish Appeal/Federation Campaigns, are the main source of funds for absorption, Youth Aliyah and other services.

Are there Sufficient Funds to Help Ethiopian Jews Become Absorbed?

Not yet. Fundraising was successful to meet the initial costs of absorption, but the job is not complete nor was it ever said that it would be complete through Operation Moses. American Jews wishing to participate may send a check to their local federation.

Are Ethiopian Jews a Large Percentage Now of the Israeli Population?

Absolutely not. Israel has 4.2 million residents, including 3.5 million Jews within pre-1967 borders. So Ethiopian Jews constitute only a fraction of a percent of Israel's population.

Can Israel Absorb Thousands of Immigrants in a Short Period?

While a majority of Ethiopian Jews are in Israel, this aliyah is small compared to others. At Independence in 1948, there were 700,000 Jews. Operation Magic Carpet airlifted 47,000 from Yemen in 1949-50, and Operation Ezra brought in by ships and airplanes 114,000 from Iraq in 1950-51. Then, 77,500 came from Morocco in the mid-1950s; 40,000 from Poland in the late 1950s; 75,000 from Romania in the early 1960s; 18,000 from the U.S. in the late 1960s; and 163,000 from the Soviet Union since the early 1970s. These were among 1.8 million immigrants to Israel.

What is Ahead for Ethiopian Jews?

Most will likely spend a year or so at absorption centers, the youngsters moving on to Youth Aliyah villages in many instances and the adults moving into their own homes and the work force. They will likely become blue collar workers, white collar workers, high-technology specialists, doctors, lawyers, engineers, scientists, craftsmen, artists, musicians and writers. Some will make it with limited additional help and others will need more help, for which they will look to the people of Israel and to the Jewish Agency and in effect to American Jews through UJA/Federation Campaigns.

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SECTION TWO: EYEWITNESS ACCOUNTS OF ARRIVALS IN ISRAEL

*An American who visited with Ethiopian Jews upon their arrival at Jewish Agency absorption centers, wrote a letter to his friend and recently provided the letter to us. It contains some fascinating glimpses.*

Dear Jerry,

Have just a few minutes, but want to share with you what little I've seen of the Ethiopian Jews saying hello to modern times. Excuse the scrawl.

Amazing how much we take for granted that's new to these Jews. They have lived for so many centuries in rural Ethiopia. A woman was being shown how to use a faucet and had two problems. One, she wasn't used to twisting her wrist, needed to open the faucet fully. Two, she almost scalded herself before finding out -- you should have seen the look on her face -- that she could use the other knob to moderate the temperature to her liking.

Everything is a big surprise for them. Another woman couldn't get over a mirror. A man was taken aback upon seeing -- what's that? -- a multi-story building. Showers, lavatories, stairs, a fork, refrigerators, ovens, can openers -- cans, for heaven's sake -- it's all new, new, new.

Even their names are new. Jewish Agency social workers help them choose a Hebrew name, usually something sounding close to their Amharic names. This is a sign of their new life, and they know that most Israelis came here with different names too. Some ask if they can keep their names and they are assured warmly that they can.

There's so much for them to learn but they are very eager. They start with basic Hebrew words and facts about life here in Israel. After four months, the teenagers go to Youth Aliyah villages for education and job training.

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Being here has impressed me that it is our challenge to help them prepare for life here in the 20th century, but it's also our privilege and it gives us a role in history.

Jerry, there's a lot we can learn from Ethiopian Jews. They have enormous self-respect, much confidence and arresting dignity. Who can predict the potential of these people? From among them will come tomorrow's doctors, lawyers, engineers and professors. Our ancestors didn't look a whole lot better on arrival at Ellis Island.

It's been a long journey. Two thousand years sounds melodramatic. It's true.





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MEETING THE PLANE

UJA Leaders Greet Ethiopian Jews on Arrival In Israel

by Wendy Elliman  
UJA Press Service

BEN GURION AIRPORT, Israel -- They stream from the plane onto the tarmac. Children with huge eyes and limbs stick-thin. Young women cradling tiny infants in emaciated arms. Men and women, some too weak to walk unaided, some who have never climbed down stairs before. Their bearing was dignified. There was no shouting, no pushing, no noise.

A tall man broke away from the column moving slowly from the plane to the waiting buses. The crowd halted as he knelt. "Blessed art Thou, Lord, our God, King of the Universe," he cries. "You sent Moses to bring us out of the land of Egypt. Now you have brought us to Eretz Israel." Those around him intoned, "Amen."

"They were disciplined, quiet, mild-mannered," said United Jewish Appeal National Vice Chairman Alan Shulman of Palm Beach, Fla., one of three UJA representatives to greet Jewish immigrants from Ethiopia, who arrived last winter. The mass migration is not currently in progress, although thousands of Jews remain in Ethiopia.

"There was no weeping or sobbing as they disembarked. But there were tears in the eyes of the three of us. We were participating in history."

Shulman, National Vice Chairman Martin F. Stein of Milwaukee, and Elton J. Kerness as UJA Vice President, were keenly aware of the absorption challenge confronting Ethiopian Jews and the Jewish Agency, which receives most of its funds from annual UJA/Community Campaigns.

"We were invited onto the plane to meet the new arrivals before they disembarked," Kerness said. "They sat there -- quiet, proud, happy, beautiful, regal in their rags. Most of them had no shoes. Babies lay without diapers. The plane's hold was empty. All they owned was on their backs. And no one seemed afraid -- or even confused."

"You're in the land of our forefathers now," a Jewish Agency representative told the newcomers, in their native Amharic. And their solemn faces broke into smiles. They had finally come home. Perhaps that's why they weren't afraid.

- more -

Jewish Agency personnel, who welcomed and settle Ethiopian refugees in Israel, have worked around the clock. "But you wouldn't know it to look at them," said Shulman. "They must be exhausted, but all you see is their sensitivity to the needs of the Ethiopians.

"Some have never seen a bus before, and so they were helped aboard. Most have never used modern sanitary facilities -- so the bus stopped by the darkened roadside to allow them to relieve themselves before they reach the absorption center and are introduced to modern plumbing."

As soon as the bus stopped, one old man brought a piece of earth to his lips. "I must taste the land," he said.

"How does it taste?" asked a Jewish Agency social worker.

"Like heaven," said the old man.

"At the Jewish Agency absorption center," Kerness said, "they filed quietly in and sat down. But no one -- not even the youngest child -- reached for the food before they were invited to do so."

"Please eat," the Agency representative said. "You must be hungry."

The Ethiopians' first meal in Israel was boiled potatoes, rice, bread and hot tea -- a menu respectful of common gastric problems. In the beginning, the diet had to be wholesome but simple.

"We walked among them as they ate," said Shulman. "We had no common language, but we all knew how to smile -- and none of us could stop. We saw a bright, eager people, who were going to learn and adapt very quickly. The Jewish Agency social workers, who have helped earlier Ethiopian groups settle in, confirmed that this impression is true."

"We left as they were finishing their meal," said Kerness. "Some were going to see the doctor, some to choose clothing, others were heading for the absorption center apartments which will be their homes for the next ten months.

"We left with a sense of Jewish history occurring all around us. What other people does what we are doing? What other people reaches out to save their scattered remnants? It's truly an Operation Moses."

Shulman added, "With all the desperate economic difficulties, the Jewish State is still reaching out to Am Yisrael, to our people everywhere on earth. My encounter with these Ethiopian Jews has been the most valuable Jewish experience of my life. It's what being Jewish is all about."

# # #

FIRST DAYS OF ABSORPTION

The crowded plane that lands in Israel marks the end of one long journey for Ethiopian Jews, and the beginning of another.

The thin, impoverished and often ill persons who climb down from the aircraft arrived in the Jewish State "quiet, proud, happy and beautiful, regal in their rags," said Elton J. Kerness, who as UJA National Vice President met arriving immigrants. "Most of them had no shoes. Babies lay without diapers. The plane's hold was empty. All they owned was on their backs. And no one seemed afraid -- or even confused."

The second journey, which began on the airport tarmac, is the one that will take them from being in Israel only physically into Israel the industrialized, technological, democratic society -- into the 20th century. The guides on the trip are from the Jewish Agency's Absorption and Youth Aliyah departments, the Kupat Holim Health Fund, and the Ministries of Absorption, Health and Education.

The Jewish Agency meets its absorption and other responsibilities with funds mainly raised by United Jewish Appeal/Federation campaigns.

The devotion and good will of the Jewish Agency staff receives high marks from anthropologist Phyllis Palgi, Head of the Behavioral Science department at Tel Aviv University, who studied under Margaret Mead. "They show a very genuine identification with the immigrants, and an almost desperate search for a way to make things go right," Palgi noted.

The Jewish Agency welcome began at the airport, where the immigrants are greeted, "You're in the land of your forefathers now!"

- more -

Then it is on the buses to one of Israel's 23 absorption centers designated for the Ethiopian Jews, who have more adjustment challenges than traditional immigrants.

A simple meal is first -- boiled potatoes, rice, bread and hot tea -- nutritious fare prescribed by doctors because so many Ethiopians arrive with gastric sensitivities.

Health checks and registration follow. Malnutrition and exhaustion, eye and stomach problems are commonly identified and treated -- if possible, at the absorption center -- with Amharic speakers on hand to explain what is going on.

Clothes donated by local residents fill a room in each absorption center, and the new arrivals are invited to choose what they want.

"Some, especially the older women, stay in traditional dress, or at least keep their large woven cloaks wrapped over their Western-style clothes," a Jewish Agency social worker said.

"But the men willingly pick out jeans and shirts. Children, who have never heard of television, sport Superman T-shirts, and infants are swaddled in Paddington Bear-emblem clothes. One 10-year old girl insisted on feeding her six-year-old brother every meal for his first two weeks, so that he wouldn't spill on his Israeli clothes.

# # # # #

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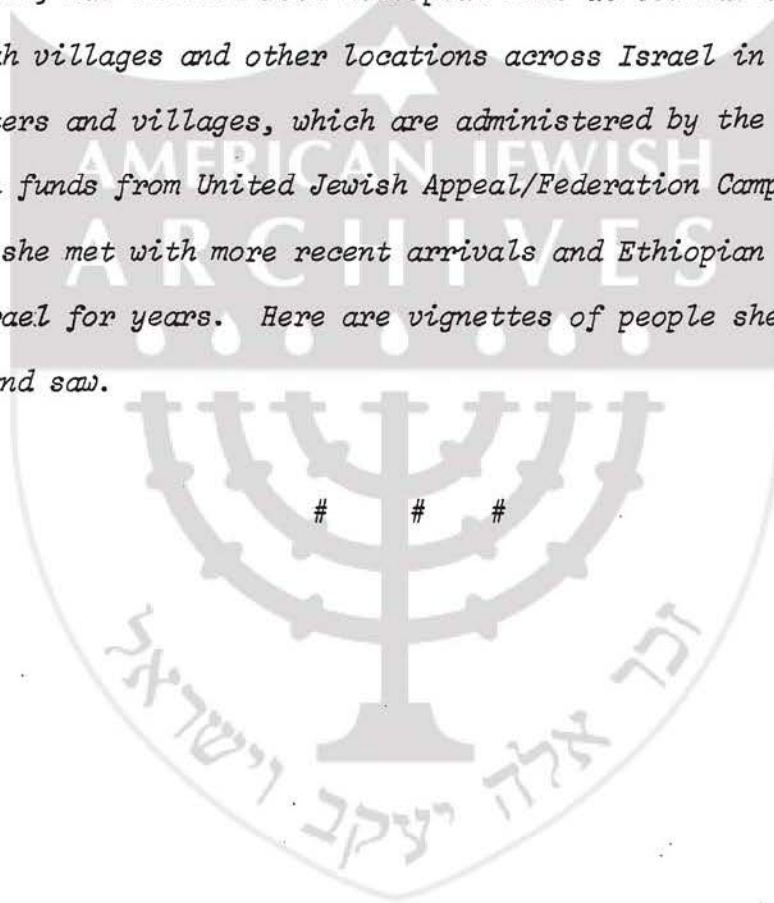
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*Wendy Elliman, an Israeli who writes for the United Jewish Appeal Press Service, has visited with Ethiopian Jews at several absorption centers, Youth Aliyah villages and other locations across Israel in recent months. At the centers and villages, which are administered by the Jewish Agency mainly with funds from United Jewish Appeal/Federation Campaigns, and elsewhere, she met with more recent arrivals and Ethiopian Jews who have been in Israel for years. Here are vignettes of people she met and things she heard and saw.*



85-485-36

YAFFA

UJA Press Service

Yaffa is 11 years old. She stands in synagogue in her hand-me-down clothes, clutching her prayerbook. Her finger traces each word as it is read to her.

"Here?" she asks, every few lines. "Isn't it here?"

Yaffa began learning Hebrew when she arrived in Israel five months ago. She now reads enough to follow, and is beginning to gain confidence in her skill.

She came to Israel from Ethiopia with her mother, sister and brother. Her father is dead.

"What happened to your father? Was he sick? Did he die in the army? On the journey?" she was asked.

"Dead," is all she answered.

Yaffa's sister is also called Yaffa.

It is Shabbat, and she sits with me and other UJA representatives for lunch. With big eyes, she watches carefully, taking her knife, fork and spoon how and when we do.

"What's 'knife' in Amharic?" we ask her. "What's 'spoon'? What's 'fork'?"

'Knife' and 'spoon' she translates into a guttural sound with a wide smile. But there is no Amharic word for 'fork.'

The melon to start the meal is new to her. She tastes it cautiously, and enjoys it. Chicken she has had before, but she struggles to cut it from the bone.

"Shall I help you?" asks the host. Yaffa gratefully surrenders her knife and fork.

"How many children do you have?" she asks a guest, seated next to her.

"I have no husband, so I haven't got any children," is the reply.

She murmurs something shyly, her eyes on her plate. It turns out to be: "I hope you soon have a husband."

-- W.E.

# # #

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TALES OUT OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

UJA Press Service

A few days before she began to teach her new class of 18 Ethiopian Jewish 11- and 12-year olds, Dorrit happened to see one of her future pupils trying to cross a busy street.

"It was in the center of town, and the child was bewildered by the traffic," Dorrit recalled. "She remained on the sidewalk for some time. Then, with her eyes shut tight, she dashed across the road. Fortunately no car came just then -- but the incident gave me an idea of how to begin the new class.

"I start with basic road drill, because that can't wait," she said. "We move on to learn about the post office, police station, supermarket, bank and so on. We learn what the names of the places are in Hebrew and how to write them. We talk about what services they give, and why they're necessary. We also visit them."

Taking Ethiopian pre-teens into a regular school, here at the Safed Absorption Center, is an experiment that has worked well, said the school's principal, Meir. "The Ethiopian children are in a separate class only until they catch up, and during recess they play together with Israeli youngsters," he said.

A parents' evening was held after the new class had been underway for three weeks.

"We had 100 percent attendance," said Meir. "We showed the parents around the school, and explained in Amharic what we're teaching, how, and why. We invited questions, and without exception they wanted to know, 'Is my child working? Is she doing well?' We could answer wholeheartedly, 'Yes! They're surprising us with how fast they learn'."

One thing the Ethiopians have not yet learned is that Western children love to hate school. Ask 11-year-old Rivka what she likes best about living in Israel. Without hesitation, she answers, "School!"

-- W.E.

# # #

85-485-38



TALES OUT OF HIGH SCHOOL

UJA Press Service

Shmuel, who is 17, left Ethiopia with boys and girls his own age, and arrived in Israel a year ago. A quick and willing learner, he made much progress at the Youth Aliyah school in which he was placed.

He waited for word from his family. One night last fall, he dreamed that his mother, father and sisters were walking across a great mountain. He told his dream to a classmate the next morning.

"It's a sign that they'll come soon," said the classmate.

Two days later, Shmuel learned that his family was in Israel. Tears streamed down his face as he arrived at the Safed Absorption Center for a joyful reunion.

"Shmuel is the family's veteran Israeli," said the absorption center's director, Dovid.

Sara's story is not as happy. Sara, 16, brought four younger brothers and sisters with her to Israel, when she arrived eight months ago. When others her age were able to move to residential Youth Aliyah schools, she stayed behind with her brothers and sisters, continuing to take ulpan (Hebrew language) classes.

Then came the news that Sara's mother had arrived. Not only was her mother safe, but now Sara would feel free to take other opportunities provided Ethiopian Jewish teenagers by the Jewish Agency.

But Sara's mother is not well, it seems. She did not come to the absorption center with the others, but was taken straight to the hospital. No, better not visit her yet, they told Sara. Your mother has had a mental breakdown.

-- W.E.

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85-485-39

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**PRESS SERVICE**

TALES OUT OF THE FACULTY LOUNGE

UJA Press Service

The new classes will begin shortly at the Safed Absorption Center, but the first task is to find more teachers. The school's principal Shaul approaches Devorah, a veteran teacher at the school.

"Have you heard that we're to have Ethiopian classes?" he begins.

"Really? It's about time!" she replies.

"Would you like to teach them?" asks Shaul.

Devorah thinks carefully. Yes, she decides. She could help such classes with reading and writing, but not with cultural adjustments and other subjects.

Shaul agrees. Finding an additional teacher will be a problem. It is the middle of the school year, and there is not staff to spare. Something has to be done, and Shaul will see to it.

-- W.E.

85-485-40

A NEW ALIYAH FOR YOUTH ALIYAH

UJA Press Service

Baruch reached Israel in his mid-teens and he was tough and self-sufficient -- but had never seen a telephone, grocery or bank. He knew nothing about indoor plumbing or electricity, reading or writing. He has no relatives in Israel and is uncertain whether any of his family back in Africa are still alive.

Baruch and 36 other Ethiopian youngsters live at Hodayot, a 24-year-old village near Tiberias, and one of the first Youth Aliyah schools where Ethiopian Jewish teenagers were placed. Today over 2,000 such youngsters are enrolled in Youth Aliyah schools, supported by the Jewish Agency with funds mainly from United Jewish Appeal/Federation Campaigns.

"No one -- not the sociologists, psychologists or educators -- had any experience with Ethiopian children," the school's principal Yaakov said. "Their motivation to learn is fierce, but there are huge cultural gaps to be filled."

For example, relates Yaakov, Ethiopian youngsters would be expected back at school on Sunday morning, after Shabbat, like Israeli students. But the Ethiopians would often not show up until Monday, or even Tuesday or Wednesday -- and then be surprised to find they had done something wrong.

"Their concept of time is different from ours," he said.

The Israeli students, in general, receive their Ethiopian classmates very well. "When the Ethiopians first arrived at Hodayot, they were a novelty," the principal recalled. "All the kids wanted to help them. We didn't integrate the Ethiopians at the outset. We kept them as a separate class until they learned the basics for school life. Then they joined the others."

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Scholastically, the Ethiopians are doing very well. Some who arrived earlier will obtain Ministry of Education matriculation soon, and will study engineering.

"They are easily motivated," said Yaakov. "They see themselves as their family's representative in Israel, and are preparing themselves to help their parents when they arrive.

-- W.E.



WELCOME WAGONS

UJA Press Service

There was excitement in the Safed Absorption Center office about the parcel that Richard Sivan, a volunteer, had just brought in. It contained 100 pairs of plastic pants to cover diapers.

"I phoned five manufacturers before one agreed to give them to us at cost," Richard told the center's director, Dovid. "They arrived just now, with a letter saying that the manufacturer had decided to give them as a gift to the Ethiopian Jews."

"The volunteers are playing a very important role in helping the Ethiopians settle in," Dovid said. "Safed has the largest Ethiopian group in Israel -- 600 people, or one in every 30 Safed residents."

Richard, a British-born high school chemistry teacher, had first visited the newly-opened Safed Absorption Center late in 1983, simply to introduce himself to Safed's latest arrivals.

"I felt very excited about making contact with a community that had kept their Judaism alive, completely isolated from the world outside, for 2,000 years," he said. "Besides what the Jewish Agency can do, the community must play a part."

Richard started with what the Jews of Ethiopia and Safed have in common -- "our identity as Jews," he said.

He first persuaded Safed residents to bake Shabbat cakes for the Ethiopians, and to take the cakes to the absorption center. An accompanying note in Amharic welcomed the newcomers to town.

"People were more than willing," said Richard. "We got 25 percent more cakes than we had families to give them to!"

Soon Safed residents were encouraged to invite Ethiopians into their homes on weekends and for holidays. A common Friday night prayer service was initiated at the absorption center -- well attended by both Safed and Ethiopian Jews -- with a special prayerbook in Hebrew and Amharic, printed by Richard, to help things along.

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"Language was a barrier at first," Mordechai, another Safed volunteer said. "So it takes a while until you get to know that these are gentle, refined people, with an impish sense of humor. Courtesy is a key element in Ethiopian culture: it can take up to 10 minutes to say hello, with a double-handed handshake and five or six kisses. We abrasive Israelis can learn from them."

The Ethiopians refer to Richard as "father." He knows most of the 600 by name -- although occasionally he falters.

"I forget what you're called," he told a young man, who had chosen not to take an Israeli name. "But I know that it means, 'I've brought something good home from the market'."

The screening of science films on Saturday nights is Richard's latest idea. "The evenings can be empty, especially for those here without their families," he said. "Not only is there the pain of separation, but often intense guilt about those left behind."

Richard's five daughters are as enthusiastic about welcoming the Ethiopians as he is. Twelve-year-old Avigail, for example, has set up her own peer tutoring program at the absorption center, reviewing with children what they learned in class that morning. And 10-year-old Yona has a tendency to run to the absorption center and return with three or four children for lunch.

"The Ethiopians will manage well in Israel," said Mordechai. "Coming here is their great dream. They are determined to make it work. And, as I see it, it's our job to help them in every way we can."

W.E.

ABSORPTION: FROM SUPERMARKETS TO SCHOOLING

UJA Press Service

Rina, a homemaker in Beersheva, is one of many Israelis reaching out to help the Ethiopian Jews, the newest newcomers in this land of immigrants.

"I'm a paraprofessional at the Beersheva absorption center," said Rina proudly. "As new immigrants come in, I'm called to assist. I'm assigned to three or four families. On my first day with them, I go to their absorption center apartments, and show them how water comes out of the faucet, and how the toilet works, and so on.

"The next day, I take them to the supermarket," she added. "I show them what foods and cleaning materials to buy, how to pay for them, and the safe way to cross a busy street. Then we go back to the apartment, and learn how to prepare and store the food, and how the stove works."

Two to three weeks are allowed for this initial settling in. Then infants begin kindergarten, children are sent to school, and adults start at ulpan to learn the new language.

"This is a different kind of aliyah," said a Jewish Agency kindergarten teacher in Beersheva here in Israel's south. "These children have never played with toys before. At first, they are frightened of dolls. But they learn very fast. It's always easiest with the kids."

The children learn as much outside the kindergarten as in. Eight-year-old Anat was fascinated by the leather gloves worn by a visitor to her class. Hesitantly she reached for them, took a moment to work out where the thumb should be - and quickly discovered their advantage.

"Warm!" she exclaimed.

- more -

Some 85 percent of immigrants past school age arrive illiterate in any language, so the educational challenge alone is considerable.

"We've had to develop new methods for teaching Hebrew to people who are unaccustomed to symbols representing sounds," said a Negev ulpan teacher, whose former pupils have included North African, American, European and Soviet Jewish immigrants. "But the motivation of the Ethiopian Jews is enormous. They're very cooperative and hardworking."

Language goals are pragmatic. Names and spellings of local vegetables are learned as ingredients for vegetable soup, with the recipe taught too. Classes in modern Israeli history and culture, and general Jewish knowledge are enthusiastically received, although sometimes sensibilities are offended. When one of the slides included in a family planning class for women showed a naked man, the women walked out in protest.

-- W.E.



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**PRESS SERVICE**

ON THE ROAD TO FULL ABSORPTION

UJA Press Service

Kiryat Shmona's 250 Ethiopian Jews have been in Israel for a year now. Their ulpan (Hebrew language) course has been completed. They speak the language of their new country, but are still learning the language of job marketability.

"In Ethiopia they were proud farmers and craftsmen, but for Israel's work market they are still learning skills," said Shimon, Kiryat Shmona's employment coordinator. "We must prevent them from sinking to the bottom of the work pyramid."

To help, 15 Ethiopian women have been provided with an industrial sewing course at the Amal School in this northern Israel town.

"The women here are ages 18 to 60," said the principal, Hanoch. "The idea of the course is both to teach them how to use the sewing machines, and to develop what modern society considers good work habits. We've taken them to nearby textile factories, so they can see what working conditions are like. We also provide supplementary learning about health and civics. It's the first such course, and we're still feeling our way."

The men are being offered training in metalwork and carpentry, but Shimon has more ambitious ideas for them.

"We're trying to arrange technical instruction in computers and electronics," he said. "That's the only real way to ensure that the Ethiopians find their true level in Israel."

Israel's nationwide shortage of 3,000 engineers and technicians, recently announced by Absorption Minister Yaacov Tsur, suggests that Shimon is on the right track. Young Ethiopians, graduating from Youth Aliyah schools, are beginning a preparatory year at Israeli universities.

"Younger Ethiopian immigrants will study in traditional Israeli schools, Amal school official Elana said, "but technical work may suit the older arrivals better -- and Israel certainly needs that."

"The Ethiopian Jews are highly motivated and fired with idealism," said Shimon. "They've gone through a lot and have enormous potential, for themselves and for all of us in Israel. They constitute a vital resource that must not be wasted."

-- W.E.

# # #

85-485-44

GETTING INTO TECHNICALITIES  
UJA Press Service

Afternoons and evenings, you can find Elias escorting Ethiopian Jewish immigrants to the bank, the supermarket or the doctor in Beersheba. Or he will be at the absorption center there, trying to solve problems or sort out frustrations.

Elias is a slightly-built 21-year-old, but with the insight of himself having reached Israel from Ethiopia less than five years ago -- and quite alone -- he is sensitive and caring toward the newcomers.

"I know exactly what those first few months feel like," he says. "And I want to help them through it."

Mornings, however, Elias is not around. He is at Beersheba's College of Practical Engineering, where he is approaching the end of a two-year course in the technology of electro-optics.

Elias is among over 50 Ethiopian immigrants who have studied at the Beersheba technical college since 1981 -- and one of only a small number successfully to complete the course.

"Ethiopian men -- and increasingly women -- in their 20s and 30s are eager to study," says Yitzhak Bitan who, as Regional Director of the Absorption Ministry's Student Authority, is responsible for immigrant students in the Beersheba area.

"It doesn't take them long to look around Israel and see that those who do well here are those with an education. They're a very honest and straightforward people, but on the application forms they'll write that they're within the age limit and have the 12 years of education necessary for admission, whether it's true or -- more often -- not."

-- more --

Those with an academic background do as well as other students, according to technical college principal Stephan Yanko.

"Like any immigrant students, they find the language a problem," he says. "But they're very hardworking and they manage. What you can't expect, however, is for people from primitive villages to catch up on 400 years of progress in three months."

Nina Livney has been teaching the preparatory year for immigrant students at Beersheba's Practical Engineering College for the past 14 years.

"My present class has Moroccan, French, South American and Romanian immigrants, as well as Ethiopians," she says. "They get on well together and learn fast -- the 10 Ethiopians as rapidly as anyone else. But their general knowledge background is quite different from ours. Avram, for example, was 25 when I taught him two years ago. He'd attended academic high school in Ethiopia and is now doing very well in a construction engineering course at the college. But he didn't know basics like the capital city of France."

A technological training is a useful way to start weaving Israel's Ethiopian immigrants into the country's social and economic fabric, Bitan says, and new and more intensive preparatory courses should be thought out -- especially for those without an academic basis.

But technological professions are only a beginning," he says. "It's relatively easy to specialize in a practical area, however sophisticated the technology. And you don't really need to know much outside your immediate expertise. We won't have truly succeeded in absorbing Ethiopians into Israel until they qualify as doctors and lawyers, sociologists and psychologists. And that is something that won't come until the Ethiopian children, who reach Israel before high school age, grow up and graduate from college."

-- W. E.

# # #

**UJA**

**PRESS SERVICE**

"GOD UNDERSTANDS AMHARIC TOO"

UJA Press Service

The 250 teenagers in Hofim Youth Aliyah village, who had known famine in Ethiopia, had declared a 24-hour fast.

"In Ethiopia, when there was no rain, our priest would go to the mountain to pray, and we would all fast," says 16-year-old Menashe. "So now we fast to strengthen our prayers for our parents' safety."

Hofim was still reeling from news brought by newly-arrived Ethiopian Jews to Israel that the families of five of Hofim's youngsters had died during the grueling journey out of Ethiopia.

"All the kids here are waiting for their parents," says Hofim's director, Rabbi Nahum Cohen. "They see themselves as the trail blazers, getting ready to ease the way for the family members who follow them to Israel. The news of the deaths has rocked the village."

Hofim, like over a dozen Youth Aliyah institutions, provides service exclusively to Ethiopian Jewish teenagers who are in Israel without family. They are among many centers for Ethiopian Jews supported through the United Jewish Appeal/Federation Campaign.

In normal times Hofim has served disadvantaged children from nearby Nahariya and other towns, but Hofim has become Youth Aliyah's intake center since July 1984 -- a place where terrified, shocked and exhausted youngsters, fresh off the planes, can grow strong and begin the transition to Israeli life.

"They study harder than any children I've ever taught in 30 years," says Rabbi Nahum, "but fear for their families is always uppermost in their minds."

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That fear is heightened by first-hand knowledge of the danger their families face.

"Do you know what it's like to be without food? Without water?" asks Menashe. "I do. I and others walked across the desert for many days. At last we came to water. But, suddenly, bandits were there, with long knives. They took everything -- even our clothes. After that, some people went back to the villages. I stayed with the rest, and we traveled on."

Hofim's 55 staffers quickly organized themselves to help the children cope with news of the deaths.

"We held a prayer service as soon as we knew," says Rabbi Nahum. "Classes were cancelled and we took them to the Western Wall in Jerusalem.

"Some had been to Jerusalem before," he added. "For newer arrivals it was a first trip. Some of the children decided that prayers at the Wall were a more powerful supplication than fasting, and broke their fast for strength to pray more fervently."

Before Hofim's 250 youngsters boarded the buses for the three-hour journey to Jerusalem, Rabbi Nahum held up slips of paper.

"If anyone wants to put a message into the Wall, I've got paper and pens," he said. "You can write in the language that's easiest for you. God understands Amharic too."

-- W. E.

# # #

YOUTH ALIYAH IN ITS ETHIOPIAN PERIOD

UJA Press Service

In a sense, it has all happened before. The clock has spun back 50 years, and once again Youth Aliyah is reaching out to children who come to Israel hungry, disoriented and often sick. Again, as in the Holocaust, these are children who have no parents in Israel, and often don't know if their families are even alive.

"Today there are 2,000 Ethiopian teenagers studying in a dozen Youth Aliyah villages all over Israel," says Eli Amir, Director-General of the Jewish Agency's Youth Aliyah Department, which operates mainly with funds from the United Jewish Appeal/Federation Campaign. "Within the year, we expect that figure to grow by several hundred from Ethiopian Jews now in absorption centers."

Youth Aliyah has returned, as Amir puts it, to its "classical role" of home and school, parent, teacher and refuge to immigrating children. But there are gaping differences between the youngsters fleeing Nazi Europe in the 1930's and 1940's, and the Ethiopian children of the 1980's.

"Almost everything the Ethiopians see in Israel is new and bewildering to them," says Amir. "Quite apart from the technological wonders of the 20th century, it's the first time in their lives that these youngsters are seeing white Jews."

Paradoxically, a key problem in helping Ethiopians settle down, according to Amir, is their fierce desire to fit into Israel as fast as possible.

"We're trying hard to slow them down," he says, "and stop them from trying to run before they can walk. We refuse to repeat the errors of the 1950's and allow the Ethiopians to forget their roots and traditions. We must be wise enough

- more -

this time around to help them maintain their pride in who they are... to build on what they have, not to destroy it... to ensure they're not dazzled by Western culture to the point of abandoning their own."

Youth Aliyah is well qualified to help the Ethiopian youngsters, says Amir. "It's the best residential school system in Israel, and among the best in the world. It has knowledge, background, know-how, and methods. And -- as important -- it has the will and the flexibility to adjust to its students."

The teaching of these newest teenager immigrants is a new experience for Youth Aliyah, and so teams of educators, psychologists and sociologists are helping to establish signposts along the route. Working together with veteran Ethiopian-Israelis, they are developing teaching methods and materials, and evaluating how the newly-arrived Ethiopian youngsters feel -- about themselves and about Israel and Israelis.

The years with Youth Aliyah are, however, only a beginning, says Amir. "While these Ethiopian youngsters are at school, we must do all we can to help them prepare for the future. Youth Aliyah villages are sheltered communities. Once the students leave us, they move into a harsher world. I hope and pray that Israeli society -- with all its stresses -- will be sufficiently open and mature to welcome this wonderful and heroic Jewish tribe with open arms and full hearts."

-- W. E.

# # #

THE HOME STRETCH

Ethiopian Jews Settle into Israel

by Wendy Elliman

UJA Press Service

Pisaha Mahdani discovered pasta when he reached Israel. He was born 28 years ago in a remote Ethiopian village near the source of the Blue Nile, and arrived in Israel in the late 1970s.

Today a senior production worker in Osem's pasta factory in the Negev development town of Sderot, Pisaha was named the food conglomerate's "outstanding employee" for 1984.

Simcha Eliezer is 14 and studying in the 8th grade of the Talpiot Religious High School in Hadera on Israel's coastal plain. Like Pisaha, he comes from Ethiopia. In January 1984, three years after reaching Israel, he was the first Ethiopian youngster to be elected head of the school's Student Council.

A stranger to elections and electioneering until he reached Israel, Simcha learned fast. He ran his own campaign, and successfully persuaded fellow students that he could effectively represent their educational interests and social needs.

"Ethiopian Jews are finding their place in Israel," says an Ethiopian immigrant, who left Ethiopia 12 years ago and prefers not to be named. "Much of it is a matter of confidence. People told me that I couldn't make up the gap between the education I'd received in Ethiopia and the level in Israel. But I worked hard. I finished high school and graduated, and went on to university. Today I have a Bachelor's degree, and I'll continue studying -- not so much for myself, but so I can tell newcomers: 'Look at me! I grew up in a grass hut just like you, and I've made it here. That means you can too!'"

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Tesfa, 32, was trained by as a teacher in Ethiopia by the Organization for Rehabilitation Through Training (ORT), which is partly funded by United Jewish Appeal/Federation Campaigns. He has been in Israel a little over a year now, and is about to leave the Nazareth Absorption Center to study at Haifa University. His wife, who also worked for ORT, is studying bookkeeping.

There are two Ethiopian Jewish kibbutzim in Israel today, and an Ethiopian receptionist is behind the desk of a five-star hotel in Eilat, the southern Israel resort town. Ethiopian Jews are employed by Israel Aircraft Industries, Tnuva Dairies and the Tadiran Electronics Corporation.

By far the greatest number of veteran Ethiopian Jews in Israel work for the Jewish Agency and the Absorption Ministry, easing the way for those who follow them out of Ethiopia.

The Jewish Agency, funded mainly by the United Jewish Appeal/Federation Campaign, plays the major role in absorbing Ethiopian Jews into Israel. Veteran Ethiopian immigrants on its staff serve as Amharic-Hebrew interpreters and translators at the absorption centers and in hospital wards; counselors to the long- and short-range planners of the Ethiopian Jewish absorption; and paraprofessionals working with newer immigrants.

In March 1985, 75 Ethiopian Jewish women started eight-month courses in five Israeli towns, which will ground them in health and child care, domestic science, nutrition, geriatrics, use of community resources and the psychosociology of acculturation. With this training, they will help future Ethiopian Jewish arrivals settle in quickly and painlessly, equipping them for life and work in Israel.

-- W. E.

# # #

**UJA**

**PRESS SERVICE**

VILLAGE LIFE

From Ethiopian Village to Youth Aliyah Village

by Sharon Y. Weingarten

UJA Press Service

Rivka spent her first 10 years in a small village in Ethiopia, a little to the north of the source of the Blue Nile. She lived with her parents and four brothers and sisters in a grass and mud hut, without electricity or running water.

Her days were spent helping her mother, drawing water from the stream, and preparing meals over an open fire -- milk and meat dishes separately -- and on Saturdays she prayed to the God of Moses in the village synagogue. Israel, the Torah told her, was her true home.

Rivkah has finally reached Israel, and today she lives in a very different kind of village -- the Youth Aliyah Village of Neve Michael on Israel's coastal plain.

Now 11, speaking her newly-acquired Hebrew and more interested in school life than introspection, Rivka talks little about having left her family, or the long year since she last heard from them. And although she readily describes the lonely, tense and dangerous journey to Israel for the 175 wide-eyed Israeli-born youngsters at Neve Michael, she does not put into words her bewilderment at Western, industrialized, technological Israel and its white-skinned Jews.

Neve Michael is among 250 residential schools throughout Israel supported by the United Jewish Appeal/Federation Campaign through the Jewish Agency's Youth Aliyah department, and one of over a dozen exclusively aiding Ethiopian Jews. Neve Michael has been feeling its way in helping Rivka and 34 other Ethiopian youngsters, ages six to 12, settle into the land which they have risked so much to reach.

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"These kids have left everything they know," says David Friedman, Neve Michael's director. "Not only their culture and society, but also their homes and their families. We're trying to temper that break with the past, to introduce them smoothly to 20th Century Israel, while helping them retain pride in their heritage."

Youth Aliyah has a 51-year history of caring for confused distressed children without parents, and knows that the first essential is a warm and loving home. Houseparents are at Neve Michael around the clock -- sharing good news, drying tears, helping with homework, comforting after nightmares, and providing parental discipline.

While Youth Aliyah has half a century of experience on which to draw in welcoming Ethiopian children, Israel's newest immigration is presenting fresh challenges, too. For them, even electric light switches, water faucets and jeans, sweaters and sneakers have all been new.

Avi, one of Rivka's classmates, was so upset by the challenge of adjustment that he hid himself on the village grounds.

"We searched frantically for him," said Friedman. "We knew he felt unable to cope. But after that, we invited adult Ethiopian immigrants to come to Neve Michael and talk to the kids in Amharic -- about home and about Israel. It's helped Avi, and I think it's helped the others, too."

The Youth Aliyah way seems to be working. Within months of reaching Israel, the Ethiopian youngsters from another world are sufficiently grounded in schoolroom basics to become integrated into mainstream classes. In Neve Michael's vocational high school, 11 Ethiopian-born girls are studying nursery school teaching and clerical and hospital auxiliary work. And Ethiopian youngsters in Youth Aliyah villages across Israel grumble together with Israeli-born students, as they buckle down to study for end-of-school matriculation.

-- S. W.

# # #

REMINDER. TO EDITORS: THIS VIGNETTE IS BY  
SHARON Y. WEINGARTEN; THE OTHERS ARE BY  
WENDY ELLIMAN

**UJA**

**PRESS SERVICE**



## ETHIOPIAN JEWISH ALIYAH IN PERSPECTIVE

by Gerald S. Nagel, Editor

UJA Press Service

A clear majority of the approximately 24,500 Ethiopian Jews are now in Israel. Like earlier groups, they have come for many reasons and after a dangerous trek. They have come to study Torah in their national homeland, fulfill mitzvot (commandments) in Judaism's historical center, speed the advent of Messiah by ingathering, and escape terrible persecution and famine.

Like other groups of Jews, those from Ethiopia, who are black, bring their own culture and heritage, enriching the diversified mosaic of Israeli life. The Ethiopian branch of the world Jewish family was certified as Jewish by both the Chief Ashkenazic and Chief Sephardic rabbis of Israeli in 1973.

When Independence was declared (5 Iyar 5708, May 14, 1948), there were fewer than 700,000 Jews in Eretz Israel, but their numbers would double in three years as Jews would begin to return to the homeland they had lacked for nearly 2,000 years. Here are highlights of some major waves of immigration, that may show Ethiopian Jewish immigration in perspective.

The first Jews to arrive after Independence were 25,000 Eastern European Jews whom Britain had jailed on Cyprus for daring to seek entry into what was then a British Mandate with strict immigration quotas barring Jews. They were soon joined by other Holocaust survivors -- men and women with battered lives and tattered clothing, the vestiges of once-large and prosperous Eastern European families. They were, like immigrants to follow, without funds but with confidence and hope.

In 1949-50, Operation Magic Carpet provided a dramatic example of aliyah or the "going up" to Israel by olim (immigrants) foreseen by the Prophets (Ezra 1:3). Operation Magic Carpet airlifted to Israel virtually all 47,000 Jews in Yemen, who first had to survive an arduous journey on foot to Aden. The Yemenite Jews called the planes 'eagles' wings' after God's words, "And I bore you on eagles' wings and I brought you unto myself" (Exodus 19:4).

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Operation Ezra soon followed (1950-51), bringing out 114,000 Jews from Iraq, after Iraq enacted the Special Law Authorizing Emigration of the Jews that permitted their exodus if all their property would be left behind. They came by sea and air, over 18 months.

Throughout the 1950's the return of Jews to their homeland continued, including many from Arab lands such as Tunisia and Morocco, where oppressive anti-Semitism sparked departure.

In the early 1960's Brazilian and Argentinian Jews came in large numbers, and after the Six-Day War in 1967, Jews flocked from Britain, France, the U.S., Canada, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand.

Since the early 1970's, when Soviet emigration restrictions eased somewhat, 163,000 Soviet Jews made aliyah. And in the 1980's Jews continue to come, including those from Ethiopia, fulfilling the mitzvot of living in Israel.

The decision by Ethiopian Jews to exercise their right to make aliyah under the Law of Return (1950), which grants every Jew the right to settle in Israel, and the Citizenship Law (1952), which confers Israeli citizenship on arrival on all Jewish immigrants, fulfills an ancient dream that scores of their generations have kept alive. They leave behind rampant anti-Semitism, persecution, discrimination and oppression; domestic political, economic and military turmoil; and a sub-Saharan famine of shocking proportions.

Jewish immigrants from Ethiopia have many problems common to other olim, but include a far higher proportion -- 70 percent -- of children under 14 who arrived without parents. And each is challenged by the needed transition from an ancient culture to a contemporary Western-style democracy.

They are being helped, as have all 1.8 million other olim since 1948, by the Jewish Agency, the main beneficiary agency of the United Jewish Appeal/Federation Campaigns in the U.S. The Campaigns enable American Jews to play a role in pidyon hashevuim, redemption of the captives, and help improve the economic and social life of the people of Israel.

# # #

**UJA**

**PRESS SERVICE**

ETHIOPIA'S JEWS: CERTIFIABLY JEWISH

UJA Press Service

It could be said that the Jews of Ethiopia are the lost tribe of Dan, whom the Bible describes as "dark-complexioned." Or perhaps they are descended from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, who saw herself as "black and comely." Or maybe they were once an African tribe, converted to Judaism by Jewish merchants traveling north from southern Arabia, millenia ago.

The truth of their origins is lost in time. What is known is that Ethiopia's Jews, cut off from Judaism long before the Talmud was written or the events of Chanukah and Purim took place, remained a community apart from Ethiopia's neighboring tribes -- venerating the Torah and fervently following pre-rabbinic Jewish law and tradition.

Over the centuries, travelers made reference to a "Jewish tribe" in Ethiopia, but Ethiopian Jews were not "discovered" by the modern world until late in the 19th century. An intermittent debate began then among rabbis about the Jewishness of these Ethiopians -- an argument resolved in 1973, when both Israel's Chief Rabbis formally recognized them as Jews.

That recognition was followed in 1975 by a declaration from Israel's government that Ethiopian Jews were entitled to enter the Jewish State under the Law of Return (1950) that provides Israeli citizenship to all Jewish immigrants on their arrival.

The Jewish Agency, however, had been in active contact with Ethiopian Jewry long before. As early as 1955, it had brought 27 Ethiopian youngsters to Israel, and trained them as teachers in the Youth Aliyah village of Kfar Batya.

The youngsters returned to Ethiopia as teachers. They fired young and old with a strong yearning to return to Israel.

# # #

85-485-51

**UJA**

**PRESS SERVICE**

ETHIOPIA'S JEWS: A CAPSULE HISTORY

UJA Press Service

For more than 2,000 years, a community of devout Jews has endured in the highlands of Ethiopia. They call themselves "Beta Israel," the House of Israel, and believe themselves to be descendants of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. Some sources maintain that they were originally part of the lost tribe of Dan which separated from Moses on the journey to Israel. Others believe they were migrants from Yemen or arrived after fleeing from ancient Israel upon the destruction of the First Temple in 586 B.C.E.

From the 10th to the 16th centuries, Jews in Ethiopia formed an independent kingdom with a population reaching 500,000. But in 1632, their independence was crushed, their land was confiscated, and they were reduced to second-class citizenship. They became targets of severe persecution and of anti-Semitism which continue today.

In the 17th century, they were conquered. Many were massacred and others were sold into slavery. Their lands were confiscated and conversion was forced upon many of them.

From then until the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974, Ethiopia's Jews toiled as serfs in a feudal aristocracy, tagged with the derogatory label of "Falasha" (stranger).

The passing of Haile Selassie went unmourned by Ethiopia's 28,000 oppressed Jews, but life in the Jewish villages was not to improve for some time. The Marxist military regime that emerged after the Emperor's downfall was confronted with a secessionist war in Eritrea, a war with Somalia in the Ogaden, and civil war and tribal insurrection at home as well as widespread poverty, ignorance and disease.

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During the years of political upheaval in the 1970s, Ethiopia's Jews suffered greatly as the fighting ebbed and flowed around them, and their sons were conscripted into battle. They also became restricted in religious practice and are suspect because they aspire to live in Israel.

Aliyah, or the "going up" to Israel of Ethiopian Jews, did not become possible until after the revolution in 1979, when disorganized conditions permitted movement within the country.

Today thousands of Ethiopian Jews live in safety and peace in Israel. There, Ethiopian immigrants have begun the difficult and costly absorption program conducted by the Jewish Agency, which receives most of its funds from United Jewish Appeal/ Community Campaigns. Numerous health, cultural, vocational and educational gaps must still be bridged to make possible the transition to modern Israeli society.



BEING JEWISH IN ETHIOPIA

by Wendy Elliman

UJA Press Service

Tel Aviv on a Saturday morning in summer: observant Jews making their way home from synagogue, prayerbooks in hand. But for most of Tel Aviv, the Sabbath is a day for the beach or sidewalk cafes, for visiting relatives or household chores. Cars honk their way down hot, crowded streets. Through open windows of homes comes the aroma of cooking and the blare of radios.

Israel's secular Jews are more astonishing to the ingathering Jews of Ethiopia than any of the technological wonders of the Jewish State. In Ethiopia, a Jew who defiled the Sabbath was no longer welcome in his community.

In the villages around Lake Tan'a back in Ethiopia, these Jews began preparing for the week's holiest day on Thursdays, as their fathers had for generations before them. First came laundry, bathing and ritual immersion, because only after they had bathed were women permitted to cook the Sabbath food.

By midday on Friday, all work had ceased. Homes were tidied, stoves extinguished and embers dampened -- because the Torah (Exodus 35:3) requires: "You shall kindle no fire throughout your habitations on the Sabbath day."

Weekday clothes were exchanged for special Sabbath garments worn without belts or sashes -- because the Torah teaches that tying a knot transgresses the holy day.

When a man's shadow lengthened to 12 paces under the setting sun, Ethiopia's Jews knew that the Sabbath had begun. The village converged on the beit makdas (synagogue). Removing their shoes as they entered, the men gathered on one side, the women on the other, and the kes (priest) and his aides -- their heads covered -- assembled in the kadusta kadustan (inner sanctum).

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Facing Jerusalem, the congregation followed the kes as he prayed in the ancient Semitic tongue of Je'ez. The traditional prayers of Ethiopian Jewry attest to the Oneness of God. They recall the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, and implore redemption, the return of the exiled Jews to Zion and the coming of the Messiah.

The service over, the kes blessed the special Sabbath bread the women had baked. "Sanbat Salam" (A Peaceful Sabbath) the Jews of Ethiopia wished one another.

The Sabbath is meticulously observed by Ethiopia's Jews -- celebrated as the stern Mosaic law of the Torah commands, uninterpreted by the rabbinic law recorded in the Talmud which developed after these Jews (possibly descendants of the lost tribe of Dan) were separated from other Jews by circumstance.

Isolated from mainstream Judaism while the Second Temple still stood, Ethiopian Jews knew neither the Talmud nor the festivals of Chanukah and Purim. The Hebrew language was lost in time, and mezuzot, tefillin and tzitzit vanished from Ethiopian practices.

But their sons are circumcised on the eighth day as the Torah prescribes, and the laws of family purity so literally maintained that a wife leaves the home of her husband altogether during her menstrual period.

Rosh Hashanah is a time of repentance. It is known as the Festival of Trumpeting (Berhan Matka), even though Ethiopian Jews blew no shofar. Yom Kippur (Ba'ala Asterai) is a solemn fast day. Sukkot (Ma'ala Masalat) is an eight-day harvest festival, during which Ethiopian Jews dwell in thatched huts.

No leaven is eaten during the seven-day feast of Pesach (Pasika), when parents tell their children the story of the Exodus, and matzot (kitta) are baked on an open fire.

The Torah foresees: "For out of Zion shall come forth the Law, and the word of God from Jerusalem." Ethiopian Jews are eager to adjust their ancient customs to life here, the source of the Law and the word of God.

Guiding that adjustment is the Jewish Agency's Absorption Department, funded through the United Jewish Appeal/Federation Campaign. The department is careful to help the Ethiopian Jewish community adapt to life in Israel, while remembering the roots and traditions of their long history.

# # #



JEWISH LIFE IN THE ETHIOPIAN DIASPORA

UJA Press Service

In Ethiopia, Jews live in some 490 villages, scattered through Gondar and Tigre provinces, just north of Lake Tana, the source of the blue Nile. They are one group among an Ethiopian nation which has 28 million people, 70 languages and innumerable tribes.

Ethiopia is one of the world's poorest countries. Its devastating famine, which has gained worldwide attention, has been mounting for nearly ten years. The average life span in Ethiopia is 36 years, and the country suffers from an infant mortality rate of 15 percent. Jews, along with other minorities, are among the country's poorest.

Village life has changed little in 2,000 years for Ethiopia's Jews. Homes are grass huts with earthen floors, and the largest of the Jewish villages includes only 140 people. There is neither electricity nor running water, and only the young men, recruited for compulsory military service, and the few Jews who live in Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa, know much about 20th century life.

Ethiopian Jewish men are farmers and weavers; the women embroider, make pottery and prepare food. Some villages have schools, to which the children from neighboring villages walk -- often several miles.

Every Jewish village has a synagogue, which is a grass hut larger than other huts and contains benches and a Holy Ark. Prayer services are well attended. The religious leader is called a kes, and his chants from Scriptures are punctuated by fervent congregational "Amens."

Despite famine, an Israeli social worker who recently visited Ethiopia found a warm, friendly, undemanding people, eager for news of relatives in Israel.

"For them, Israel and Jerusalem are interchangeable," said the social worker. "At first, I was puzzled when they asked me about their 'children in Jerusalem,' when I know these children live in other Israeli towns. But then I got used to it, and would ask them, 'Where in Jerusalem does your son live?' And the answer would be: 'In Safed, Beersheba, Ashdod...'"

# # #

85-485-54

ETHIOPIAN JEWRY:  
AFTER THE ABSORPTION CENTERS  
UJA Press Service

The Jewish Agency, in conjunction with Israel's Ministry of Absorption, has been working to meet the needs of Ethiopian Jews. To follow Jewish Agency programs, the Ministry has established a longer-range master plan committee to coordinate housing, vocational training, health care and education.

Once families leave absorption centers and move into permanent housing, there are numerous basic household items such as beds, refrigerators, stoves, heaters and furniture that must be purchased. The Agency and Ministry provide for these.

Health education and preventive medicine are other areas of involvement. The Ministry of Health reports that numerous tests have been conducted for the detection and treatment of illnesses. Funds have also been allocated for the expansion of laboratory facilities, the screening and treatment of children and adults, and the testing of children's basic developmental skills.

Vocational training to prepare immigrants for existing jobs in Israel is a top priority of the committee. Steps taken to meet this objective include national training programs, on-site training in high-tech skills, development of job contacts in industry, creation of curricula tailored to the needs of industry, and helping newcomers find suitable employment.

Educational programs have been developed by the Ministry of Education in coordination with UJA-supported agencies. Research has been commissioned to monitor the learning patterns and progress of the new students. Educational experts have helped illuminate and address special problems. Special curricular programming, a training center for Ethiopian Jewish teachers, and written supplements for existing textbooks are ways Israel's school systems are adjusting to information about the new immigrants. In addition, an adolescent health education program is underway in conjunction with Youth Aliyah, Israel's program for teenagers that is supported by the UJA/Federation Campaign.

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At 150 community centers in Israel, which are aided by the Joint Distribution Committee, a United Jewish Appeal/Federation Campaign beneficiary agency, numerous programs are offered to enhance the Israeli understanding of Ethiopian Jews. Lectures and slide shows explaining Ethiopian Jewish history illuminate various aspects of Ethiopian Jewish culture with local residents. In addition, centers offer Hebrew classes, homework assistance for children, sports activities, music, dance, arts and crafts and other cultural activities to Ethiopian Jews and others. Some centers offer comprehensive educational programs for Ethiopian children and adults.

Special programs help develop Ethiopian Jewish spiritual leadership, as by yeshiva scholarships for kessim (priests) and training programs for future kessim.

Veteran Ethiopian Jewish immigrants are also trained as paraprofessionals to help newcomers through the transition period.



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QUOTATIONS

UJA Press Service

"There is no greater obligation than the redemption of captives, for the captive is like the hungry and the thirsty and the naked, and stands in danger for his life."

-Maimonides, Laws of Gifts to the Poor, VIII,10

"Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the coasts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her that travaileth with child; a great company shall return thither."

- Jeremiah 31:8

"Thus saith the Lord: I will even gather you from the people and assemble you out of the countries where ye have been scattered, and I will give you the Land of Israel."

- Ezekiel 11:17

"The State of Israel shall be open to immigration and the ingathering of exiles."

- Israeli Declaration of Independence, 1948

"The right of every Jew to enter and live in the State of Israel is guaranteed."

- Israeli Law of Return, 1950

# # # #

85-485-56

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TORAH BOOK. Ethiopian Jews have maintained the Torah as a handwritten book, not as a scroll. This Torah is hundreds of years old, these men's only possession from Ethiopia. The man on the right is a Kes, a religious leader, which means he conducts services and performs marriages, but his position comes by heredity, not ordination.

-- UJA Press Service Photo by Richard Lobell

85-485-57

UNITED JEWISH APPEAL, 1290 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10104 (212) 757-1500

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FIRST FOODS IN FREEDOM. Ethiopian Jews sit down for their first meal in Israel, at a Jewish Agency absorption center. The meal consists of potatoes, rice, rolls and tea, to provide nutrition without complicating common gastric problems.

-- UJA Press Service courtesy of Alan Shulman

85-485-58

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ON LOCATION IN ISRAEL. A United Jewish Appeal film crew records aspects of the successful absorption in Israel of an Ethiopian Jewish family. The film, seven minutes and 40 seconds, includes interviews with family members, neighbors and Jewish Agency officials, illuminating aspects of the transition from a primitive society to contemporary Israeli life. The film is available to UJA/ Federation Campaign groups from the UJA Public Relations Department, 1290 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10104 at \$45 a cassette. It is available in 3/4 inch, 1/2 inch VHS and 1/2 inch Beta 2 and 3, but it is not cleared for broadcast at this time.

-- United Jewish Appeal Photo by Richard Lobell

85-485-68

**UJA**

**PRESS SERVICE**



TOGETHER WE WILL BUST GHOSTS AND BUILD ISRAEL. Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres and a Jewish immigrant child who arrived earlier this year from Ethiopia symbolize the harmony between older and newer immigrants in Israel. Most of the thousands of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants are under 14 and arrived without parents. But the Jewish Agency is fully committed to helping meet their needs, mainly with funds contributed to the United Jewish Appeal through Operation Moses.

# # #

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SHALOM, I'D LIKE TO BE YOUR FRIEND. This is one of the many Ethiopian Jewish children, safe, fed and receiving medical care in Israel, their national homeland. Some 70 percent of Ethiopian Jews in Israel are under the age of 14 and arrived without parents. The Jewish Agency, which aids immigrants mainly with funds from UJA/Federation Campaigns, sees to it that such immigrants not only receive nutritious food, clothing and shelter, but that their medical and psychological needs are also addressed.

--UJA Press Service Photo

-- UJA Press Service Photo









EYE ON THE FUTURE. Elias is about to graduate from Beersheba College of Practical Technology. He studies electro-optics until mid-afternoon, then returns to the Beersheba Absorption Center, where he works as an interpreter and counselor for Ethiopian Jewish immigrants.

-- "Scoop 80" Photo distributed by United Jewish Appeal Press Service



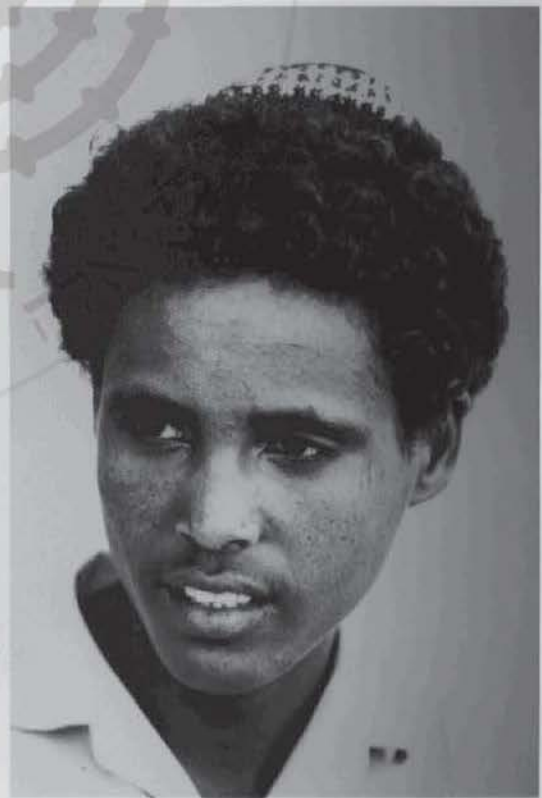
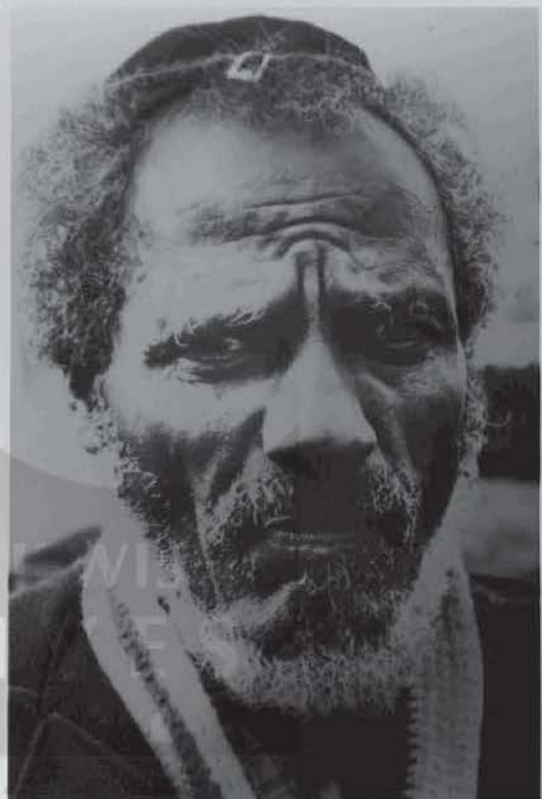
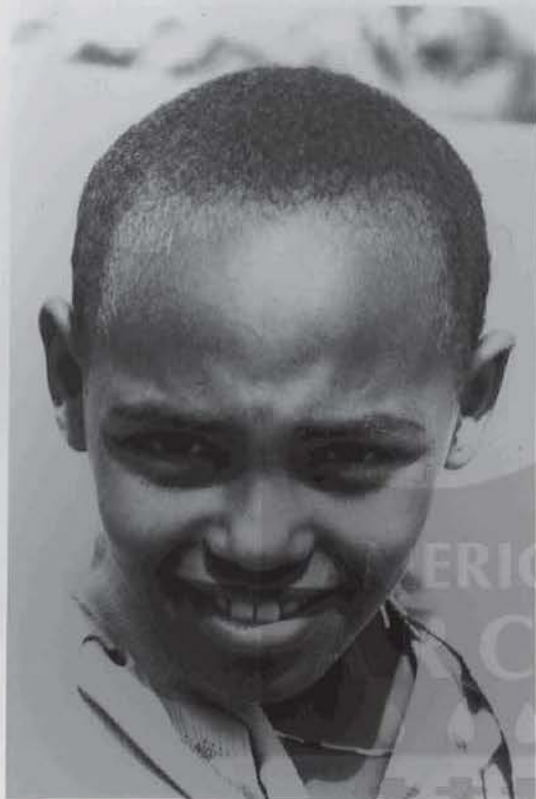
SECURITY ORIENTATIONS. As part of their orientation to Israeli society, these Ethiopian Jewish teenagers are participating in Gadna, an organization whose name is derived from the Hebrew acronym for Youth Battalions. Most Israeli teenagers join Gadna, which increases their awareness of their personal responsibility to help protect Israel in a hostile region. During some Israeli wars, Gadna members have filled in for Israeli hospital orderlies, postal workers and others called to emergency military service.

-- Government of Israel photo distributed by United Jewish Appeal Press Service



AMERICAN JEWS VISIT ABSORPTION CENTER. At the Kiryat Gat Absorption Center near Ashkelon, Israel, Marva Perrin of Palm Beach, Fla. a National Women's Division Board member, visited with Ethiopian Jewish children. Ms. Perrin participated in the National Women's Division Aviv Mission, one way that American Jews have reached out and aided Israel's newest citizens. The absorption of Jews from around the world is supported by the Jewish Agency, most of whose funds come from American Jews through the UJA/Federation Campaign.

--UJA Press Service Photo by Donna Lee Goldberg



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