

## SMALL WORLD

My father was born in Kishinev in 1884, came to New York when he was around 20, leaving his parents and several brothers and sisters. He was the only one of his family to make his way to America, though he arranged for a nephew to come after World War I. My father died in 1931, when I was three. I knew nothing about his family.

In 1973, I finally learned about that family. I learned that my father had an older brother, Zalman, who as part of the second Aliyah, came to Palestine in 1912. He settled in the Upper Galilee, on land purchased in 1892, by the Jewish Colonization Association. In 1915, it became a kibbutz, Ayelet Hashachar. My uncle Zalman was one of the founders. He returned to Kishinev in 1920, and persuaded his parents and several of his brothers and sisters to go to Palestine with him. Part of the family stayed on the kibbutz, and the others spread out across the land—to Haifa, Tel Aviv, Beersheba etc.

In 1975, I visited Israel for the first time, and met my Israeli relatives. I stayed on the kibbutz, Ayelet Hashachar, for several days and got to know the youngest brother, whose name, appropriately, was ISRAEL Shalit, and his family. I learned that the older brother had been killed in a flash flood in 1924. I was shown his grave, and the grave of his parents, in the kibbutz cemetery. I helped pick apples, ate in the kibbutz dining room, and drove with Israel's son, Moshe, to the Lebanese border, and "The Good Fence." (Writing this, I realize that I was wrong calling Israel my cousin. Since he was the youngest of my father's siblings, he was actually my uncle.)

I visited Ayelet Hashachar several more times: in 1979 with my daughter Martha, and in 1994, when Fran, David and I went to meet an Ethiopian 13 year old and his family in Haifa, bringing them gifts for his Bar Mitzvah. Through the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ) we had arranged to "twin" his and David's Bar Mitzvahs. It was our first contact with an Ethiopian Jewish family.

In 1982, my friend Sid Stern, participated in a mission to Ethiopia, organized by NACOEJ. There was much excitement in Jewish communities across the US about the "discovery" of a large, persecuted, and forgotten, Jewish community in Ethiopia, labeled falashas. The word has several meanings, as noted by another friend, Len Lyons, in his beautiful book, "The Ethiopian Jews of Israel:" exile, stranger, immigrant, outsider. An effort was undertaken to rescue our Ethiopian brothers and sisters (who preferred to be called "Beta Israel" and bring them home. Sid was active in NACOEJ, served on its board, and supervised their warehouse, which received, stored and shipped, food and clothing to both the Ethiopian Jews remaining in Ethiopia, and those who made it to Israel as part of Operation Moses in 1984, and Operation Solomon in 1991. These were massive airlifts that brought thousands of black Jews home, after more than a thousand years. Home, but to a very different culture and environment from which they left.

So, what does the story of my father's family leaving Kishinev and helping to found a kibbutz, Ayelet Hashachar, have to do with Sid, NACOEJ, and Ethiopian Jews returning to Israel? After 70 years, the kibbutz was in decline. It once had fruit trees, a dairy and

poultry farm, fish ponds, and a very impressive guest house where hundreds of tourists enjoyed wonderful accommodations. However, the days of Israel's kibbutzim were coming to an end. By the 1980s, Ayelet Hashachar's kibbutzniks were leaving, and those who stayed cut back on the farms and the orchards, and worked outside the kibbutz, like my cousin Moshe. There were no more communal dining halls, or communal anything. And the impressive guest house had fewer and fewer guests.

The Israeli government's Jewish Agency arranged with Ayelet Hashachar for it to become an absorption center for the newly arrived Ethiopian Jews, which enabled the kibbutz, which was no longer a kibbutz, to remain solvent. If the transition was hard for the kibbutzniks, it was infinitely harder for the Ethiopian Jews. It is not easy, and it takes time, to learn a new language and a new way of life. But thousands of Ethiopian Jews have done it, and are continuing to do it at Ayelet Hashachar. Some have chosen to live there permanently.

The Winter 2014 edition of NACOEJ's newsletter carried a story on its front page: "A Torah Goes to Addis Ababa for Rosh Hashanah." It reported that, a few years ago, a synagogue in the Bronx was closing, (another example of change in the Jewish world) and gave one of its Torahs to an Ethiopian congregation in Israel. The congregation was located in Ayelet Hashachar. The Ethiopian-Israeli recipients were thrilled to receive the Torah, made some repairs, and replaced the Torah's cloth mantle with a Sephardic-style case.

Rosh Hashanah was approaching, and the small Jewish community in Addis, waiting to be admitted to Israel, did not have a Torah for the High Holidays. They requested one from the Jewish Agency's Director of Ethiopian Absorption. The director turned to Ayelet Hashachar's Ethiopian congregation, and asked if they would be good enough to lend a Torah to the Jews in Addis. They happily agreed, with the expectation and hope that it will be returned, and with the Torah's return, will come the remaining Ethiopian Jews to Israel.

It may turn out that some of the Ethiopian Jews in Addis, along with the Torah, will find a home on the kibbutz that my uncle from Kishinev helped found 100 years ago.

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