



NOFAR MAHARAT AT LIONS OF JUDAH CONFERENCE

Speech delivered at International Lions of Judah Conference in New Orleans

on 10 November 2010

My name is Nofar Maharat. I was born in the fall of 1982 in a very small village in Ethiopia. I was one of seven brothers and sisters. Two of my brothers died of some illness that spread throughout the village. They were very young and that was a very sad time, but for the most part I had a very happy childhood. We lived a very simple life. Now I know that to be the case, but when I was a little girl I thought that everyone in the world lived as we did. Our lives were dictated by the seasons and the hours of daylight, our religion, and our dream of one day going to live in Jerusalem.

When I was about six or seven years old people in our village began to hear that there was a chance that the Jews of Ethiopia would finally be able to go to Jerusalem. After waiting over two thousand years we did not want to be left out so we sold our animals and farm tools, packed our clothes and bedding and moved to Gondar. Gondar is one of Ethiopia's largest cities and we wanted to be certain to be where we would not be left out and forgotten.

After a few months in Gondar we were told to move to Adis Ababa so we could be near the Israeli consulate. That was from where the Jews were going to leave to go to Jerusalem.

We stayed in Adis Ababa a few weeks and then one day when my father went to the consulate to check on what was happening he was told that everyone had to come to the consulate compound. We were going to Jerusalem.

It was exciting and frightening. I remember that we were told only to take the clothes that we were wearing and nothing else. That made sense – we were going to the land of Milk and Honey and we would have no cares and have everything that we needed.

I remember that everyone was marked with a number. The Israelis who came for us told us that the numbers were so that families would not be separated. To this day I will never forget that number- it was 45.

I was very frightened by the plane. It was big and very noisy. We had to go inside. There were so many of us. How could this big bird fly with all of us inside.

But it did fly. I must have asked my father one hundred times – when are we arriving in Jerusalem – And finally we did arrive. All the kessim and many of the older people kissed the ground when we left the plane. People were shouting and someone grabbed me and started to dance with me in his arms. I was frightened and excited. We had made it to Jerusalem. Our journey was over.



But our journey was not over. We had come thousands of kilometers in a few hours but for my family the journey from the small village in Ethiopian to the fast, big, loud Israel would take many years. I was lucky. I was only nine when we arrived in Israel and my journey was difficult, but I feel successful. We moved from an Absorption Center to a caravan village near Nahariya and finally to Pardes Channa. I was a good student and finished high school with a full matriculation. I served in National Service and am now in the final year of my B.S. degree in Administration at Rupin College. For the past four years I am a member of the local residents committee which is helping shape the future of the Ethiopian community in my town. Two years ago I ran for a seat in the municipal council. I didn't make it – this time, but I will the next time.

I want to be involved and I want to make a difference. I want to make sure that my six year old son's future will be bright and that he will take for granted what my parents never had and what I had to work so hard in order to achieve.

I want the Ethiopian community in Israel to be involved with and responsible for their own future and I want Jews all over the world and in Israel to be proud of what they have helped us achieve.

Thank you for letting me to tell you my story. I should say our story because you have allowed me to represent my community, an honor and a responsibility that I will never forget.