



Speech from the Bimah for Adelaide's Bat Mitzvah
by Grace Rodnitzki
Shabbat, 6 March 2010

To celebrate Adelaide's Bat Mitzvah and Support ENP
<http://www.enp.org.il/adelaide.aspx>

Today is the day that Adelaide marks the transition from girlhood to Jewish womanhood, with all the roles and responsibilities that accompany it.

I must tell you, from the few months I have grown to know Adelaide, we women- and the entire Jewish community- should be proud and honored to have her join our ranks.

For Adelaide's clear commitment to Tikkun Olam, her thirst for knowledge and her love of good is not only truly admirable, but trendsetting, for all to follow her lead, grown ups and children alike.

And when I heard from her family and friends that her two-year quest for selecting a project worthy of her Bat Mitzvah, a project that she would be proud of and feel honored to share with you all, culminated with the Ethiopian National Project, I was not only proud and excited, but also humbled and feel an even greater burden of responsibility to uphold our commitment to this effort which Adelaide has also found so worthy.

So I am here today to share just a glimpse of what has inspired Adelaide, and I hope will inspire you.

I look upon the Ethiopian Jewish community with awe. For two millennia they succeeded in preserving their Judaism and their longing to return to Jerusalem. And once the opportunity arose, despite the dangers and risks, they left everything behind to reach the Promised Land. Many of you may recall Operation Moses in the mid 80s, when 7,000 reached Israel after having walked for weeks and even over a month through desert and wilderness to reach Sudan, where they suffered in refugee camps until finally being airlifted to Jerusalem- 4,000 lost their lives making that journey. Or





Operation Solomon, the magical 36 hour airlift in May 1991 when 14,000 returned to Israel.

I remember, standing in my small apartment in Jerusalem, hearing the emergency radio broadcast announcing Operation Solomon. I remember, as a new immigrant myself, imagining what they must be going through. I had experienced first hand the difficulty of learning a new language and the frustrations of trying to succeed. Life in Israel is challenging.

But it is difficult for you and me to comprehend how very challenging it is for Ethiopian-Israelis. The huge cultural leap experienced is seemingly insurmountable. 70% of adults came to Israel illiterate in their own native Amharic. Imagine as an adult, needing to learn to read and write for the first time, and to somehow be faced with the task of supporting a family in a fast paced modern society.

And the children—I am a mother of three, and I see how much time, effort and resources I must invest in their education to help them to succeed. So, imagine a child whose parents do not have the skills to help with their homework, or to guide them to traverse the many obstacles they face in their day to day life.

Yet these children grow up fast, and learn the language quickly. So the gap between child and parent widens by light years. And the children, wanting to succeed and to be accepted, are exposed to risks and temptations which too often lead them towards the wrong paths.

This cycle of underperformance and underemployment result in growing socio-economic gaps which perpetuate poverty- 68% of the community lives under the poverty line.

Yet this is a community- the same community that yearned to reach Jerusalem. The same parents who dream only that their children will succeed. The same young girls and boys who dream of a bright future, but simply are missing the opportunities that will enable them to succeed.

We at the Ethiopian National Project, bring that dream within reach. We provide intensive scholastic assistance to 7th through 12th graders so they can perform well in school and pass the exams they need to qualify for university.

We displace the temptations of drugs and alcohol, vagrancy and delinquency with positive role models, myriad activities and hope and determination, by creating Youth Outreach Centers in the heart of neighborhoods where so many of these kids live.



But ENP isn't just another set of programs. ENP is different than anything that preceded it. Everything ENP does is done hand in hand with the community itself, in partnership, inclusive, ensuring that instead of merely being a beneficiary, the community plays an active role in the responses being carried out, thereby taking ownership and accountability. They, together with you, Jewish communities that want to make a difference, and the government of Israel, work side by side in a grassroots bottom up effort to see this community to success. And everything we do is externally evaluated to ensure it works. Partnership, accountability and outcomes. That's what ENP is about.

So one example—our scholastic assistance program is demonstrated by external evaluations as hugely successful—in just 18 months of participation there is a 39% increase in passing university-qualification exams.

Those youth centers—73% of the kids who come to our centers had never used any other youth service—no JCC, no youth group, nothing. Ours was the beacon of light leading them to discover their own potential.

That's our message. The potential of this community is tremendous. Their desire to succeed in Israel is huge. The only obstacle is lack of opportunity.

Through ENP we provide them with the opportunity to succeed. We do this with support from communities like yours—the Jewish Federation of Greater Charlotte also supports our work. And with individuals like Adelaide, who learn about our work, and wish to share it with others. And with you, who respond to that request to support a project that she deems so worthy.

I believe the Ethiopian-Israeli community is in a way like Jews in America: just a small percentage, yet so many have succeeded, despite all adversity. I am certain, that with an effective investment in this community, that Ethiopian-Israelis will be the pride not only of Israel, but of the Jewish world.

So I want to take this opportunity to thank Adelaide and her family. And I especially want to thank you for responding to Adelaide's request that you support this effort. It is you who helping her carry out this quest.

Together, may we ensure Israel is a light upon nations. And Adelaide, may you continue to lead and to do good, may you succeed, and may all your wishes come true.