

Ethiopian National Project

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הפרויקט הלאומי לקהילה האתיופית בישראל



David Mashasha **ENP Yanoff Master Ethiopian-Israeli Healthcare Scholar,** **4th Year Medical Student at Hebrew University in Jerusalem** **Ethiopian National Project**



David Mashasha was born in Israel in 1991 to immigrant parents who made their way by foot during Operation Moses in 1984. His parents' journey was arduous, and the pain of the losses they sustained surface even today. One of five siblings growing up in Rishon LeZion, David's seven-person family lived in a small, two-bedroom apartment and struggled to make a life in the land of Israel.

In 2004, David's eldest brother, an officer in the Israeli army, was critically injured during a Gaza operation, and his leg amputated. The tragedy of that injury was nearly insurmountable for their family- but one which prompted David, at the age of 13, to decide to become a combat doctor. The only Ethiopian-Israeli pupil in his entire school, his struggles as an outsider compounded with the challenges he faced by learning disabilities posed innumerable barriers to his success in school that he was determined to overcome.

As David witnessed his brother's long path to rehabilitation, he also began his own exploration of science. At first as a participant in a special science program at the Weizman Insitute, and then in an intensive preparatory program at university, David was able to improve his grades and demonstrate that he was capable of entering medical school. After a year-long effort, he was invited to the university entrance exams and passed. Today, he works tirelessly to fulfill his dream of becoming a surgeon so he can help amputees such as his brother. He was even invited to teach anatomy to second-year medical students.

As an Ethiopian National Project Yanoff Master Ethiopian-Israeli Healthcare Scholar, David is provided critical fiscal support and the comfort of knowing he is not a financial burden to his parents. Through this scholarship and his hard work, David serves as a role model for so many, especially for youngsters from the Ethiopian-Israeli community who, like David, have tremendous potential to succeed, despite the odds.



Telephone: 972-2-620-2025

Website: www.enp.org.il

Email: info@enp.org.il

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Speech of David Mashasha to Florida Federations

January 2015

Hello my name is David Mashasha, and I'd like to thank you all for the chance to tell my story, and for the honor of representing such an awesome endeavor as the ENP.

I'm a 23 year-old medical student in a special military program.

But first and foremost I am a passionate Israeli of Ethiopian origin.

My parents made Aliyah during operation Moses, a covert attempt to rescue Ethiopian Jews.

It all started when a family member brought news of Jerusalem to the village. Two weeks later my parents, along with my then 1-year-old big brother, left their entire life behind and went on foot on a tedious journey for months.

They encountered bandits, horrible guides, wild animals, famine, disease and even death.

During the journey my grandmother passed away, and my father had to give his mother a proper Jewish burial in an unmarked grave, not to endanger the living.

With many painful stories such as this, that part of the journey ended in a refugee camp in Sudan. There they waited for months and the suffering began anew, forced to lie about their identity, living under threat and severe poverty.

Those who died, babies among them, were buried outside the makeshift tents.

After all of that they made it to Israel in 1984. Since then my parents have been struggling with minimum wage and poor acceptance in Israel.

In 2004 my brother became the first Ethiopian company commander in the combat engineering corps. An amazing feat by all accounts, he even was on TV.

Then, on the 17th of December, a Friday morning, he called our house saying "I got injured, they think you should come". An hour later an army van was waiting to take my parents and 13-year-old me who convinced my folks to come along to the hospital.

We later saw that injured was an understatement. He lost his left leg, right beneath the knee.

That was only one of the traumatic events in my family's eventful life.

In the years to come I would grow as a man and see my brother overcome countless obstacles and trials.

My brother, one of my greatest heroes, along with my unbelievable parents, became my symbol of triumph and perseverance.

During the years after the injury, my parents had a handful to deal with-- a new baby, the loss of my father's job and my big brother's rehabilitation.

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I was helpful at home but I failed at school. My mom, feeling overwhelmed, turned to the school counselor.

During one of our weekly talks she sent me to a special program for Ethiopian youth in the Weizmann institute. There I developed my love to science and excelled in my own way.

Why am I telling you all of this?

Well, all of that resulted in me, a nearly high-school-dropout with severe ADHD, going to the preparatory school in the Hebrew University in Jerusalem for a year where I got a new Diploma with sufficient grades to fulfil my dreams of becoming a military combat doctor.

Now I'm in my 4th year, and I struggle each day to maintain that dream.

Not an easy task. But nothing compared to my family's story.

On the daily basis I encounter numerous obstacles, whether academic or financial, I got it.

The ENP has lifted an enormous amount of those burdens with a simple scholarship. Now I buy the books I need, the stethoscope I want and I eat well (!). Now I have twice the time to study harder.

A few days ago I participated in the University's white coat ceremony, representing the passage of the first 3 years of Medical School and entry into the clinical years.

My parents were there alongside my four siblings. We all got emotional.

Sadly, we were also the only Ethiopian-Israeli family in the audience.

And that's where the ENP enters, and that is reality that the ENP struggles to change on a daily basis throughout various campaign and programs. And that is why I am honored to stand before you on behalf of the ENP.

Thank you all for listening, I hope you enjoyed.

David Mashasha, January 2015