ICEJ OFFERS NEW BEGINNING IN ISRAEL FOR ETHIOPIAN JEWS

THE HEART BEHIND ICEJ AID
FROM THE PRESIDENT’S DESK

Dear Friends,

In Matthew 24, the first warning Jesus gives in his Mt. Olivet discourse on the “end times” is “do not be deceived.”

In 1943, a book was published titled *Das Antike Weltjudentum* (“World Judaism of Antiquity”). It was cowritten by two leading academics in Nazi Germany, one of whom was Prof. Eugen Fischer, head of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology. He was a leading proponent of “Social Darwinism” and the Third Reich’s racial theory. Fischer inspired the Nuremberg Laws and greatly influenced Hitler’s personal views on the Jews. The other author was the well-known German theologian Gerhard Kittel, known for his seminal dictionary on biblical Greek—which is still a standard text for many Bible students today. Kittel also was a leading figure in the *Entjudungsinstitut*, Hitler’s special institute to de-Judaize the Bible.

All this demonstrates why Jesus’ words remain so important for believers today. “Do not be deceived” is a call to be spiritually alert. It is aimed at the church rather than the world. Even the best-educated theologians are not immune to deception. Derek Prince once stated: “If you believe you cannot be deceived, then you already are deceived.” One of the most important doctrines of the Bible under attack today is that of God as Creator of the heavens and the earth. It’s the theme of this year’s Feast of Tabernacles—“Beginnings.” The lead article in this magazine addresses why this is such an important truth, even for the modern-day restoration of Israel.

Meanwhile, recent protests by Ethiopian Jews have highlighted again the urgent social needs of the Ethiopian community in Israel. In June, the director of our ICEJ AID program, Nicole Yoder, finished her master’s studies (with excellence) on this very issue. Her master’s thesis deals with strategies for better integration of Ethiopian immigrants in Israel. Not surprisingly, her study quickly attracted the interest of local community leaders and even Jewish Agency officials. Here at the ICEJ, we are blessed and proud of Nicole’s accomplishment, and we know it will help us to work even more effectively on the successful absorption of the Ethiopian community into Israeli society. In this issue, you will find that the core results of her study show how much ongoing assistance is still needed for Ethiopian Jews—even after their arrival in Israel.

God promised to plant the people of Israel back in their land, never to be uprooted again (Amos 9:15). The ICEJ is committed to this divine promise, both in prayer and in practical means. With your help, we are uniquely positioned at present to assist them in getting better rooted in the soil of Israel. Please stand with us to fulfill this prophetic mandate in our days.

I hope you are blessed by reading this edition of the *Word From Jerusalem*. And I look forward to meeting many of you in Jerusalem at this year’s Feast of Tabernacles.

Yours in Christ Jesus,

Dr Jürgen Bühler
ICEJ President

COVER PHOTO: ICEJ AID Director Nicole Yoder with a newly arrived Ethiopian mother and child (see special immigrant assistance report on pages 8-13)

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This is how our Bible, the Word of God, starts. These words are so significant the crew of Apollo 8 read them to the world while orbiting the moon on Christmas Eve, 1968.

Yet, the understanding that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth is the one biblical concept that has come under the sharpest attack in modern times. Many churchgoers today can believe much of what the Bible says, except that He is the Creator.

Not by Chance

Since Charles Darwin published his work *On the Origin of Species* in 1859, countless scientists claim to have disproved the Bible and some even say the very existence of God. According to Darwin, “survival of the fittest” was one of the main driving forces of nature, not an all-creating God. Small changes within species gave one an advantage over the other. By a gradual and random process, these better-adapted species not only survived but also eventually dislodged the weaker species.
At the time he proposed this theory, Darwin was unaware that such “small changes”—like gradually growing wings, legs, eyes, etc.—was not just an accidental change in the physiology of a creature but required a highly complex alteration in the DNA code of an organism. DNA codes are the building blocks for any living being and consist of massive arrays of highly complex molecules. Today, we know that Darwin’s “small changes” are in reality extremely improbable changes to elaborate systems.

In 2004, microbiologist Doug Axe demonstrated that to accidentally arrange the various elements of a protein called beta-lactamase (an enzyme that confers antibiotic resistance upon bacteria) would need an incredible amount of chance. Axe showed that to rearrange just this one particular enzyme by chance would be a probability of $1/10^{77}$. The number $10^{77}$ is incredibly large: a 1 followed by 77 zeros. To illustrate just how huge this number is—or how small its probability—consider that there are roughly $10^{80}$ atoms in the universe! This means the probability to form just this one protein by chance would be only slightly higher than finding one particular atom from all the particles that exist in the entire universe—obviously a task infinitely less probable than finding the proverbial needle in the haystack.¹

There are many more examples from science on how improbable life on Earth truly is. Scientists today speak about the “fine tuning” of the cosmos or the “Goldilocks theorem,” meaning that our universe on so many levels seems to be incredibly fine-tuned to make life on Earth possible. From the size of the earth, its distance to the sun, the type and size of the sun, the tilt of the planet, etc., everything seems so perfectly tuned to make life on Earth possible. Again, the probability that such conditions are found anywhere in the entire known universe is extremely unlikely.²

All these factors make the notion of evolution by chance scientifically less and less plausible. The odds against it are mounting to such a staggering degree that a whole new theory is being formulated to maintain belief in evolution—and to avoid acceptance of a creator.

In May 2007, Eugene Koonin of the National Center for Biotechnology, stipulated that our known DNA-based world is unexplainable by current probability models. He thus proposed a new approach. But instead of considering the simplest and most logical of all explanations—that there is an omniscient and omnipotent God who created our amazing world—he suggested that since our universe does not account for all the improbabilities of life on Earth, there must exist an endless amount of parallel universes that would explain the infinitesimal chances of life on this planet.

A High View of Man

Years ago, I was discussing science and God with one of my fellow students at the Weizmann Institute. When I submitted to him that he would need more faith to believe in pure chance than I need to believe in the God of the Bible, he laughed. But today, this seems to be truer than ever.

Long ago, King David knew what scientists are discovering only now: “The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge” (Psalm 19:1–2).

To believe in God and science is not a contradiction. Many of the greatest scientists of the past were inspired by the Bible when developing their theories to describe the amazing order God placed into creation.

However, the question remains: Why start the Bible with such a seemingly provocative statement: “In the beginning God created...”? Is it necessary to believe in Creator God? Why would it matter to believe in evolution by chance? A leading mega-church pastor recently stated such a start to Scripture is confusing, at least to young modern-thinking people, and advised, therefore, to avoid reading the Old Testament in general.

But it does matter because the reality of God as Creator of the heavens and the earth is central to a biblical worldview and to the way God wants us to know Him.

Early in Scripture, we find the core of mankind’s calling and identity. We are created—both male and female—in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). This separates and elevates us from the animal world and from the concepts of human origins in other religions. Being created in the image of God gives a tremendous calling to humanity to rule, cultivate, and tend the earth (Genesis 1:28; 2:15). It is a calling that encourages science, research, and technology to accomplish these ends. It gives us—even in our fallen state—the enormous hope that one day we will be like Him (1 John 3:2), and already in our fellowship with God here on Earth, we are being “transformed into the same image from glory to glory” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This truth of humans being created in God’s image also gives us something that no other creature on Earth possesses. It gives tremendous value and dignity to every human life, whether a believer or not, rich or poor, regardless of race or gender.

Jürgen Habermas, one of the leading philosophers of our time, made a profound statement. In a lecture entitled “Glauben und Wissen” (Faith and Knowledge, 2001), this self-avowed atheist expressed concern about the increasing secularization in modern societies. The very understanding that mankind is created in the image of God, he said, gives each man and woman a unique dignity so that every human deserves respect no matter what they believe. Even as an atheist, Habermas recognized that retaining the concept of Imago Dei acts as a humane safeguard for our modern society. And he viewed this boundary as eroding. Amazing words from someone who denies God.
The Results of Abandoning God

Habermas’ concerns were proven correct over 70 years ago in Germany. Some time back, I visited the exhibition at Villa Wannsee, just outside Berlin, where in January 1942 Hitler’s “final solution to the Jewish question” was rubber-stamped by various government ministries. In this beautiful lakeside setting, the decision was made to eradicate all 11 million Jews in Europe, followed by a toast with glasses of cognac.

I was intrigued to find out what drove these well-educated participants at this notorious Nazi gathering. For many years I viewed Christian anti-Semitism as the main engine behind Hitler’s murderous plans. But at Wannsee, I learned these men were driven by a pseudo-scientific theory called “Social Darwinism.” In certain ways, it was a logical extension of Darwin’s theory from animals to humans, and this led them into the depraved field of eugenics, championed by Eugen Fischer, Josef Mengele, and other Nazi “scientists.”

According to many Social Darwinists, not all races were equally fit to live. Some were ahead of others in the evolutionary process—and the race endangering humanity with degeneration the most was the Jews. German universities had special research departments to study the application of Darwinism to human societies. “Racial hygiene” and euthanasia were the tools to maintain racial purity. The result was the brutal murder of 6 million Jews. The piles of corpses from Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen show the depravity of humans who no longer saw Jews as created in the image of God but an accident of nature. In such a world, morals had no place; man became a law unto himself, and this led to the industrial slaughter of fellow humans.

Even today, man no longer considers himself as being created in the image of God but as elevated in the place of God. The moral ambiguity of our post-modern world carries few safeguards against evil. Years ago, the foreign policy chief of the European Union refused to recognize the terrorists of 9/11 as being evil. They were just misguided individuals, he said. Our world has become an increasingly dangerous place as it has thrown overboard the moral safeguards against human depravity.

The Maker of Israel

On the other hand, seeing God as Creator of the world gives us a sense of humility and accountability to our Maker. It gives ownership and final authority to Him. King David once again reminds us of these profound truths: “Know that the Lord, He is God; It is He who has made us, and not we ourselves; We are His people and the sheep of His pasture” (Psalm 100:3).

Consequently, the Creator of the heavens and the earth is also their Owner, which gives Him full authority to do “according to His good pleasure” (Ephesians 1:9).

The noted thirteenth-century Rabbi Ibn Ezra once posed the question: Why does the Bible start with “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”? His answer: “Because a time will come when men will question the right of the Jewish people to live in their own land. But as the Creator of the world, He can do as He pleases.”

The prophet Isaiah returns to this very point again and again. “It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers, who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in. He brings the princes to nothing; I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles.” (Isaiah 42:5–6)

God made everything! He is not just Creator of the heavens and the earth but “your Holy One, the Creator of Israel.” (Isaiah 43:15)

This means the Maker of Israel is also the One who “made all things” (Isaiah 44:24). He who called Cyrus to rebuild Jerusalem is the One who “made the earth and man on it” (Isaiah 45:12). And the Savior of Israel, our Redeemer, introduces Himself thusly:

But Israel shall be saved by the Lord with an everlasting salvation; you shall not be ashamed or disgraced forever and ever. For thus says the Lord, who created the heavens, who is God, who formed the earth and made it, who has established it, who did not create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: “I am the Lord, and there is no other.” (Isaiah 45:17–18)

That means the entire history and fate of Israel is in the hands of the God who made and possesses everything. While God wants us to reason with Him, to search His ways, and have dominion over the earth, He also wants us to recognize that we all are accountable to our Creator. Paul gives us this healthy warning against the arrogance of our time: “But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God? Will the thing formed say to him who formed it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (Romans 9:20).

The amazing truth of the gospel is that God invites mankind to be reconciled with Him and to rule and reign with Him as the Creator of heaven and Earth. This gives us both humility and confidence in our calling. It invites us to fight His battles but also to rest assured that His purposes will stand, even though we might not fully understand them.

Finally, it gives us incredible hope for the future, when once more the Creator of the heavens and the earth will majestically create a new heavens and a new earth “in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13).
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Over this summer, frustration reached a boiling point in Israel’s struggling Ethiopian Jewish community following the death of 19-year-old Solomon Tekah, caused by an off-duty police officer attempting to break up a street fight. Protests over his death gained national attention as thousands of Ethiopians blocked main roads, producing six-hour traffic jams that completely disrupted daily life in Israel.

Although the Ethiopians’ grief and justifiable anger aroused much public sympathy, on the one hand, the inconvenience of the traffic snarls also eroded some of that goodwill. These distressing events have underlined the urgency of addressing the Ethiopian immigrant community’s unique need to better integrate into Israeli society.

A Timely Study of a Prolonged Problem

Through the generosity of Christian supporters worldwide, the ICEJ has brought some 150,000 Jewish people home to Israel since 1980, including 1,920 Ethiopian Jews who have arrived under our sponsorship in the past three years. But there is an absorption phase for newcomers to Israel that can often pose an array of problems, and none have faced more than the Ethiopian immigrants.

As director of ICEJ AID for the past two decades, I have been privileged to serve as a conduit of Christian compassion to meet Israel’s pressing social needs. To improve our outreach efforts to new Jewish immigrants in Israel, I recently began pursuing a master’s degree at Northwest University in International Community Development and wrote my thesis on Ethiopian Immigrant Integration Strategies Within Israel’s Modern-Day Restoration. I wanted to better understand the unique challenges Ethiopian Jews face here and how they view their integration, as well as gain insight to more effectively direct our future aid efforts.

As it turns out, this research could not have been more timely, as I completed my master’s just as the Ethiopian street protests brought Israeli traffic to a halt this summer!

I had already made many connections over the years that enabled me to carry out a qualitative research study involving interviews with Ethiopian communal leaders—social and community workers, educators and students, absorption center officials and activists—who arrived in Israel during the emergency airlifts.
While that issue gets resolved and given the recent joyful arrival of 620 new Ethiopian immigrants on flights sponsored by the ICEJ. They could come because of a 2015 Israeli cabinet decision to bring the remaining 9,000 Jews in Ethiopia to Israel. However, implementation of this decision remains sporadic due to shifting government guidelines and approvals.

In June, Israel’s Ministry of Interior completed reviewing all Ethiopian immigrant applicants according to current government directives. From their perspective, the Ethiopian Aliyah can now be closed unless a new government broadens the eligibility requirements. The Ethiopian community will find this especially disheartening, as it would leave thousands stranded in transit camps in Addis Ababa and Gondar, and many families separated.

The Roots of Unrooted-ness

While that issue gets resolved and given the recent protests, we sense a strong leading to focus more efforts on helping Ethiopian Jewry find their place in Israeli society, as it continues to present significant challenges. Though initially welcomed with open arms, the earlier Ethiopian immigrants arrived in Israel from a patriarchal and agrarian society where the majority were illiterate. Their adjustment to Israel’s modern, hi-tech, egalitarian society came as a shock for which they were ill-prepared.

One recent study said that “in 2011, 39% of Ethiopian-Israeli families lived in poverty, compared with 14% of all Jewish families.” They also suffer from low educational levels, with an average of 4.6 years of education, according to a recent Jewish Agency report. This puts them at a distinct disadvantage in Israel, where 49.9% of the population has completed some form of post-secondary education. In practical terms, less education means most end up in unskilled occupations.

To improve their situation, the Israeli government began providing Ethiopian immigrant families with extra funds to help pay for schooling and homes. But the grants unintentionally resulted in segregated Ethiopian neighborhoods, as extended families preferred living near one another and most families could only afford low-income apartments.

Enormous cultural gaps have caused confusion as well. Takele Mekonen, an educator who arrived in Operation Moses in the early 1980s, explained that somewhere in the few hours between take-off and landing, “[our] social structure—that is from the top of the pyramid, the kesim [spiritual leaders], to the foundation of the family—completely melted and didn’t exist anymore. ... From the moment of Aliyah, it vanished.”

The community elders lost spiritual authority as the younger generation, eager to become Israeli, devalued their traditions in favor of new Israeli practices. Time-honored customs clashed with Israel’s more Western ways. Ethiopians also discovered their Jewish identity was not accepted by all Israelis, despite a favorable chief rabbinate ruling in the 1970s. Also, the cohesion of larger extended families began to break down, as young couples dispersed into new neighborhoods and the community’s intergenerational support system, so foundational to Ethiopian society, was lost. Each of these challenges profoundly affected their integration process.

Gender roles within families also changed overnight, leaving many bewildered. According to Avraham Abouya, an educator who arrived in Operation Solomon, 95 percent of Ethiopian immigrants came from rural villages where traditional gender roles were more pronounced.

“... from the moment of Aliyah, it vanished.”

Finding Acceptance

Indeed, many Ethiopian youths feel unwanted at home and unaccepted as Israelis. This discouragement has led many into drinking, drugs, and delinquent behavior. Israeli media reports focusing on poverty, juvenile delinquency, and violence in the family have fed negative societal views of Ethiopians without reporting on their positive contributions and potential to balance the picture.

These adjustments inevitably cause tension, family conflicts, and parenting difficulties. The resulting figures on single parenting are daunting. In 2018, the Central Bureau of Statistics reported that “among Ethiopian Israeli families some 26 percent are single-parent families, more than double the rate of the rest of the ... population (12%).” Unfortunately, these stresses combined with the slower acculturation process for Ethiopian men has translated into high rates of intimate partner homicide “more than 16 times the rate in the general population.”

All these challenges have caused the Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel to lose its balance. As one Ethiopian social worker told me: “A person has to feel that he is worthy. This is what is missing in the Ethiopian community. Since the ... community collapsed, people lack confidence ... and are looking for ways to cope.”

“... from the moment of Aliyah, it vanished.”

“The men earn more, are more important, and control the money.” But in Israel, the women have been quicker at learning Hebrew and more easily found work outside the home as cleaners and caregivers. This shift left many men disoriented and even humiliated, as their wives were now providers and wanted a say in decision-making.
The exact origin of the Ethiopian Jewish community remains unresolved. But there has likely been Ethiopian Jewish blood since the time of the Exodus when Moses married an Ethiopian woman (see Numbers 12:1).

Today, there are approximately 148,000 Ethiopian Jews in Israel (1.75% of the total population). Roughly two-thirds immigrated from Ethiopia, while one-third were born in Israel.

In 1977, Israeli authorities approved their right to rejoin the Jewish people in Israel.


Operation Solomon brought home another 14,300 in a three-day, emergency airlift in May 1991, which took place amid a civil war in Ethiopia.

Some 9,000 Ethiopians were left stranded in transit camps in Gondar and Addis Ababa over questions they had converted to Christianity.

In 2015, the Israeli cabinet approved the return of these last 9,000 Falash Mura to reunite separated families.

Around 7,000 Ethiopians claiming Jewish descent remain in transit camps in Ethiopia awaiting further government approval for them to come home to Israel.

This painful reality periodically comes to the fore in Israeli public discourse, such as when Israeli authorities decided in the late 1990s to throw out blood donations by Ethiopian immigrants due to fears of AIDS contamination, the refusal of some schools to accept Ethiopian students, or the Barkan Winery’s 2018 decision (later reversed due to public outcry) to ban Ethiopian employees from some stages of the wine-making process when inspectors for a stricter kashrut license questioned their Jewishness. Events such as these, along with the recurring police profiling and brutality, cause deep resentment in a community that feels denied full acceptance and too often bears the brunt of discrimination and cultural misunderstandings.

The cultural and language gaps, the residential segregation, and other factors have meant that many Ethiopian Jews were not positioned to connect well with the broader Israeli society. Takele Mekonen, contemplating what is yet required, concluded: “The process of education is very long. It means to create a new reality.” The desert or first-generation immigrant does not know what this new reality should look like, he added. It takes time to adjust and develop accepted new role models who can lead the way forward.

In these efforts, we are partners with the God of Israel who passionately proclaims: “I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will assuredly plant them in this land, with all My heart and with all My soul” (Jeremiah 32:41). Being planted in the Land means successful integration, and God lets us know it is one of His top priorities.

The Jewish Agency for Israel's sons to their borders, whereas our integration efforts address the challenges of melding diverse cultures, customs, and languages into one cohesive society. We also are seeking to prevent disenfranchised or disadvantaged groups from developing on the periphery of society.

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**A Call to Planting**

The ICEJ’s Aliyah work enables the rebuilding of a nation by returning Israel’s sons to their borders, whereas our integration efforts address the challenges of melding diverse cultures, customs, and languages into one cohesive society. We also are seeking to prevent disenfranchised or disadvantaged groups from developing on the periphery of society. This has happened for far too long within the Ethiopian Jewish community. With your support, ICEJ AID is committed to working with Ethiopian immigrants and Israeli community leaders to promote projects that bridge the cultural differences and assist these new arrivals to develop their full potential.

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**“A WIND BLEW AND WE KNEW WE HAD TO COME”**

An Excerpt on Ethiopian Integration

Considering the many challenges inherent in uprooting one’s family and beginning afresh in a new land, one might be tempted to ask, “Is it worth it?” No doubt there are as many answers to this question as there are immigrants.

However, since most Beta Israel immigrants arrived [from Ethiopia] based on a deep faith conviction, a sense of identity, and a purpose within the ancient narrative of the people of Israel, their arrival in the Land represents the beginning of a long-yearned-for redemption. As such, it would have been unthinkable for them to forego this journey.

Nevertheless, the reasons people make Aliyah vary. I once asked a secular Russian immigrant toward the end of the large Russian Aliyah in the 90s why they chose to come to Israel. Their reply amazed me: “I don’t know. It was like a wind blew and we just knew we had to come” (unknown). It hit me then. This “wind” is essentially what brought me to this Land, just as it has done and is doing in Jewish communities worldwide. Whether immigrants have arrived because they sought refuge from unwelcoming environments, aspired for the opportunity to rejoin their people and rebuild their nation, or because of something less definable—a wind that blew—each new wave of Aliyah contributes something beautiful to the colorful mosaic that is Israel.

When 22-year-old Nicole Yoder first stepped off the plane at Ben-Gurion Airport in the early 1990s, she never imagined Israel would become her home. Nor could she have dreamed that more than 20 years later she would serve as director of ICEJ AID, a position she has held since 2006.

Nicole’s early years were marked by a rich spiritual heritage and an understanding of the importance of Israel in God’s redemptive plan. For example, her grandfather was censured in 1946 for preaching in support of the rebirth of a Jewish state of Israel, a biblical dream that came to prophetic fulfillment only two years later. Nicole’s interest was piqued as a preteen by the Sound of Music and Corrie Ten Boom’s story, which led to her avid investigation into events surrounding World War II and the Holocaust.

Years later, while writing her master’s thesis on the challenges faced by Ethiopian Olim (new immigrants to Israel), Nicole drew heavily on her journey to Israel to create a deeper connection. As recounted in her thesis:

I remember that final wrenching goodbye as I turned to walk toward the plane with tears streaming. I wasn’t leaving on a typical vacation trip with the expectation of returning home in a few weeks, bubbling with new experiences to share. No, this trip was different. At 22 years old, I was moving halfway around the world to a country I had never visited before, and I was going alone.

I had seen it on television often the previous year, as relentless media coverage of the Gulf War revealed a populace that kept gas masks at the ready in case of a chemical attack. A million anxious questions pulled at my heart. Would I be safe there? Understood? Accepted? How would I live? Though I knew with unwavering certainty as I boarded that El Al flight to Tel Aviv that God had moved me to go serve in Israel, it would take time before I fully understood my purpose there. Nor did I suspect then that this trip was essentially one way. Since I am not Jewish and am not entitled to make Aliyah, for me being in Israel longterm would require divine intervention.

Reflecting on this today, however, I realize that the same is true for the Jewish people or any other people. Those who settle in this land, which God has called his own (Leviticus 25:23), are here only at His invitation and for the time He has purposed.

Nicole’s experience echoes throughout the ICEJ family. Our Jerusalem head office is staffed by Christians hailing from 17 different countries and six continents. With vastly different backgrounds, cultures, and spiritual journeys, ICEJ’s team dynamic becomes, in some ways, an intercultural microcosm of the nation of Israel at large. ICEJ also reflects the ongoing realization of biblical prophecies regarding the role of the nations in these days. As much as Jewish Aliyah was prophetically foreseen throughout Scripture, so was the role of believing gentiles: “Thus says the Lord God: ‘Behold, I will lift My hand in an oath to the nations, and set up My standard for the peoples; they shall bring your sons in their arms, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders’” (Isaiah 49:22).

This fall, Nicole will celebrate 20 years with the ICEJ. In her role with ICEJ AID, she has witnessed the challenges, frustrations, and issues unique to the Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel. Through her research and ongoing relationships, her now-completed master’s thesis gives a voice to Ethiopian leaders and demonstrates the crucial role vocational training and higher education play in laying a solid foundation for the Ethiopian community in Israel going forward. Ethiopian immigrants who receive the ICEJ’s assistance today are on track to become the leaders, role models, and visionaries to light the way for future generations.

Ethiopian Israelis have endured much, and yet they have big dreams and look to the future with optimism. David Elazar, director of an integration center in Rehovot, said it well: “In the early years, we were busy with survival. However, in recent years, [the idea] is catching on. ... The [Ethiopian] community doesn’t just want to lead themselves. They see themselves as capable of leading others as well.”

Now is the time to walk alongside this community and strategically assist them in breaking free of the stigmas of discrimination, poverty, and despair. At the same time, we want to raise future leaders from within. Thanks to Christian donors worldwide, the ICEJ’s investment is sowing seeds that will reap an abundant harvest for Ethiopian Olim for generations to come.

Nicole Yoder with an Ethiopian mother and child arriving in Israel.
Welcome with a hug and a kiss, I felt instantly at home with Sigal Kanotopsky, a petite yet powerful woman with enough dreams to fill the horizon.

Sitting comfortably with a cup of tea, Sigal recalled her arrival in Israel from Ethiopia at age five. Since then she has completed an academic education, married, become a mother, and is now a community leader helping other immigrants advance in Israeli society. In rapid Hebrew requiring my full attention, Sigal passionately described the frustration and vision shared by so many of her peers. If I had to sum it up, the bottom line is education, mentoring, and mediation.

For Ethiopian immigrants, education and employment are a significant measure toward making them feel equal with other Israelis. Roni Akale, a colleague operating educational programs for Ethiopian youth, agreed—pointing out that successful integration means “learning professions that position you for a better job and salary. The more you prepare and move into an important position, [the more] the gaps begin to close.”

Since most Ethiopian Jews arrived in Israel with little education amid enormous cultural upheaval, it will take time to catch up. Even second-generation Ethiopian-Israeli children enter school with huge gaps and cannot rely on educated parents to help. Support and mentors are necessary to help them dream and to encourage them to believe success is possible and personally attainable.

Naturally, after investing effort to learn a profession, one hopes to find suitable employment. Yet, for Ethiopian Olim (newcomers), unexpected barriers often arise. Intense competition for a good job is difficult for immigrants who are less connected. In addition, it is easy to overlook how cultural misconceptions unexpectedly impede acceptance.

When asked how cultural misunderstandings can impact opportunities, Ethiopian Israeli Educator Takele Mekonen explained:

In Ethiopia, the cultural code of honor was the most essential. They taught us not to make eye contact, to hide or restrain our feelings ... to measure our words and to speak little. However, in Israel, it is completely the opposite. ... You must enter with confidence and make eye contact. Here, you must speak a lot. The first words you tell about yourself must be right and authentic. ... If not, most interviews will end with this. ... If a person doesn't believe in his own ability ... he won’t pass the interview.

Hearing this, I understood why educational workshops are so critical for these newcomers.

Later, while visiting an ICEJ-sponsored employment seminar, Ethiopian-Israeli Ezra Warku drove home the point. A recent law graduate who dreams of working in a private or public sector law firm, Warku described his struggle when in an Israeli courtroom, noting: “It is instinctive to look down and not meet the eye of the judge as a sign of honor and respect. ... However, this is seen in Israeli culture as weakness.”

With lightning clarity, I visualized the disastrous consequences of
appearing weak as an attorney in Israel and agreed that—if not overcome—this would be a serious handicap.

ICEJ AID seeks to mitigate these and other challenges by investing in a variety of educational enrichment programs for Ethiopian Jews.

Two years ago, Samaon (27 years old) and his sister Liquitu (24 years old) made Aliyah with their wheelchair-bound father on an ICEJ-sponsored flight. Due to the generosity of our Christian friends, both Samaon and Liquitu are currently working to complete an intensive preacademic program to qualify for nursing studies. I met them in Beersheva, the city they now call home, and was able to gift them with a new computer to help with their studies.

Amazed by the help received, Samaon said with quiet conviction, “I want to say thank you. If you hadn’t have helped us, our economic situation would be very difficult. I feel really good in this program. Every day I am meeting new people.” He further emphasized the importance of his mentors, saying: “When I came into this program, I started to feel hope. ... They advised me ... and helped make my way clear.”

When asked about the big dream for her community, Sigal responded, “that we would be equals. That the judgment of Ethiopian-Israelis would be the same as for all other Israelis.” In other words, when Israelis look at Ethiopians, there would no longer be the immediate assumption they are uneducated, needy, or incapable.

Considering all these voices, I thought to myself: “We can do this! We can ease their way by helping them lay a good foundation for their future.”

Over the years, ICEJ AID has assisted new immigrants in Israel through crucial stepping stones on the path to successful integration by providing support for children’s educational enrichment programs, vocational training, support for single mothers, employment and other workshops, mentoring programs, youth programs, and stipends for university students.

Helping our Ethiopian friends make Aliyah is just the beginning of their journey to return to their rightful place among the Jewish people. Continued assistance in the years following their arrival is a vital need—until their new homeland truly becomes home.

Today there is a fresh urgency to address Ethiopian integration needs so the next generation will have a solid foundation and not be disenfranchised or relegated to the periphery of society.

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**Ethiopian Jews in Israel NEED OUR HELP NOW!**

The problems Ethiopian Jewish immigrants face adjusting to life in modern Israel came to the fore once again this summer, when many took to the streets in protest of their sense of alienation. The ICEJ is uniquely positioned to help, as our AID Director, Nicole Yoder, just completed a master’s degree on how best to assist the Ethiopian newcomers to fit in better. The main focus of the ICEJ’s efforts going forward will be to provide them with better education and job training opportunities, from childhood through adulthood. These are the keys to unlocking Ethiopians’ full potential in Israel.

**Help us make the future brighter for Ethiopian Jews in Israel.**

MAKE YOUR DONATION TODAY AT: www.icejusa.org/help-immigrants

For more information on the unique history and challenges of Ethiopian Jewish Aliyah and integration, watch the ICEJ’s powerful documentary film Journey of Dreams on YouTube at: www.icejusa.org/documentary
Nothing can unite people in pursuit of a common cause like hatred. And no ideological movement is more dangerous than one held together by the hatred of a demonized enemy.

Anti-Semitism—singling out the Jewish people as the root of society’s ills—is an early warning system for such hateful movements. It is often described as a “canary in the mineshaft,” warning us that a Pandora’s box of death and destruction is about to be opened.

Why is anti-Semitism so dangerous?

Unites Against a Common Enemy
In his 1951 book about mass movements entitled The True Believer, Eric Hoffer explained that mass movements are not built so much on a group’s positive beliefs or goals but on their opposition to an enemy. “When Hitler was asked whether he thought the Jew must be destroyed,” Hoffer recounts, “he answered: ‘No ... We should have then to invent him. It is essential to have a tangible enemy, not merely an abstract one.’”

Hitler understood that the ideal “enemy” would unify Germany and would deflate the resistance of the surrounding countries he intended to occupy. He knew that by demonizing the Jews, any Nazi failure could be blamed on them and every success seen as a triumph over this evil devil. When once asked if he was attributing too much importance to the Jews he exclaimed: “No, no, no! ... It is impossible to exaggerate the formidable quality of the Jew as an enemy.”

When Hitler unleashed anti-Semitism and built the Nazi movement on the hatred of Jews, he plunged the world headlong on a path of destruction. Not only were 6 million Jews exterminated but some 50 million people died in WWII. Among the dead were churchgoing Germans and Russians, not to mention hundreds of thousands of allied forces.

Today, anti-Semitism is rampant in the Muslim world. Arab leaders demonize the Jews, focusing their nation’s anger toward Israel and away from the socio-economic problems at home. Those in quest of pan-Arab leadership must use hatred of a common enemy to unite the otherwise divided Arab world behind them.

Spreads and Becomes Accepted
The founding of Israel in 1948 fueled this attitude. In their attempt to delegitimize the fledgling Jewish state, Arab leaders like Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser promoted all kinds of anti-Semitic literature and rhetoric. Arab states became propaganda machines for anti-Semitism, brainwashing generations of their people with hateful ideas about Jews.

Since then, the demonization of Jews has only grown worse. Today, state-sponsored propaganda permeates the Muslim World and anti-Semitic curriculum is common discourse.

But it’s not just happening within the Muslim world. Anti-Semitism is impossible to ignore in Europe—especially in France where synagogues, schools, and bagel shops are routinely defaced with anti-Semitic graffiti. Just this past year in Germany, following an increase in attacks against Jews, the German government warned Jewish men against wearing kippahs in public.

In the past, anti-Semitism seemed far from North America, but now even Canada and the United States are experiencing a dramatic increase in anti-Semitic activity. On October 27, 2018, American Jewry changed forever when 11 people were killed by a madman yelling “all Jews must die” at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—on Sabbath. It was the deadliest anti-Semitic attack on US soil.

Last month, two Jewish boys wearing kippahs were assaulted north of Toronto, Canada. “Juden” was found carved into the door of synagogue in Venice Beach, California. And two identifiably Jewish men were struck with stone pavers in the same week in Brooklyn, NY.

Propaganda against Jews—alarmingly similar to that used in pre-Holocaust Europe—is also surfacing on US soil. This September, swastikas, messages advocating violence against Jews, the slogan “Hitler 2020,” and stickers depicting Anne Frank painted over in red were found at the historic Fort Revere Park in Hull, Massachusetts. Newspapers are printing anti-Semitic cartoons. And a flyer was recently found in San Francisco blaming Israeli Jews for 9/11.
There is also a marked increase in hostility on college campuses toward Jewish students who support Israel, further fueling anti-Semitism among students. A roundup of anti-Semitic activity includes swastikas painted on doors, mailboxes, and landmarks, spray-painted racial and anti-Semitic graffiti in residence halls, and vandalism of Jewish symbols like menorahs. Little is done to quiet these groups.

Anti-Semitic rhetoric and propaganda once repulsive to most Americans (and unacceptable) are quickly becoming commonplace, if not accepted.

**Creates Climate for Acceptance and Growth**
This modern-day anti-Semitism has a different but still satanic edge. It involves prejudice against the Jewish movement for self-determination and the right of the Jewish people to a homeland—the State of Israel. Called “Anti-Zionism,” it can include threats to destroy the State of Israel (or otherwise eliminate its Jewish character), unfounded and inaccurate characterizations of Israel's power in the world, and language or actions that hold Israel to a different standard than other countries.

To be clear, hatred of Israel is not in and of itself anti-Semitic. However, antagonism toward Israel can mask anti-Semitism. Criticism of Israel crosses the line to anti-Semitism when all Jews are held responsible for Israel's actions, when Israel is denied the right to exist as a Jewish state and equal member of the global community, and when traditional anti-Semitic symbols are used.

Whether anti-Zionism is motivated by or the result of anti-Semitism, it’s creating a climate in which anti-Semitism is becoming more acceptable—and for which it can grow and spread.

When millions of Muslim immigrants settled in European countries like Sweden in 2015, they brought anti-Israel sentiment with them. Over a short amount of time, this negativity has become part of the culture of Europe. Jews are often conflated with Israel and held responsible for its perceived misdeeds, and the general population now thinks twice about voicing support—knowing such support has potential consequences. Europe is once again unifying against a common “enemy,” but this time it’s the nation of Israel, and anyone identified with Israel (i.e., the Jews).

The most unifying motivator in mass movements is finding a common enemy to hate and demonize. It's happening in the Muslim world and in Europe, and the soil prepped for it to happen in the West, too.

There is no room for complacency. Pandora’s box of death and destruction is about to be opened. We must stop the hatred by standing up to anti-Semitism and bigotry wherever it occurs. If we don’t, we will witness a wave of death and destruction like the world has never seen.

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