



The First Bridge 1955-1995: The Testimonies of Jewish Ethiopian Students from Kfar Batya

Azriel Kamon

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In the years 1955-1956, 27 youths were brought to Israel from the Jewish-Ethiopian community (then called Falasha). They were sent to the Kfar Batya religious youth village for their education. The first group completed its education after three years and returned to Ethiopia in order to educate and train the youth of the community and work on its behalf. The second group spent eight years in Kfar Batya and other institutions, returning to Ethiopia for the same purpose. Most of the young people tell difficult personal stories, as they were troubled by feelings of detachment, abandonment and rejection—paying a high personal price for the purpose to which they had dedicated their young lives. As Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Israel's second president, put it, they were “the first bridge” between Israel and the Jewish community of Ethiopia. Their pioneering activity on behalf of their people ultimately led to Operation Moses, Operation Solomon and various other operations which must remain covert. Today, most of the young people from these two groups reside in Israel, and the story of their adventures and personal sacrifices is told here for the first time. The Yad Tabenkin Institute for the Study of Zionism in Eastern Lands, in interviewing and documenting their stories, aims to expose the broader public to the activities of these young people, to inspire a new generation of the Ethiopian community in Israel with esprit de corps and to recognize the contribution of these groups to writing a new chapter in the history of the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

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