



ASK HERZL

TIYUL LESSON PLAN

Name of Site: Ethiopian Memorial Kiryat Gat

Region/Location: Kiryat Gat, Southern Israel

Time Period(s) Covered: Modern Israel, 1980s-modern day

Big Ideas/Concepts Covered: Minorities in Israel, Ethiopian Aliyah, Periphery of Israel

How educators can use this tiyul and the videos:

It is a jumping off point for discussions about race and religious diversity in the Jewish state. What does it mean to be a Jew? What ties us together and what can separate us? How are Jewish experiences around the world similar or different to that of American Jews?

[The video](#) is a short clip and should be used in context of the larger teaching about Ethiopian Jewry.

What age range is this for: High School - Adult, but could be adjusted

Background Information:

Ethiopian Jews trace their lineage back to the tribe of Dan, or sometimes through the line of King Solomon through the Queen of Sheba. They were cut off from most other Jewish communities for their history, although Jewish travelers write of their communities as far back as the 9th century, but most in detail in the late 1400's. In the Middle Ages it was very common for Rabbis to make halachic (religious) rulings through letters called *Responsa*. One of these responsa, from Rabbi David ibn Zimra, states that the Ethiopians he encountered were indeed Jews and one of the lost tribes.

Because the Beta Israel were cut off from the rest of the world, they developed their own customs. Their laws of kashrut vary from traditionally held Ashkenazic and Sephardic beliefs. They do not celebrate post-biblical holidays like Chanukah and Purim.

In 1973, the Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, declared that the Ethiopian Jews were full Jews, and therefore eligible to move to Israel under the Law of Return.

Operation Moses and Joshua: 8,000 or so Jewish Ethiopians were smuggled from Ethiopia, through Sudan, to Israel in 1984 and 1985

Operation Solomon: More than 14,000 Jewish Ethiopians were brought from Ethiopia to Israel in a mass airlift.

Ethiopians in Israel: There have been many challenges with Ethiopian integration into Israeli society. They face pushback from religious authorities and struggle with the cultural and language differences. Statistics show that Ethiopian Israelis have a higher rate of unemployment and poverty. Many Ethiopians express feeling pressure to become more "mainstream" with both religion and culture. Organizations have been created to help support Ethiopian Jews and celebrate their culture. See links below for more discussion.

The monument discussed in [this video](#) is in memory of the more than 4,000 Ethiopian Jews who perished trying to make *aliyah*.



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Guiding questions for discussion with students:

1. How can Israel embrace a variety of cultures while still remaining unified?
2. Ethiopian Jews came to Israel fleeing persecution and looking for the right to practice their own beliefs in safety. Israel has not always been welcoming though, causing Ethiopians to face prejudice and having the validity of their Judaism questioned. Do you think the lives of Ethiopian Jews in general are still better in Israel?
3. Even though the Ethiopian Jews have never celebrated Chanukah or Purim, do not speak Hebrew, and have different religious customs, most Israelis strongly support the Israeli government bringing them to Israel. What tie do Israelis find with Ethiopian Jews? What is the common link that unites all Jewish people?
4. The police killing of Solomon Tekah is often compared to similar instances in the United States, including the [Trayvon Martin](#) case and the killing of George Floyd. Racism in the U.S. and in Israel are different, with a significantly different history and government roles. How can each country learn from the other? Can Israelis take away anything from the riots in the U.S.? Can the U.S. learn anything from Israel about racial tension?
5. How can we use examples of racism in Israel as an opportunity to ask critical questions and push for change, *without* demonizing Israel in the public eye?

Activities that students can do around the site or topics being covered:

1. Listen to an Israeli-Ethiopian song like “Handcuffed” by rapper Teddy Neguse, “Ihiye beseder” by Cafe Shahor Hazak, or “Feker Libi” by Eden Alene. What do the lyrics tell us about the Ethiopian-Israeli experience? What do you think about the style of music? What is the impact of an Israeli song being sung in Amharic at the Eurovision?
2. Visit the Beta-Israel Village in Kiryat Gat and learn more about Ethiopian culture and the experience of Ethiopian Israelis. <https://www.facebook.com/atachlit/>

Other sources:

General information about the Aliyah movements: <http://archive.jewishagency.org/aliyah/program/301>

Statistics on Ethiopian-Israeli Economic status: <https://brookdale.jdc.org.il/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/MJB-Facts and Figures Ethiopian Population in Israel-2018 Eng.pdf>

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef:

[https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-](https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4438268,00.html#:~:text=Standing%20up%20to%20authorities%2C%20Rabbi,believed%20in%2C'%20says%20Ethiopian%20rabbi&text=Upon%20his%20death%2C%20many%20Ethiopian,'re%20the%20rabbi's%20Jews.%22)

[4438268,00.html#:~:text=Standing%20up%20to%20authorities%2C%20Rabbi,believed%20in%2C'%20says%20Ethiopian%20rabbi&text=Upon%20his%20death%2C%20many%20Ethiopian,'re%20the%20rabbi's%20Jews.%22](https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4438268,00.html#:~:text=Standing%20up%20to%20authorities%2C%20Rabbi,believed%20in%2C'%20says%20Ethiopian%20rabbi&text=Upon%20his%20death%2C%20many%20Ethiopian,'re%20the%20rabbi's%20Jews.%22)

<https://outorah.org/p/32355/>

Racial Challenges:

<http://worldpolicy.org/2016/11/17/bring-me-the-ethiopian-jews/> Page Break

Source #1

http://www.nacoj.org/images/stories/sections/curriculum/pdf/bio_tizazo.pdf



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Adapting to Life in Israel: Adana Tizazo's Story

I was born in a small village in Ethiopia called Wazba in 1985. I first came to Israel in 1991 together with my mother and my grandmother with Operation Solomon. When we first arrived here, we were given a place to live in Ashkelon before moving to an absorption center in Bat-Hatzor.

After completing my high school studies, I did two years of national service. During the first year, I worked as an assistant teacher at a primary school in the Jewish quarter of the old city. I spent the second year of my service as an assistant nurse at the Kaplan Hospital, where I worked in the oncology ward.

I am currently a second-year student of pedagogic counseling at the University of Haifa and I live in Rehovot together with my mother and my two brothers. My absorption here in Israel and assimilation of the Israeli culture were always accompanied by personal questions about my identity, and I have always felt a tension between wanting to preserve our Ethiopian traditions and way of life and wanting to become a more integrated part of the society in which I now live.

Source #2

Once they were kings. A half million strong, they matched their faith with fervor and out-matched the Muslim and Christian tribesmen around them to rule the mountain highlands around Lake Tana. They called themselves Beta Israel – the house of Israel – and used the Torah to guide their prayers and memories of the heights of Jerusalem as they lived in their thatched huts in Ethiopia.

But their neighbors called them Falashas – the alien ones, the invaders. And even three hundred years of rule, even the black features that matched those of all the people around them did not make the Jews of Ethiopia secure governors of their destiny in Africa.

“Falashas: The Forgotten Jews”, *Baltimore Jewish Times*, November 9, 1979



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Source #3

“In the case of Rav Yosef’s ruling regarding Ethiopian Jews, his reasoning is presented in Teshuvot Yabia Omer 8:11. He bases his ruling on the precedents set by two major 16th-century halachic authorities, the Radbaz and his eminent student the Maharikash, who accepted the Ethiopian Jews as Jews. Hacham Ovadia forcefully writes that once the Radbaz and the Maharikash, two pillars of Halacha, accepted the Ethiopian Jews’ tradition of descent from the tribe of Dan, our generation enjoys no right to question this ruling.

Moreover, Hacham Ovadia cites the former Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog who questioned this ruling based on the views of anthropologists who question the Jewish identity of Ethiopian Jews. Hacham Ovadia roundly rejects this view, noting that once a *chazaka* (halachic presumption) has been established of Jewish identity we enjoy no right to disturb this *chazaka* based on sources extraneous to the halachic process. Hacham Ovadia elsewhere argues that whenever there is a clash between scientists and traditional halacha, the halacha unquestionably prevails....

One might question the stability of the *chezkat kashrut* of the Ethiopian Jewish community, since 500 years have passed since the Radbaz and Maharikash issued their rulings. Hacham Ovadia dismisses this concern, noting that Ethiopian Jews zealously guarded their Jewish identity throughout the generations, even going to the extreme of requiring community members who even spoke to *nochrin* (gentiles) to immerse in a river.”

“Hacham Ovadia’s Ruling Confirmed Ethiopian Jews as Full-Fledged Jews” by Rabbi Haim Jachter



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