



Beta Israel of North Shewa



**Friends of the Beta Israel of North Shewa:
Community, Crafts and Agricultural Development**

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**Friends of the Beta
Israel of North Shewa**

*A Development program for community, artisan
crafts and agriculture in the North Shewa Zone
of Amhara and in Kechene, Ethiopia.*

Beta Israel of Ethiopia

In Ethiopia Christianity and Judaism, have blended together in a manner virtually unknown in other parts of the world. Ethiopian tradition describes that the country was Jewish prior to its Christian conversion and that the lineage of Ethiopian imperial rulers traces its heritage from the first king of Ethiopia, Melenik, the son of queen Sheba and King Solomon, and continues all the way to the last imperial ruler, Halie Selassie.

From the star of David to the Lion of Judah, Jewish icons and symbols in Ethiopian history and culture are a testament to a shared past and create potential for shared future.

Jewish Kingdoms of Ethiopia

The history of Jewish empires in Ethiopia are clouded in mystery but multiple accounts prove the existence of an independent Jewish kingdom in the Siemen region of Ethiopia. The Kingdom of Beta Israel (Kingdom of the Gideons) thrived from mid-850 until the 1600's.

The Judaism of Beta Israel is a Biblical, pre-Rabbinic Judaism adding diversity and uniqueness to the global Jewish family. The recognition of the Beta Israel communities by the State of Israel was a struggle up to the declaration in the 1970's that gave them official status.



Beta Israel of North Shewa

Beta Israel communities were not restricted to the region of Gondar, and migration occurred to various parts of Ethiopia. Reports such as those by Richard Pankhurst in the early 1990's describe communities with Jewish heritage in the North Shewa zone of Ethiopia, several hours north of Addis Ababa in the Siemen mountain range.

The Beta Israel of North Shewa migrated from the Gondar region after the fall of the Beta Israel Kingdom with the establishment of the Shewa dynasty. These communities hold ancestral roots to the Jewish communities of Gondar and have continued to live in the North Shewa region as well as the sub-city of Kechene of Addis Ababa.



The North Shewa Zone has a population of around 2.5 million people, 90% of whom live in rural settings. The average family income is \$500-600 a year (~\$1.5 a day) and over 60% of the population is below the age of 30. Agriculture is the main source of income with 80% of men and 65% of women dependent on agriculture for their livelihood. 30% of the population suffer from malnutrition and close to 50% of children are at risk of stunting due to low dietary diversity.

*The Beta Israel communities in Ethiopia provide
are a historical connection between Ethiopia,
Israel and Judaism worldwide.*





The Gedams

The North Shewa communities' religious practices are centered around Gedams. These compounds serve as monasteries, providing a type of retirement home for the aged and a haven for spiritual tranquility.

Today, there are around 15 Gedams in operation, spread throughout North Shewa. Each Gedam has agricultural fields and is self-reliant. The elderly together with orphaned children do all the daily work. Gedams are the backbone of the community and their survival assures strengthening of the community and local identity.

The leaders of the Gedams are requesting assistance in raising the living of standards at the Gedams and utilizing these community and religious centers for uplifting the social and economic well-being of the surrounding community.





A Culture of Crafts

The Beta Israel community is often referred to as Bal Ej which literally means “Craftsmen” in Amharic. In all city centers a variety of artisan crafts are produced by the community which includes blacksmiths, weavers, pottery makers and leatherworkers. These products are sold and distributed throughout Ethiopia and are symbols of national pride.



The Jebena is a traditional Ethiopian serving container used for brewing and serving ground coffee.



Shaping of clay

Firing and blackening

Coating



Agricultural Potential

The Agricultural Sector is the backbone and foundation of Ethiopian society and the national economy. While the main production system in North Shewa is mixed production of grain crops and livestock, there is high potential for vegetable and fruit production due to the agro-ecology of the zone. The widespread development and adaptation of improved production methods is critical to address issues of food and nutritional security. The area around the capital of North Shewa, Debre Brehan has a unique potential for deciduous fruit trees while other areas show potential for tropical fruits and a wide variety of vegetables.



Through Agricultural Development, the Beta Israel communities, as well as the entire region of North Shewa could participate in economic growth while addressing critical issues of malnutrition and food security.



Tikkun Olam



Tikkun Olam—The Repair of the World

If you see what needs to be repaired and how to repair it, then you have found a piece of the world that God has left for you to complete. But if you only see what is wrong and what is ugly in the world, then it is you yourself that needs repair.

— MENACHEM

MENDEL SCHNEERSON

In June 2018, Suzi Colman visited the community in Kechene and initiated a chain of events that would establish the Friends of Beta Israel North Shewa. The group includes Rabbi Joshua Bennett of Temple Israel and David Goldberg, a global Jewish leader. The group selected CultivAid, an Israeli development organization, to support a new initiative to strengthen the communities of North Shewa.

Following several assessment visits, data collection, meetings with community leaders, the group has started to work with the community to help organize and raise funding for program development.

The Friends of Beta Israel North Shewa are inspiring action and seeking support for the development of North Shewa and the community in Kechene.



Lovers of Zion Association - LOZA

The Beta Israel Communities have started to organize as an emerging Jewish Community. In Kechene, Addis Ababa the community have been organizing into social action, establishing the Lovers of Zion Association (LOZA) and currently two synagogues are in operation in Addis.

The community seeks to reconnect to its Jewish roots and strengthen their Jewish identity while connecting to the international Jewish family.

"I don't speak because I have the power to speak; I speak because I don't have the power to remain silent."

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook



Covid-19

In the wake of COVID-19 LOZA, a sewing workshop to produce facemasks was established with the support of the Friends of Beta Israel of North Shewa and CultivAid. They are currently producing 2500 masks per week supplying the community with protection. The proceeds from masks are going to the neediest community members. The goal is to expand the operations and initiate production of hand sanitizer and install hand washing stations in the city.



What we are looking to do

The Development program is focusing on three main pillars:

- 1) Jewish Community and Identity
- 2) Agricultural and Economic Development
- 3) Artisan Crafts and Market Development

In order to implement our programs, there is a need for establishing field teams on site, introduction of new technologies, and providing much needed supplies and equipment. In other words, we need your help in raising the funds to implement these programs.

The following lists some of the proposed programs

Donations can be sent to Temple Israel, which is a 501c3, please specify, “ETHIOPIA - Hidden Jews of Ethiopia Fund”.

Or through paypal at <https://beta-israel.org/donation/>

Programs and Activities

JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER IN DEBRE BREHAN To establish a center for strengthening the community and connection with the Gedams. cost: \$40,000	JEWISH IDENTITY AND STUDIES The community has requested prayer books, Hebrew lessons, a Torah and religious studies in Ethiopia. cost: \$50,000
AGRICULTURAL TRAINING CETNER Establish training and demonstration center for Vegetables and fruit tree development. cost: \$150,000	MAPPING OF GEDAMS Conduct needs assessment of all Gedams and the communities of North Shewa cost: \$45,000
CRAFT TECHNOLOGY PROGRAM New technologies and methods to be introduced to the craft production systems COST: \$100,000	JEWISH STUDIES IN KECHENE Establish a Jewish and Heberw studies program with LOZA in Kechene COST: \$50,000
KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT Implement CultivAid's knowledge and technology transfer program in Debre Brehan. COST: \$200,000	DAIRY FARM DEMONSTRATION SITE Assessment and Training of the sector in North Shewa. COST: \$50,000

GEDAM TECHNOLOGY PACKAGE

Adopt a Gedams and provide technologies related to water, solar power, agriculture, emergency supplies & food and more.

cost: \$30,000 per Gedam

COMMUNITY ORGANIZER

The Beta Israel communities seek support in organization and to bring a community organizer to train and build capacity

cost: \$75,000

POULTRY DEVELOPMENT

Lay and boiler system to improve the production of eggs and chickens for the purpose of nutrition and income generation.

cost: \$50,000

CRAFT ORGANIZATION AND MARKET DEVELOPMENT

Establish communal workshops and reorganization of the craft production towards cottage industry and distribution systems.

cost: \$50,000

COVID – 19 EMERGENCY FUNDS

Emergency food and protective supplies for the Gedams and communities of North Shewa.

cost: \$50,000

POTTERY PROGRAM

Establish of a ceramic studio with upgraded pottery wheels, new raw materials, improved ovens along with training of staff.

cost: \$75,000

Contact us

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**DO NOT BE DAUNTED
BY THE ENORMITY
OF THE WORLD'S GRIEF.
DO JUSTLY, NOW.
LOVE MERCY, NOW.
WALK HUMBLY, NOW.
YOU ARE NOT OBLIGATED
TO COMPLETE THE WORK,
BUT NEITHER
ARE YOU FREE TO ABANDON IT.**

RABBI TARFON



CultivAid is a not-for-profit organization registered in Israel and Ethiopia. The organization specializes in capacity building as well as **knowledge and technology transfer** initiatives with a focus on agricultural, water and nutrition.

CultivAid focuses on the construction of local knowledge infrastructures that creates a mechanism for empowerment and self-development of the population, to create food security and economic stability.

CultivAid's methodology combines market based, private sector development and social development initiatives.

