

# Dr. Naomi Shmuel in the newspapers

## Rainbow writer

With her first book in Hebrew for adults due to be published soon, British-born Naomi Shmuel is continuing her tradition of bridging cultural gaps

By BATISHEVA POMERANTZ

The books of British-born Naomi Shmuel were the first children's books in Hebrew to introduce



SHMUEL, WHO lives in Ma'aleh Adumim, was born in England, the youngest of four children. Her mother, writer and poet Karen Gershon, was born in Germany and came to England on the Kindertransport (see box). In 1967 and whose work has often appeared in the paper.

### Chief Rabbis defied

Defying the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, which has ruled that all Ethiopians in Israel belong to many small first weddings is symbolic conversion ceremony, an Israeli rabbi who wishes to remain anonymous has married an Ethiopian and an English girl, without noticing that the husband undergoes symbolic conversion.



It has often appeared in the paper as a child refugee separately spent some years in Israel before returning to this country. Her daughter has inherited much of her mother's literary talent and has written a very moving and compassionate book about her experiences working and living in an absorption center for Ethiopian Jews for which she is anxious to find a publisher.

**JEWISH CHRONICLE**

**All in the family**

Karen Gershon - poet, Holocaust survivor, and mother of children's book author Naomi Shmuel - came to England on the Kindertransport from Germany at the age of 15. Her life is the subject of Vanessa Rossenthal's play *Karen's Way*.

Based on Gershon's own words and poems, the play - a dramatization with her music - traces her story from an idyllic childhood in 1930s Germany, through her time as a refugee, and finally to her achievement of literary acclaim.

Gershon was born Ruth Lewenthal in Bielefeld in 1923. Alone in England at 15, she would never see her parents again.

"After the war, my mother was in denial of her Jewish identity," says Shmuel. "She felt it was better not to identify as a Jew. She married my father, Val Tripp, who was not Jewish, and in effect we grew up in a home with practically no traditional celebrations or religious content."

In the early 1960s, Gershon returned to visit Germany, then started writing poetry. Her selected poems and *My German Children* - a collective autobiography of refugees - were both published in 1966, when the Holocaust was still a taboo subject for many. By the time she died in 1993, she had published six poetry collections, three non-fiction volumes and three novels.

Former premier Zeev Shazar, a poetry lover who enjoyed Gershon's work, located her in England and invited her to participate in a delegation of writers visiting Israel in 1966.

"My mother was married with Israel, and this led to her ally with my father and siblings," relates Shmuel. "The family lived in Jerusalem for six years before returning to Cornwall."

In 2009, Val Tripp published Shmuel's book *Fragment* (in English and in Hebrew), which is based on her mother's life story and recounts her journey to find both a home and an identity. -R.P.

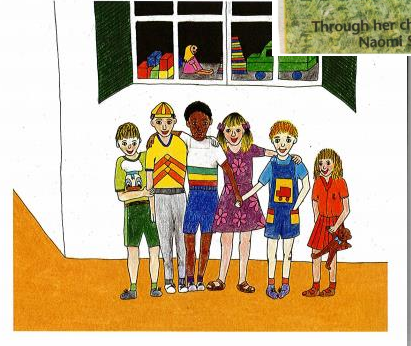
### COVER STORY: ISRAEL THROUGH ETHIOPIAN EYES

### MIXED SIGNALS

A mother's book helps her son understand his skin color

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Naomi was born in England to a family of Eastern European origin. Many Israelis are bemused, she says, when they meet her husband of seven years, Emanuel, who was born in a village called Kino in Ethiopia.



One of the gang: A page from Naomi Shmuel's popular 'Abba Hum' children's book shows her son Daniel and his nursery school playmates

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Naomi Shmuel, now Mrs Shmuel, is herself a graduate of the Yehuda Foundation for the Advancement of Citizenship in Israel, she and her husband Emanuel, who is also a member of the Cultural Competence together with...

"Cultural competence refers to a set of skills that enable people (professionals and others) to function better in a multicultural environment," she says. "It goes beyond the classroom, and is relevant in every sphere of life in Israel."

in 1967 and whose work has often appeared in the paper. Karen came to England as a child refugee from Germany and subsequently spent some years in Israel before returning to this country. Her daughter has inherited much of her mother's literary talent and has written a very moving and compassionate book about her experiences working and living in an absorption center for Ethiopian Jews for which she is anxious to find a publisher.

**Jerusalem**

**Writing society's wrongs**

Through her children's and adults' books with Ethiopian protagonists, Naomi Shmuel encourages cross-cultural understanding

"The term 'care (*tipul*) of the Ethiopians' is widely used among absorption organizations and in the Israeli media," says Ellen Goldberg, director of Amishav, the Center for Aid to Ethiopian Immigrants. "This is patronizing, suggesting they cannot take care of themselves. With other immigrant groups, the term used is 'relationship (*hiyyahsut*) to'."

The officials' insensitivity filters down to other groups and individuals too. For example, says Hebrew University anthropologist Shalva Weil, the Bnei Akiva religious youth movement volunteered to help Ethiopians in mobile homes to clean in preparation for Passover. "But this is one of their most important holidays, which they have observed for centuries



## Chief Rabbis defied

From our Correspondent  
Jerusalem

Defying the Israeli Chief Rabbinate, which has ruled that all Ethiopians in Israel wishing to marry must first undergo a symbolic conversion ceremony, an Israeli rabbi who wishes to remain anonymous has married an Ethiopian and an English girl, without insisting that the

husband undergo symbolic conversion.

The bride, Miss Naomi Tripp, an English-born anthropologist who settled in Israel more than two years ago, and

the groom, Mr Emmanuel Shmuel, who came to Israel two years ago, were married about six weeks ago, but kept the fact secret until they had received the marriage documents.



Mr Emmanuel Shmuel, 23, and Naomi Tripp, also 23, under the chupa. The officiating rabbi's face has been blacked out at his request, to protect his anonymity

## In her mother's footsteps

I have no doubt that many readers were intrigued by the photograph on page one last week of the wedding of an attractive English girl with long blond tresses and a handsome Ethiopian immigrant.

Naomi Tripp, now Mrs Shmuel, is herself a rather remarkable person. An anthropologist employed by the Van Leer Foundation to work with Ethiopian olim in Beersheva, she is the daughter of the poet Karen Gershon, who won the "Jewish Chronicle" Literary Award

in 1967 and whose work has often appeared in the paper.

Karen came to England as a child refugee from Germany and subsequently spent some years in Israel before returning to this country. Her daughter has inherited much of her mother's literary talent and has written a very moving and compassionate book about her experiences working and living in an absorption centre for Ethiopian Jews for which she is anxious to find a publisher.



# Emmanuel in Kiriyat Gat 1983



*Members of the AOF mission in a school workshop (left) and Alvin Gray who joined the mission (right) talks to two Ethiopian students in one of the ORT Training Centers.*

British Olim Publication  
By Judy Alexandru  
1987

# "UNSUNG HEROES"

*Many British settlers around the country are quietly and unobtrusively doing sterling work in their respective fields and imparting their skills, expertise and*

*goodwill to their fellow citizens while making substantial contributions to Israeli society in the bargain. 'Olim' highlights the work of six such people:*



Olim magazine

(1987)

### Naomi Shmuel



Twenty-five-year-old Naomi Shmuel (nee Tripp), from Somerset, has spent the last four years helping Ethiopian immigrants settle down to their new life style in Israel. Naomi, who studied Anthropology at London University, worked as a 'Madricha Hevrati' (youth leader) with a group of young Ethiopians who had arrived in Israel without their parents, in Kiriath Gat. Such were the problems of adjustment for the youngsters she soon became a 'surrogate' social worker and counsellor, plus friend and confidante to the group.

"I got very attached to them," she says. "The Ethiopians are a very friendly, sensitive and quiet people, in total contrast to the Israeli push, shove and scream – which makes it harder for the Ethiopians to adjust to life here. They needed help to understand that, when they were being messed around, it wasn't because they were black or Ethiopian – it's the same for everyone."

During her time with the group, Naomi studied Amharic, the native tongue of the Ethiopians. She also met her future husband, Emmanuel, who arrived in Israel in 1983.

Later, she went to Ashkelon to work for Operation Moses – the major airlift operation of Ethiopian refugees to Israel which started at the end of 1984 – "a touching and emotional experience, sometimes very happy as new arrivals met up with relatives, and, at other times, sad as people found out that close ones had not survived," she recalls.

Soon after, Naomi travelled to Ethiopia, to try to meet Emmanuel's family and relatives of other members of the Kiriath Gat group. On her return she joined the Van Leer Institute in Beersheba, to lay the groundwork for the Beta Yisrael community project for Ethiopian children. Most recently, she ran a Parent Co-operative Play Group in Beersheba.

Naomi and Emmanuel moved to Jerusalem in August with their one-year-old son Daniel.

*Reports compiled by Judy Alexandru.*

JUST FOR A moment, take a walk in their sandals. Picture hiking from your ancestral home for weeks to reach a national border in the hope of gaining entrance to a promised land. Sense the fear of being spotted by policemen or soldiers, and the panic of almost-certain torture if you are caught. Feel the pangs of hunger as you and your brethren march toward death, imprisonment – or salvation.

After a hellish trek along the highways and through the prisons and refugee camps of Ethiopia and Sudan, some 7,000 Jews made it to Israel before "Operation Moses" was exposed and terminated three years ago this month. The Jews arriving by way of this operation, which lasted barely two months, joined roughly 7,000 other Ethiopians who had previously made their way on their own or had been spirited out by the Mossad.

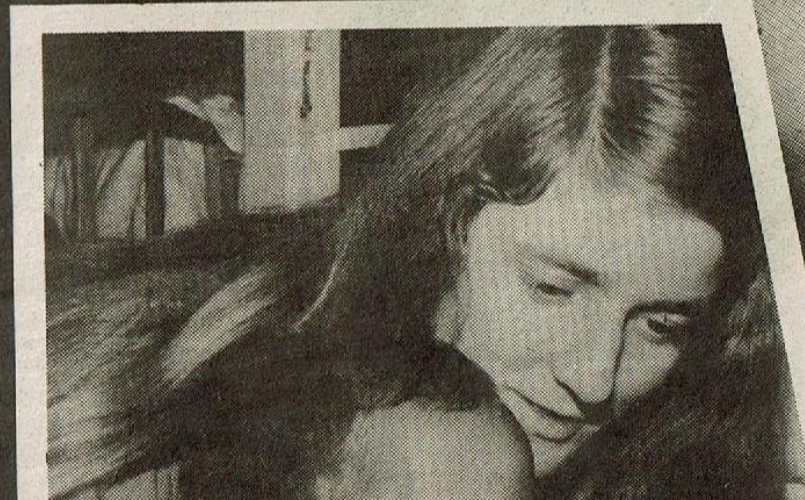
If it were a movie, the story would end on an upbeat note, as the Ethiopians touched down at Ben-Gurion International Airport. The lush soundtrack would be turned up, reunion scenes would be shown, eyes would grow moist. Then the credits would flash on the screen and the house lights would go up.

BUT THIS ISN'T cinema. And for all its vigour, modern-day Israel is a very hard-edged Promised Land. The Ethiopians arrived without money, without Hebrew, without marketable skills. Their traditional jobs were as weavers, potters, blacksmiths and farmers. A relatively primitive, agrarian people, they left a country where they were known as *Falashas*, or strangers, living in a tension-filled land

# Snapshots from the Beta Israel family album

Jerusalem Post magazine  
1.22.1988

(Right) Avraham Bayaynah.



shown staying power. Now they are Israelis. Like virtually everyone else in this land, they are protesting, griping, trying to get their fair share.

Have they been successful? Are they still a people isolated within a larger nation, or have these un-

## Ken Schachter

ingly polite and gentle people begun to carve out a niche in a country where rudeness and being disputatious have risen almost to an art form?

Can the Ethiopians, whose code of civility requires that they offer their food to bystanders, survive in a country where the national food, *felfel*, is routinely scarfed down on the dead run through crowded bus stations? Or, to put a biblical spin on the issue: Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? That question is asked in Jeremiah XIII, 23.

Where they fit in the Israeli mosaic is a question that may not be answered for some decades. Ultimately, it may be decided not by this, but by the next generation. Until then, all we can do is listen to the Ethiopians' voices and be content to look at a few snapshots from the Beta Yisrael family album...

Wherever he goes, Yeshayahu Makonen carries a reminder of the time he spent in an Ethiopian jail. He is a slight man, about 1.67 metres tall, greying at the temples. When he speaks, he gesticulates with his long, slender hands. But if



Naomi Shmuel and her son, Daniel.

## Three years after Operation Moses, how are the Ethiopians making it in this country? The answer, of course, depends on the individual.

you look closely, one of the digits is out of order. The pinky on his left hand is frozen in a crescent shape, as if he were having tea with the queen and wanted to make a good impression.

The misshapen finger, as well as some scars on his wrists, came courtesy of Ethiopian jail guards as a reward for Makonen's work in leading Jews to Sudan. But after some thought, Makonen decides, the accommodations in the Ethiopian jail were more to his liking than a jail in the Sudanese capital, Khartoum, where he lived for about six months.

"In Ethiopia, prison was better," he said without any great enthusiasm.

It seems the Sudanese applied a kind of electro-shock treatment to their prisoners. No therapeutic effects, but a great deal of screaming

and moaning were produced. These guards also showed an active interest in anatomical science, exploring new areas of the body to jolt.

The torture, the years gone by, maybe the general wear and tear, have taken their toll on Makonen. He said he first made the trek from Gondar province to Sudan in 1980 by himself. After he had scouted the way, he returned with more than 80 people. The ordinary travellers were released, but the Sudanese police decided to keep their guide.

THOSE PROBLEMS are behind him now; but since his arrival in Israel in March 1983, he has been beset by many others. In a phrase favoured by social-service workers, Makonen has "fallen through the cracks."

He has been in ill health and is

prone to fainting spells and breaking into sweats for no apparent reason. Yet his problems remain undiagnosed and untreated. He has an undemanding job at the Ashkelon power plant, but even that is sometimes a burden.

He, his wife and four of his children live in a spartan, three-bedroom flat. The building was an absorption centre that the Jewish Agency put into private hands. Makonen wants out, but after nearly five years, he has gotten precious little help from the government placement office.

In one instance, he told a placement worker he would live anywhere in central Israel, from Rehovot to Netanya. When he returned, the worker explained that there were no apartments available for him in Rehovot, as if he had limited his options to that town.

Lately, Makonen has been toting a rifle around on civil-guard duty. Even this is the result of a bureaucratic mixup. On his identity papers, Makonen's age is listed as 49, which gives him another year of military liability. But in reality, he noted, his age is 55, which should relieve him

of reserve duty.

Through it all, he persists with good humour, retaining a kind of dichotomous view of his new home.

"Israel is 100 per cent good," he said, "but it's very hard."

BABU YA'ACOV is one of the lucky ones. Or, more likely, he is someone who is unusually able and determined. Either way, he is not your typical Ethiopian case history. But he fits another mould quite easily — that of pioneer. His is a classic case of pulling oneself up by the bootstraps and reaching societal mainstream despite, rather than because of, government efforts.

For Ya'acov, the motivation to come to Israel was clearly spiritual rather than economic. His father was a prosperous cattle farmer and the family had servants at the home. By his own admission, Ya'acov was a "spoiled kid." At the same time as he was being pampered, however, a generations-old promise of a promised land was passed on to him.

During the Six Day War, Ya'acov recalled seeing his father "pray to God to save Israel. It was t

Ethiopians object to immersions

# Protesting marriage rules

**RANDI JO LAND**  
For In Jerusalem

A demonstration by about 200 Ethiopian immigrants here this week was a desperate protest against a High Court of Justice ruling which most of their community has resigned itself to accept.

The court ruled in May that Netanyahu Sephardi Chief Rabbi David Shloush act as marriage registrar for Ethiopian olim. Shloush was the only chief rabbi who approved wedding ceremonies for Ethiopian olim without requiring that the brides and grooms undergo symbolic conversions mandated by the Chief Rabbinate to remove doubts about their Jewishness.

Shloush, like all Orthodox rabbis, requires that the brides undergo ritual immersion before their weddings. Some Ethiopians are afraid that even this immersion, required of all Israeli brides, is a hidden conversion ceremony.

Though no statistics are available, a community leader estimated that 400 Ethiopian Jewish couples who refused to do the immersion before the May ruling were married by kesim, the community's own religious leaders. Their marriages are not recognized by the Interior Ministry, making it impossible to obtain benefits reserved for married couples.

"The couples who were previously married by a kes are left hanging in the air" even after the High Court decision, said Michael Corinaldi, the Jerusalem attorney who represented the Ethiopian community in



**MK Yair Tzaban meets with Ethiopian demonstrators.**

the High Court. "Although most don't care whether the rabbinate accepts them, they want to be eligible for a mortgage and other rights."

In the meantime, most of the 17,000-strong community has tired of the fight and has accepted the High Court's ruling, anthropologist Shalva Weil said. Some married by a kes are now going to Shloush for rabbinic marriages.

"Beta Yisrael has accepted the court order," Weil said. "They've accepted the immersion for women. They want to be like other Jews." Beta Yisrael is the largest organization of Ethiopian immigrants, for the most part representing the younger generation.

"This mikve idea belongs to Christians, not Jews," said Reuven

Menashe, of the Organization for Religious Tradition, which organized the demonstration across from the Knesset. "It is damaging our tradition." The organization - a small, extreme group of mostly older, more traditional olim - demanded at the demonstration that kesim be allowed to perform weddings and arrange ritual immersion for women.

Weil said, "They fear that immersion is similar to baptism in Ethiopia." Weil, a senior researcher at the Hebrew University, noted that in Ethiopia Christians tried to convert Jews for centuries through the *temquat*, a Christian conversion immersion. The Ethiopian immigrants are offended that after resisting that pressure, the Israeli rabbinate is trying to convert them.

The Ethiopians, who follow only

the Tora and not the Oral Tradition claim that such a ritual immersion is not required in the Tora and, therefore, not Jewish. In Ethiopia, Jewish women did purify themselves in running streams after menstruation or giving birth.

In 1985, Beta Yisrael staged a day sit-in in front of Hechal Shlomo against the rabbinate demand that the symbolic conversions be required and that an institution preserving Ethiopian Jewish heritage be created.

"It was very painful to see," Jerusalemite Naomi Shmuel, a migrant from Britain married Ethiopian. "These were people who walked to the Sudan, suffered in refugee camps, saw relatives die on the way and arrived with nothing. The only thing they had to hang on to was their religion. And it was thrown in their faces."

Although their demands were not accepted, within weeks many couples went to local rabbinate to get married, they were told the agreement didn't hold and they must go through the ritual immersion to be married, said Adissale, head of Beta Yisrael.

Soon afterwards, 250 representatives of the Ethiopian community met and decided that since the rabbinate did not give them an adequate answer, they would be married by their own kesim, Mesale said.

Other members of the community went to Shloush. Others did the immersion in secret so the rabbinate would not see them as traitors. They then got married by the kes the next day.

## A complicated wedding

Naomi Shmuel met the man who would become her husband, Emmanuel, while working with Ethiopian immigrants in Kiryat Gat. After her return from a two-month visit to Ethiopia, the couple decided to get married.

The Kiryat Gat rabbinate turned them away when Emmanuel, an Ethiopian oleh, said he had not undergone the conversion demanded by the Chief Rabbinate.

In early 1986 they turned to Jerusalem attorney Michael Corinaldi. He used his connections to get Netanyahu Sephardi Chief Rabbi David Shloush to register them and a Jerusalem rabbi to marry them.

Yet, even with this help, they met resistance. The Jerusalem rabbi, who wished to remain anonymous, kept changing his mind. Shloush questioned whether Naomi, an immigrant from Britain, was Jewish. Her mother was a Holocaust survivor from Nazi Germany, although her father was not Jewish.

"I don't look Jewish any more than my husband looks Jewish or anyone else does," she

one week to plan the wedding, which was held at the absorption centre in Kiryat Gat and attended by Ethiopians from all around the country.

"It was a very significant wedding for three reasons," she said. "Here was an Ethiopian marrying a non-Ethiopian. Emmanuel didn't do the conversion, which was a victory. And all the guests had been split up since their arrival in the country and this was the first time they were all together."

A wedding ceremony was first performed by a kes, the community's own religious leader, and then the rabbi from Jerusalem married the couple. The festivities lasted three days instead of the usual eight for traditional Ethiopian weddings.

Today, the couple live in Kiryat Hayovel with their two children. Naomi works for the Student Authority and Emmanuel works as a printer. They are still involved in the plight of Ethiopians who want to marry.

"We thought our wedding might open the door to other people. But I'm not sure it did. We know a lot of couples who were married by a kes and are not registered as married in their identity cards."



**Naomi and Emmanuel Shmuel were married in their identity cards.**



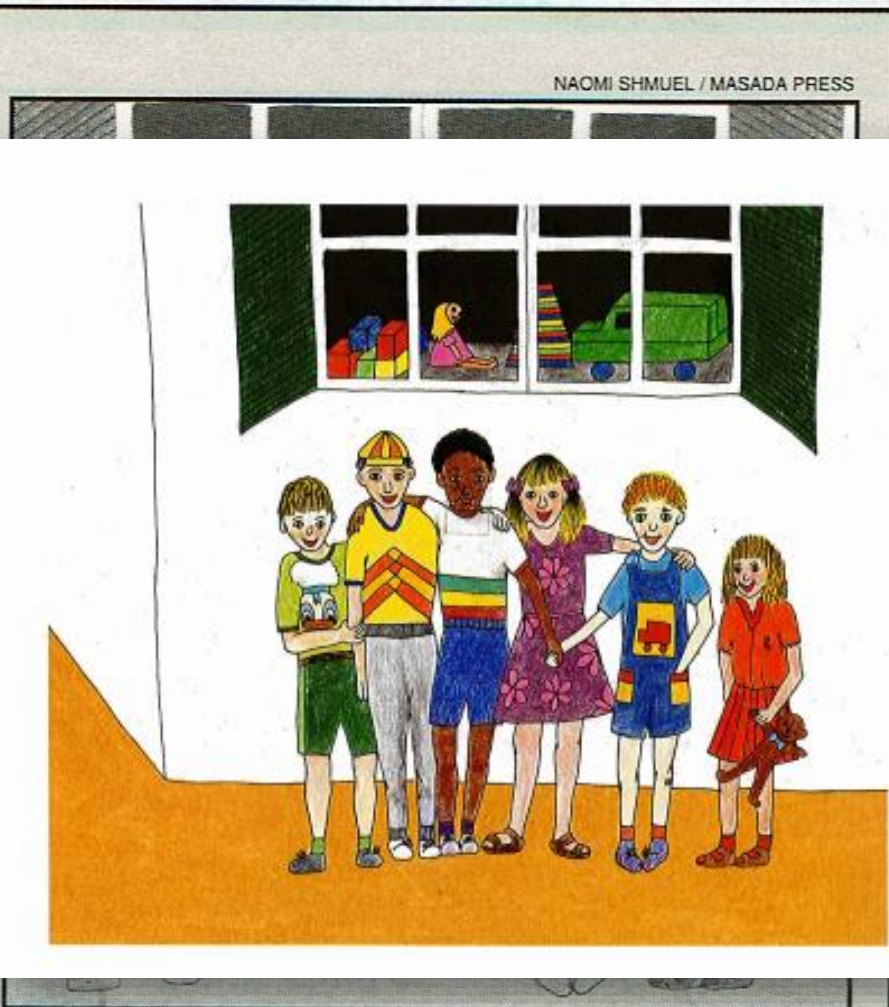
## COVER STORY: ISRAEL THROUGH ETHIOPIAN EYES

### MIXED SIGNALS

A mother's book helps her son understand his skin color

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Naomi was born in England to a family of Eastern European origin. Many Israelis are bemused, she says, when they meet her husband of seven years, Emanuel, who was born in a village called Kino in Ethiopia.



One of the gang: A page from Naomi Shmuel's popular 'Abba Hum' children's book shows her son Daniel and his nursery school playmates

one else to find me 'something to do.' "

Adds Ya'akov Avraham, 21, who's lived in Israel since December: "I am a grown man, and would like to get married, but I feel like a child. Everyone says, 'We will send you here, we'll teach you this,' but no one asks me what I want."

"The term 'care (*tipul*) of the Ethiopians' is widely used among absorption organizations and in the Israeli media," says Ellen Goldberg, director of Amishav, the Center for Aid to Ethiopian Immigrants. "This is patronizing, suggesting they cannot take care of themselves. With other immigrant groups, the term used is 'relationship (*hityahsut*) to.' "

The officials' insensitivity filters down to other groups and individuals too. For example, says Hebrew University anthropologist Shalva Weil, the Bnei Akiva religious youth movement volunteered to help Ethiopians in mobile homes to clean in preparation for Passover. "But this is one of their most important holidays, which they have observed for centuries

"Lots of people here still have an image of Africa as a primitive place and consider those who came from there to be culturally inferior. They confuse culture with technology," she says, insisting that Ethiopian Jewish culture may not have had the chance to adapt to the technology of the 20th century, but is hardly less developed than that of Western Jews.

"In some instances it may be more advanced than Western culture," Naomi adds, referring to the attitudes of her husband's relatives and friends toward her. "They always accepted and treated me as one of their own — without ever judging me because of the color of my skin." She says she's had no problems with her family, who live in England, but that she feels that Israelis — both in Beersheba where they used to live, and in Jerusalem, where they live with their five-year-old son Daniel today — have been very stand-offish toward her family.

Ironically, Emanuel Shmuel, who was a teacher in Ethiopia and is a policeman in Israel, doesn't share his wife's sense of being slighted. "People may be ignorant about my culture but I have never been treated badly," he says.

The Shmuels agree that their mixed marriage became an issue when Daniel turned three. "On the first day of nursery school, children started asking him why was he brown and why was his father brown," says Emanuel. Adds Naomi: "That was the first time he noticed the difference between his mother and father."

The problem went further: "Other children wouldn't play with him," Naomi says. "So I decided to do something about it."

What she did was write a children's book called "Abba Hum" (Brown Dad), which was recently published by Masada Press. The book tells the story of Emanuel's family, of his suffering and imprisonment when he first tried to leave Ethiopia, and of his long journey on foot to reach Israel.

"When I read the story in Daniel's nursery school, children's attitudes changed immediately," Naomi says. Fact followed fiction. The book ends with Daniel reporting delightedly that, "Now everybody in my playgroup knows that my father came from Ethiopia. And here we are all Israelis and we are friends."

And so it turned out in real life, says Naomi. "Daniel suddenly became a hero because of his father's adventures and everyone wanted to be his friend."

But, she says, it's much easier to change children's attitudes. "Adults carry a cultural load and don't really want to change." While "Abba Hum" has become very popular in Israel, Naomi has been unable to find a publisher for a similar book aimed at an adult audience.

"The publishers all tell me that a book that tells the story of Ethiopian Jewry, its richness and traditions, will simply not sell." □

Tom Sawicki

which they have observed for centuries and where their customs are even stricter than those generally accepted among other Jews today," she says.

Two full weeks before Passover — and a week before the visit by the eager youths — women in the Huldah mobile-home park, also near Rehovot, had removed all traces of *hametz* from their tiny quarters and set aside clean clothes for the holiday. Far from needing outside assistance, the women were concerned that the "helpful" volunteers would bring them various yogurt drinks. The tradition of Ethiopian Jews is to abstain from eating fermented milk products during Passover.

Another example of patronizing assistance: The Ministry of Religion produced 5,000 prayer books for Ethiopian immigrants and tried to distribute them among residents of mobile-home sites last month. But because the ministry had not bothered to consult with community representatives, all the books had to be returned to the printer for rebinding. The title on the cover read: "Falasha Prayer Book." For the Ethiopian Jews, who call themselves "Beta Israel," or House of Israel, the term Falasha — Amharic for "exiled" — is derogatory and insulting. They were called Falashas in Ethiopia by the non-Jewish population, who used the word to stress the Jews' foreignness.

Unfortunately, says Avi Bitow, national coordinator of the United Ethiopian Jewish Organization, "we are still being made to feel like Falashas in our own country by the way we are all shoved to isolated locations and kept apart from the rest of Israeli society."

Bitow came to Israel as a little boy 18 years ago. Today, his speech, mannerisms and dress are no different from a native-



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**WZPS**  
JERUSALEM

השרות  
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FEATURE FOR IMMEDIATE PUBLICATION



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***BROWN DADDY***  
***Naomi Shmuel's Family Tapestry***  
***by Susan Bellos***

**(WZPS)** In 1986, English-born anthropologist Naomi Tripp married Emmanuel Shmuel, an Ethiopian who, after a long and protracted journey, arrived in Israel in 1983.

Only after her children were born, was Naomi, daughter of German-born pioneer Holocaust writer and poet Karen Gershon, roused to write about the contrast of different cultures in an effort to create a deeper understanding in Israeli children and young adults.

WZPS correspondent Susan Bellos met with Naomi Shmuel and tells us her fascinating story.

**PHOTO:** Naomi Shmuel, pictured here at home with her three children and four of her five published books.  
WZPS photo by Sarit Uzieli.

***BROWN DADDY***  
***Naomi Shmuel's Family Tapestry***  
***by Susan Bellos***

(WZPS) When the children at Daniel's kindergarten in Jerusalem started saying, "Daniel's dad is a "cushi" (a derogatory word for African in Hebrew), his mother, British-born Naomi Shmuel, decided to take action. Naomi, who is married to Emmanuel, an Ethiopian immigrant, sat down and wrote "Aba Hum" (Brown Daddy).

"Aba Hum", like Daniel, was born of a rich cultural heritage thrown into relief by a world of differences. Naomi, with her pale, somewhat Gothic features, is herself the child of very different worlds. Her mother, Karen Gershon, was a pioneer Holocaust writer and poet who was born into a highly assimilated family in Germany where problems of home, identity and belonging abounded. Although she married British art teacher, Val Tripp, and spent most of her life in England, she was drawn to Israel and took her family to live there in 1969, when Naomi was five years old.

Karen was enchanted, and for the first time in her life stopped feeling like a refugee. But Val, a secular, humanist Englishman felt like "a permanent outsider" in Israel, Naomi relates, as did her older sister Stella. The family, bar the two older sons, returned to England in 1972.

It was painful for 11-year-old Naomi. "For years I thought that there was something wrong with me until I realized that I just felt Israeli. I couldn't relate to the English teenagers I knew who had the normal preoccupation of fashion and boys. I'd come from a country that had been at war, and the kids there seemed to me to be clued into larger issues."

Naomi wanted to go back to Israel at the age of 16, but she realized that another separation would be too much for her parents at that time. She stayed on and did a degree in anthropology at London's University College. This was to become her life's passion for she had already begun "to be fascinated by the contrast of different cultures, and how and where you were born seemed to be so very important."

After graduation, in October 1983, the young Naomi Tripp bought a one year open ticket and went to live with her brother Tony in Jerusalem. "The first thing I did was to walk my feet off tramping the old neighborhood." Six months later, Naomi decided to stay for good.

Being a qualified anthropologist, she quickly landed a job with the Jewish Agency, working with a group of young Ethiopians who had arrived in Israel without their parents in Operation Moses. They were suffering from severe culture shock but had a keen interpreter in Naomi who knew just how it felt to be an outsider. "But I at least knew the ropes. I could help them with their aliya and they provided me with what was missing

from my life - family and friends. I would sit and talk to them for hours, and then rush off and write their stories down. I was absolutely fascinated."

Officially, Naomi was a social counselor who helped the Ethiopians integrate into Israeli society by involving them in cultural events and festivities on the religious holidays. She soon noticed that they were much too distraught at being cut off from their families to take much pleasure in this sort of thing. The only things that cheered them up at that time, she noted, were trips around the country and when Israelis spontaneously showed an interest in them.

"The Bnai Akiva religious youth group invited them to their homes for the holidays but this sort of thing was rare," she said. "The Ethiopians felt that they'd come here at great sacrifice, expecting to be treated like brothers. Unfortunately, this is not what they encountered."

Among these immigrants was a young man with "a beautiful singing voice." Emmanuel Shmuel had also arrived in Israel in October 1983, though his route had been rather different. Born in a village near Gondar, Emmanuel walked part of the way to Israel, leaving nearly all his family behind. This was at the end of a protracted odyssey in which he had been captured and imprisoned, making it to Sudan by disguising himself as a priest

"Emmanuel and I spent a lot of time discussing our feelings about Israel. We clicked. We had very similar outlooks on life. There was a deep understanding between us on things like love and marriage and how we wanted to bring up our children. When we first got to know each other we spoke in English as Emmanuel was educated in English in Ethiopia. Then we gradually switched to Hebrew."

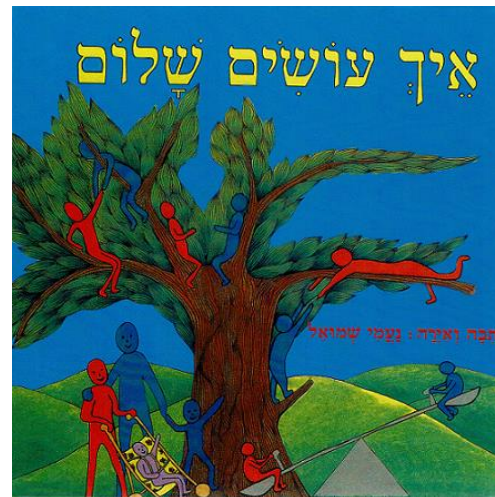
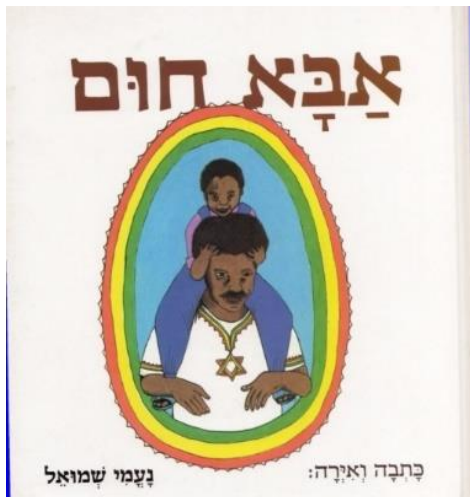
The Shmuels married in Kiryat Gat in February 1986 in one of the first Ethiopian weddings in Israel which was officiated by both a rabbi and a kes. Today they have three sons, Daniel 10, Michael 8, and Yigal 4, and they live in Ma'ale Adumim, near Jerusalem. Emmanuel works as a policeman, and Naomi, not unnaturally, works for the Ministry of Absorption.

Since "Aba Chum," Naomi has written and illustrated four more books in both English and Hebrew, all for children or young adults. "How to Make Peace" is the story of the red and blue peoples who at first despise each other but who learn to make peace through their children. "Desta and Me," published in 1994, is about an Ethiopian child who comes to Israel as a refugee and is befriended by a sabra child.

"Don't Tell the Children," aimed at slightly older children, grew out of neo-Nazi activities in Germany when a Turkish child was burned to death. Although it is a tale about chimpanzees, it is also a powerful allegory to the Holocaust. "Don't Tell the Children" is due to be published later this year, and as yet unpublished is "The Moon Is Bread," which is the story of Emmanuel's journey to Israel.

Naomi's own odyssey needed to be completed after her marriage by spending some time in Cornwall with her parents, and particularly to be reconciled with her father, who felt she had "spurned his heritage." Noting the threads in her family tapestry, Naomi sees different heritages as "enriching."

She is currently working on a biography of her mother, Karen Gershon.



WOMEN AT WORK

**A writer shows children the world is not just brown and white**

By Sue Fishkoff

One day six years ago, Naomi Shmuel's four-year-old son Daniel was playing by himself in his room, singing a nasty song he heard the other children in his Jerusalem nursery school sing about his father being "brown." Naomi Shmuel is an immigrant from England; her husband, Emanuel, is an immigrant from Ethiopia.

"I realized then it wasn't enough that we presented the issue of color in a positive way at home," says Shmuel. "If kids at school were seeing Daniel's darker skin in a negative way, I had to do something." So she wrote and illustrated a book, *Lama Abba Hum?* ("Why is Daddy Brown?"), the true story of Emanuel's dangerous trek to freedom in Israel.

The book didn't happen right away. First, Shmuel sat down with her son and took out the photos of Emanuel's family in Ethiopia. She drew a family tree and went over the story of how Daniel's father walked across the Sudanese desert as a young man, following his dream to Jerusalem.

Shmuel brought a simplified version of the story to Daniel's nursery-school teacher. Together they presented the tale to the entire class, holding up Daniel as a boy with a fascinating personal history. Soon, instead of the other children calling out, "Your daddy's brown," they were

story in 1991. It is today recommended by the Ministry of Education for reading in first and second grades.

Naomi Shmuel was born in England in 1962. Her mother, author Karen Gershon, a Holocaust survivor born in Germany, married an Englishman. The couple immigrated when Naomi was five, and lived in the capital for six years before returning to England. Naomi grew up between two worlds, feeling neither fully English nor Israeli, until she finally returned to live in Jerusalem at the age of 21.

A FEW months after her immigration, she got a job with the Jewish Agency working in an absorption center with the early trickle of illegal immigrants from Ethiopia. That's how she met Emanuel, who reached Israel the same month she did, although by a much more circuitous route.

Emanuel was arrested the first time he tried to leave Ethiopia. On his second attempt, he snuck across the border disguised as a priest, and walked across Sudan until he reached a Jewish Agency refugee camp. He was the first person in his village to leave for Israel.

"It wasn't terribly complicated for me to get involved with someone from another culture, as I've always felt a bit of a mixture myself," Naomi muses. "As immigrants, we'll never feel totally Israeli. We always feel that we're something in the middle."

Daniel, now 10, is the oldest of their three children. His mixed heritage was never an issue until he started nursery school. "He is not very dark, and could have



Naomi Shmuel with son Daniel: 'I've always felt a bit of a mixture myself.'

DEBBIE TAYLOR-ZIMELMAN

children speak English, and are various shades of brown, but all of them identify as Ethiopian, she says. "Our middle boy, who is the lightest of the three, is always taking off his shirt in the sun to get even browner," she says.

When Daniel first came home from nursery school saying the other children were calling his father names because he was "brown," Shmuel sat down with her son for a serious talk.

"I asked him, what things are brown?" Shmuel says. "He said, 'caca' is brown. So I said, 'Chocolate is brown, too. Many of the people you love are brown.' I suggested that we play a game, and think of all the things we knew that were brown. Eventually, it clicked. I remember

resisted the impulse to be a professional writer. "I'd seen my mother suffer as a writer," she says. "It's such a solitary profession. And as an English-language writer in Israel, it's so difficult to get published." When she was working with Ethiopian immigrants during Operation Moses in 1984 and 1985, she'd



shades of purple.

Shmuel's third book, *Desta Ve'ani* ("Desta and Me"), is the story of two little boys – blond, blue-eyed Eitan, and new Ethiopian immigrant Desta – who become friends and visit Jerusalem together.

Her latest book, *Don't Tell the Children*, published last year, is a Holocaust allegory for older children, using different groups of monkeys living in a jungle to explain the terrible consequences of intolerance. Shmuel wrote it in response to the deaths of two little Turkish girls killed by a fire in Germany set by neo-Nazis.

The book was considered for nomination for the Education Ministry's Ze'ev Prize, but although it is on the ministry's

him out as the boy whose father had walked all the way here.

After presenting the same program to a citywide meeting of nursery-school teachers in Jerusalem, Shmuel published the

chosen to identify with the white children," Shmuel says. "But there was a little Ethiopian girl in the class, and when the kids started to make fun of her, he defended her." The Shmuels'

taking him to the street market to buy sandals, and he said he only wanted brown ones."

Although she had always kept a journal of her own stories and illustrations, Shmuel for years

listen to their stories for hours, then go home and write it all down. She showed a collection of the stories to her mother, who suggested she focus on one person's tale instead. That suggestion, coupled with Daniel's problem in school, became her first book.

IN 1994, her second book was published. Called *Eich Osim Shalom* ("How to Make Peace"), it's the story of the Red People and the Blue People, who live on opposite sides of the same hill. The red people are good at building and making things, while the blue people are master storytellers.

While the adults are preparing for war, their children meet secretly on the hilltop to put on a play. The blue children write it, while the red children build the set. At the end of the book, everyone has intermingled, and the new children are lovely

materials, the nomination was not accepted because the book was originally written in English.

It's all part of the difficulties faced by writers working in this country in a language other than Hebrew, Shmuel says. She works full-time as the national coordinator for English-speaking students in the Absorption Ministry's student authority division.

"Critics complained that *Desta Ve'ani* gives too idyllic a picture of relations between Ethiopian and sabra children, but I feel these kids have enough real problems, so why not write them a happy story?" she comments.

When she gave a lecture on the subject at the Hebrew University, she was bombarded afterward by Ethiopian students who wanted to buy it and *Lama Abba Hum?*.

"Emanuel's nieces and nephews read the books over and over again," she says. "It gives them a sense of pride in their identity. When they see *Lama Abba Hum?* in their classrooms, they say, 'Look, that's our story.'"

## SCENE AND HEARD

### Seeing is believing, depending on what you want to believe

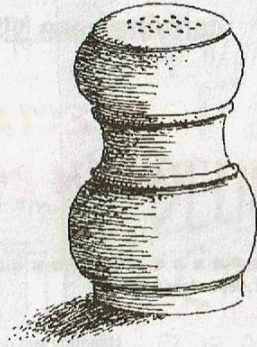
By Liat Collins

If I accidentally spill salt, I throw a pinch of it over my left shoulder, to hit the devil in the eye. Not that I believe in the devil, but you can't be too careful when it comes to superstitions. Or religion.

We all have them – superstitions that is – although not necessarily the same ones. I hate it when somebody tells me one I didn't know. As if I didn't have enough to worry about avoiding ladders, chewing thread as I sew, keeping shoes off the table and uncrossing knives. At least I've learned that the only connection between black cats and bad luck is that it is a very unfortunate feline born the undesirable color.

The thin line separating religion and superstition was stretched by Gail Hareven in *Ma'ariv* last week. The writer was inspired by the film footage and growing news coverage of Rabbi Ifergan, known as "X-ray" for his penetrating look which apparently

enables him to see into a body and find the source of medical problems. Rabbi Ifergan was shown on TV surrounded by a



dancing and singing crowd as he "cured" a crippled boy.

There are those who shun him as a fake and his followers as simple. But many of the critics are the type who study their horoscopes and carry a healing crystal.

It's easy to laugh at the showbiz healing; clearly, the crowd ignored the possibility that intensive physiotherapy could have achieved the same results. But then miracles are

things that happen when you need them most.

Hareven had the same thought: "It's yet to be proved that reflexology is more helpful in solving fertility problems than prostrating yourself on a rabbi's grave; that diagnosing an illness by studying the ear is any more accurate than Rabbi Ifergan's gaze; or that aromatic essences are better for the health than holy water," writes Hareven. It's all a matter of faith.

If the rabbi had spent two years in India instead of studying in yeshiva he might be heralded as "new age" rather than "primitive" by those who believe the Traveler's Prayer is: "Please let the line in the duty-free be short."

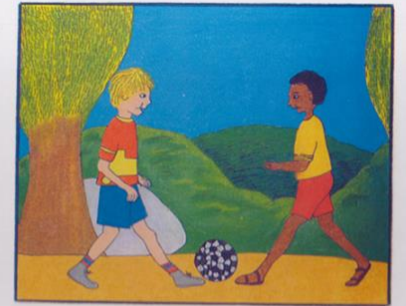
That's the irreverent thought that flicked through my mind as I watched Meretz MKs pay homage at Yitzhak Rabin's grave before the Knesset vote on Hebron. If the religious parliamentarians had first visited a rabbi's tomb, they would have been laughed at, not booed, from the Knesset plenum floor. But I can't help thinking that, *foo, foo, foo*, the distance between the two sides isn't as great as either one would like to believe.

## LET THEM EAT MARZIPAN

### "Is chocolate a luxury?"

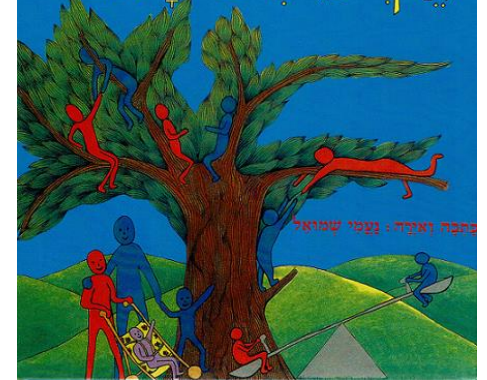
– MK Ezra Ichilov of the General Zionist Party, protesting a new tax on selected consumer goods, *The Jerusalem Post*, January 24, 1961

## דְּסֵטָה וְאָנִי



כתבה ואיירה נעמי שמואל

## אֵיךְ עוֹשִׂים שְׁלוֹם



כתבה ואיירה: נעמי שמואל

# OPINIONS/EDITORIALS



**CARL  
ALPERT**

*A View from Israel*

## Getting to understand Ethiopian Jews

HAIFA – Born in the little village of Kino, in Ethiopia, Abren Erdani, better known as Zafan, lost his father when he was age 4 and was raised by his mother, who had ambitions for the boy. He was a handsome, intelligent child, and she saw to it that he received an education – among other things, learning English.

Early in his life, he became aware that he and his brothers and sisters, though they were all black, were different from the Christian children, who called him a Falasha. He listened

intently as his mother told him that in the distant past, their people had lived in a place called Jerusalem but had been compelled to leave there and, after some wandering, had found a home in Ethiopia.

Their customs, too, were different from those of their neighbors. They observed a different Sabbath. They had dietary laws, different holidays, different prayers.

As he grew older, he decided to rejoin his ancestral people in Jerusalem, as had other Ethiopian Jews. He ran away from home, made his way on foot to neighboring Sudan, and after several misadventures and horrors, found himself in Israel, together with hundreds of others, brought over by the Jewish agency.

They lived in an absorption center and learned Hebrew, but integration into the Israeli milieu was difficult and slow. For one thing, there were frequent occasions when some Israelis commented derisively on his color.

The whole mentality was different. He found the new world strange and cold. Lacking were the emotional warmth and close family relationship that characterized the Ethiopian Beta Israel, as they were called.

Normal housing was unavailable. Jobs did not seem to materialize. They were subjected to a rigid bureaucracy,

well-meaning to be sure, but a bureaucracy nevertheless.

Furthermore, the Israeli Rabbinate questioned their Jewishness. Their dignity and pride were hurt. Zafan was among the leaders of those who staged protest demonstrations. Their hearts yearned for parents, brothers and sisters, who had been left behind in Ethiopia, where conditions were becoming intolerable.

At that time, he met a social worker who was trying to introduce cultural activities among the youth leaders. Her name was Naomi Samuel, daughter of a well-known author and poet, Karen Gershon.

The friendly relationship matured into a romantic attachment, and despite occasional friction caused by the entirely different social worlds they came from, the two were married. Even that was not easily achieved, in the face of difficulties imposed by the rabbinate.

Today, Zafan has a steady job as a policeman in Jerusalem. He, Samuel and their four sons live in the suburb of Maaleh Adumim.

This is the story of one Ethiopian Jew who managed to overcome difficulties and prejudices. Not all his compatriots have yet been as successful.

Based on her firsthand knowledge of the adjustment problems of the Ethiopians, Naomi Samuel, herself a

successful writer, decided to tell their story. She sought to give other Israelis and Jews overseas the inside story of her husband's people, their mentality, their love of Zion and the difficulties that many of them still face.

Consequently, she wrote a book, "The Moon Is Bread" (Gefen Publishing House).

For those who think of the Ethiopian Jews only in collective terms, the book is an eye-opener, depicting a scenario quite unlike our own – a world of different sentiments, emotions and loyalties.

Why is the moon bread? The book provides the answer, introducing readers to a vividly imaginative world, whose strangeness will gradually disappear as they begin to understand it. □



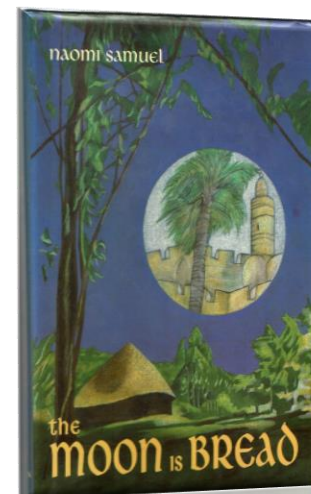
## JEWISH HERALD-VOICE

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Op-Ed  
Editorials

JEWISH REPORTER  
LAS VEGAS

## Getting to Understand Ethiopian Jews

by Carl Alpert

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Why the moon is bread? Read the book and be introduced to a vividly imaginative world, whose strangeness will gradually disappear as we begin to understand it.

Jerusalem Post  
10.12.1999

Jerusalem Report  
23.10.2000

# The Moon Is Bread

by Naomi Samuel



## The Ethiopian Exodus

Naomi tells the incredible story of her husband's personal exodus from Ethiopia to the Promised Land of his dreams.

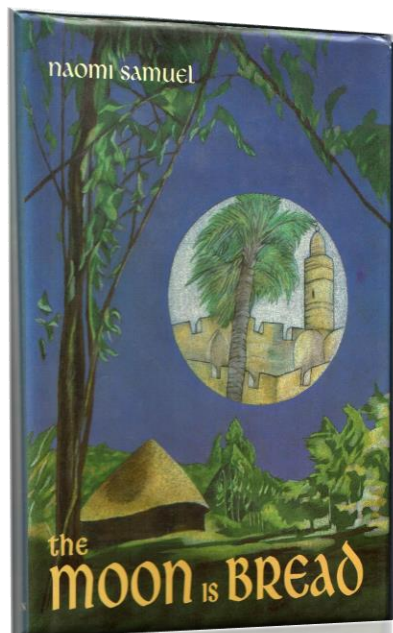
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*The Moon Is Bread* was written by a courageous and liberal woman who proudly wears the name "white Ethiopian," who does not shy away from critical looks that people - often curious, sometimes hostile - give the mixed couple. This is an interesting and intriguing book. It is worth reading. It is a must!

Dr. Samuel T. Huppert

*"This is an inspiring book about the story of immigration. A story of expectations and disillusionment. Of pain, sorrow, and grief. Of a change in self image and a struggle to preserve it. Of love and joy in a new world. The author herself succeeds in conveying the multifaceted complex experience of cultural transition and social struggle within Israeli society."*

Dr. Gadi Ben-Ezer  
Clinical Cross Cultural Psychologist and  
Author of: *As Light Within A Clay Pot*

*"The child ran forward and then hesitated, as someone afraid of clutching hold of reality for fear that it might shatter the dream. I heard her mother whisper to her, "Aizuch," and I saw the child gather strength from the courage of her people and walk out proudly into this strange, new world."*

The strange, new world is Israel; the child is one of the many Ethiopian immigrants to arrive here during the last two decades. This book is the true story of one of those immigrants: Abren Erdani, otherwise known as "Zafan" - the singer. The story covers his childhood in Ethiopia, and how as a young man he left his village home in Gondar to make the perilous journey on foot to Sudan. His capture and imprisonment did not deter him and with great determination and courage he fulfilled the dream of generations before him: To reach Jerusalem.

But would the reality of Israel be equal to that dream? And what would happen to the family he left behind? The author, who married Zafan in Israel, reveals his truly remarkable story.

JEWISH SOCIETY / CULTURE

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naomi samuel

THE MOON IS BREAD

GEFEN

# Friday Books

Friday, February 11, 2000 The Jerusalem Post

## No way to treat anyone

*THE MOON IS BREAD* by Naomi Samuel. Jerusalem and New York, Gefen. 190 pp. NIS 50/\$14.95.

By ARLYNN NELLHAUS

A biography and autobiography in one, *The Moon is Bread* tells of Abran Erdani, an intrepid Ethiopian youth. He eventually puts his energies into leaving his widowed mother, siblings and village and making the perilous journey to

Sudan and thence to Israel, the land his mother taught him was his real home.

But in Israel, he finds loneliness and heartbreak. Yet amidst the sorrow, he meets his future wife, the author, who works at the absorption center where Abren lives. Like him, she has left her family. Naomi Samuel came from England to make her life in Israel.

Samuel paints an intriguing picture of life in a Jewish Ethiopian village, its warm, intimate lifestyle

amidst startling physical beauty and a hostile population. And then, to these eager, hopeful immigrants, comes the pain of Israel and the failure of Israeli authorities to understand them, much less to recognize their values – positive values which could well be emulated.

As an example, Samuel describes how Ethiopians value privacy about life's intimate aspects. So into their midst bumbles a counselor, a young woman, probably proud of herself as having an advanced, liberal view of sex, to give these young, unhappy Ethiopians advice.

They are desperately missing their families, mourning the suicides among them, and frustrated that they aren't getting an education. Never mind, the woman tells them. They can feel better: They can masturbate. The shocked olim call the woman a whore and chase her from the premises. They smart from what they perceive as a great insult.

These Ethiopians' intelligence isn't recognized. Instead of helping them to a fulfilling education, they are left to vegetate and then, perhaps, to be funneled into manual training, even if that isn't their goal.

Yes, all people want the same. But that doesn't mean person A equals person B.

Perceptions can be far different. And so it is between Ethiopian Jews and Western society. Samuel clearly explains what separates the two and causes so much suffering and tragedy in the Ethiopian Jews' absorption.

Samuel and Abren become a couple and eventually marry. They have four sons.

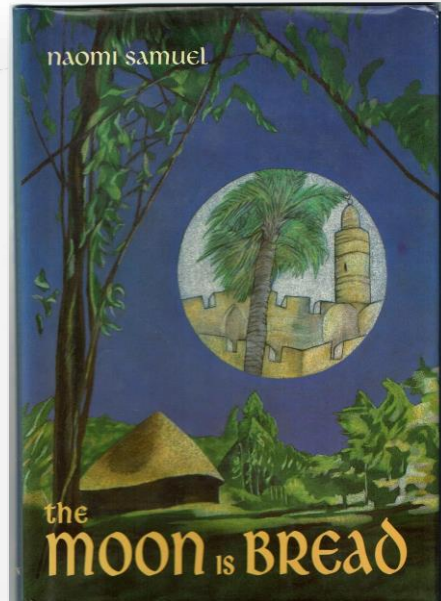
Abren now is a Jerusalem policeman. Samuel has written several children's books on Ethiopian Jews.

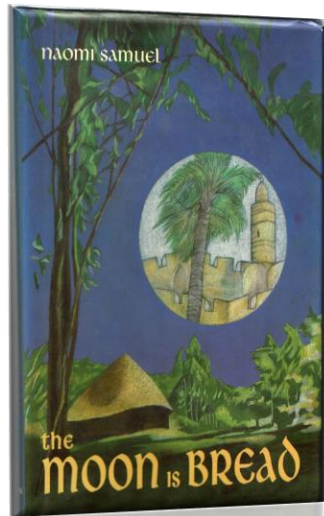
Because of Samuel's cool style and because she writes of her own life in the third person, the book has a distancing formality. She leaves disorienting gaps between the book's plot and the events taking place around it. For example, I wish she had been specific as to when Operation Moses occurred in relation to Abren's history. We're thrown back to our own recollection of events to try to put pieces of the puzzle together.

An editor should have gone through and separated one person's comments from another's reaction. Samuel, idiosyncratically, puts the two together in one paragraph, which forces the reader to backtrack to clarify who is reacting to what.

Nonetheless, *The Moon is Bread* should be required reading for every official in the Absorption Ministry. Maybe seeing the mistakes described in black and white can be helpful. And the rest of us Jews with pale skins can learn and appreciate much from it.

The title? It was Abren's explanation as a child to his younger brother of why the moon gets smaller and smaller until it disappears and then reappears bit by bit. The moon is God's bread, he says, and God takes a bite out of it until it is all gone. When he is full, he remakes it piece by piece until it is round again.





BOOKS

# Dreaming of Home

Growing up in Ethiopia, Abren Erdani was regaled by his mother with tales of the Promised Land. But the reality he faced when he got here made him long for the place he had left.

Adina Kay

*"This is our village. In my dreams it still rests peacefully in between the eucalyptus trees, and the Gorezen River floats gently by. There is the smell of freshly ground coffee roasting in the open fire, and the sound of children laughing as they play in the grass. The cattle are browsing on the hillside, and in the distance the white peaks of the Rasdejen Mountains touch the sky. There is a rich feeling of comfort in my dreams, which melts as I wake, and, opening my eyes, I remember that it is all gone."*

ONE OF THE POINTS THAT Naomi Samuel takes pains to make throughout her account of her husband's childhood in Ethiopia is that life in the ancient Jewish community of Kino — a village near the Quara region in the northern province of Gondar — was good, at least for a time.

Though the author omits some basic biographical information about her subject, it seems fairly safe to assume that Abren (Zafan) Erdani was born in the late 60s and left Ethiopia for Israel in the early 80s, probably as part of Operation Moses, the airlift that brought approximately 7,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel in 1984-85.

Samuel, a British-born Israeli who was working as a counselor for Ethiopian immigrants, met Zafan (the word means "singer" in Amharic, a name Erdani picked up as a child in Kino, because he was always humming) and fell in love with him at the absorption center to which he was sent on arrival. As she skips from past to present, switching voices from chapter to chapter, the author presents the story of Zafan's coming to Israel, from his vantage point and her own, giving the book a satisfying balance.

The life that Zafan recalls from his years growing up in Kino was rich, both materially and spiritually, and he'd miss it once he was in Israel — the promised land of his mother's tales that could never live up to that promise. She compared Ethiopian

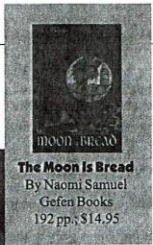


**'FREEDOM SUDDENLY FELT LIKE A TRAP':** Samuel gives a compelling description of her husband's first taste of Israel

Jewry to an olive tree that had been uprooted from its grove and replanted far away. It's a message that apparently stayed with him, though we're never told just when or why Israel went from being the place about which his mother unnecessarily filled his head with romantic visions, to the destination he would stubbornly and repeatedly risk his life to reach.

The story becomes more convincing once Samuel, who herself came to Israel on her own as an adult, begins detailing events that she herself witnessed. Adopting Zafan's point of view, she gives a compelling description of his first taste of Sabras and their land, and of the racial and cultural issues that an African immigrant faces here.

Assigned to the large absorption center in the depressed southern town of Kiryat Gat, Zafan longed bitterly for his family. He and his fellow Ethiopians studied Hebrew, but the other classes promised to the new immigrants, in subjects such as English and mathematics, were repeatedly postponed, and textbooks that were said to have been ordered never arrived. Samuel devotes several pages to describing the feelings of powerlessness and frustration that Zafan experienced. "What had once seemed like freedom — coming here to Israel — suddenly felt like a trap. It had taken him time to realize that he could never go back ... It was after one such rest-



less night that, crossing the street, he heard a child call after him, 'Kushi — Nigger,' and a stone fell at his feet ... he became convinced that the ferunge [non-Ethiopian] world could not possibly understand what he was feeling."

It was not just on the street that Zafan was singled out for being different. Samuel delves into the complicated process she and Zafan had to undergo when they decided to marry. The rabbinate in Israel does not automatically accept the Jewish lineage of the Ethiopians, and orders that they undergo a symbolic conversion before marrying. Since the community had lived for many generations as observant Jews in Ethiopia, members find this demand deeply insulting, and remain fiercely opposed to it.

But not every problem encountered by Zafan is attributable to racism. Israel is a tough country for anyone to adjust to, and many of the annoyances and obstacles that have greeted Ethiopians lie in wait for all new immigrants. Zafan and Naomi were clearly fortunate to have found each other, and to have had the fortitude and patience to stick it out until they could make a satisfying life for themselves.

AS SAMUEL PUTS IT: "ZAFAN and I have built a precarious fortress, based on a solid foundation of love, combining our rich cultural heritage to produce something new: a family that defies the categories of definition."

Today, we are told, the couple make their home, with their four sons, in the West Bank Jerusalem suburb of Ma'aleh Adumim. Naomi writes children's books, many of which, such as "Abba Hum" ("Father Is Brown"), deal with the struggles her children have faced as products of a mixed marriage in Israel. Zafan is a policeman in the Jerusalem precinct; Samuel recounts that his co-workers affectionately call him "Eddie Murphy."

Not every Ethiopian Jew has integrated into Israeli society to the degree Zafan has. Samuel describes in detail how a close friend of Zafan's from his village ended up committing suicide after coming to Israel — not, unfortunately, an isolated incident.

Zafan and Naomi, however, were successful in taking advantage of the opportunities Israel offers, making what sounds like a happy life for themselves here. It seems apt that they chose to give their first child the middle name "Achenefe." In Amharic, the word means "to win." ●

## *Love in black and white*

Reviewed by JUDY CARR

*The Moon Is Bread*, by Naomi Samuel. Published by Gefen Publishing House, Jerusalem, New York. 192 pp.

This lyrical, poetic book is the story of an English girl, Naomi Samuel, daughter of a Holocaust survivor, who married an Ethiopian.

Naomi Samuel was working at an absorption center for new immigrants in Israel when she came into contact with Zafan, newly arrived from Ethiopia. The book describes how they overcame the obstacles to the marriage between a black man and a white, golden-haired girl. In the beginning, there were prejudices, misunderstandings, differences in culture that were deep-rooted. However, the love that grew between them, though it did not do away with the difficulties, led to their marriage.

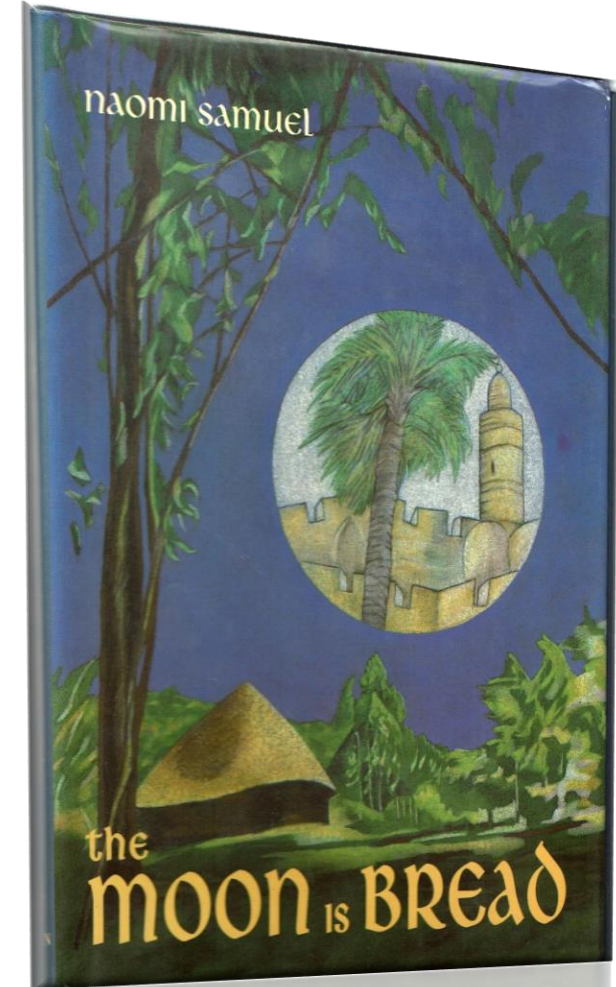
The book is also an exposé of the way the Ethiopians were treated in Israel. Let down by the absorption authorities, deprived of their

rights as immigrants, even left to go hungry, without counseling or explanation about what lay ahead in Israel.

The book begins in Zafan's village in Ethiopia and we learn about the closeknit ties in the family life there, the friendships, the decency concerning sex and personal relations.

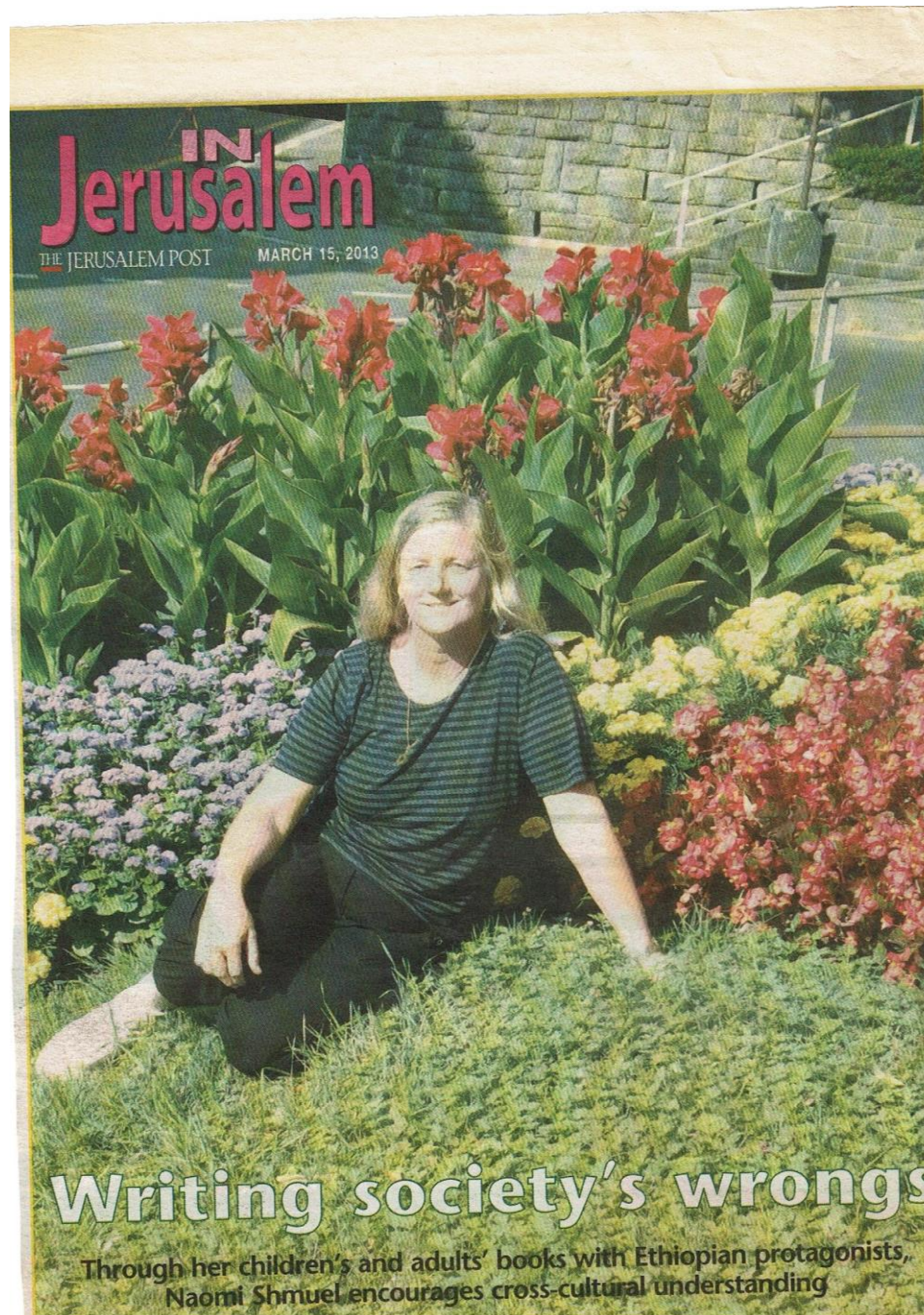
Contrary to popular belief, the Ethiopians were not backward or primitive. They had their own culture and were committed Jews. The western culture and modern life in Israel were strange to them, but they were a sensitive, intelligent, ethical people and exposure to western life did not change them.

Naomi Samuel, wife of Zafan, wrote the book with the aim of overcoming racial prejudice and on reading the book, it will be seen that she succeeds to a great extent in clearing away the cobwebs in the minds of the so-called "moderns."



MOON IS BREAD  
the

Jerusalem Post magazine  
15/3/2003



# Rainbow writer

With her first book in Hebrew for adults due to be published soon, British-born Naomi Shmuel is continuing her tradition of bridging cultural gaps

• By BATSHEVA POMERANTZ

The books of British-born Naomi Shmuel were the first children's books in Hebrew to introduce brown-skinned heroes into children's stories, heroes Ethiopian immigrant children could identify with and feel proud of.

The writer has a personal connection with the Ethiopian community, since her husband, Emmanuel, is Ethiopian. Most of her books deal with the issue of cross-cultural transition in one way or another. Many of them are used today in schools and preschool programs to foster cross-cultural understanding and tolerance.

Most of her 14 books are in Hebrew for children. However, her upcoming book, *Beten Mele'a Dma'ot* (A Belly Full



– understand the issue better,” the writer says. “I expose the problems as an observer. I don’t pretend to have all the answers.”

SHMUEL, WHO lives in Ma’aleh Adumim, was born in England, the youngest of four children. Her mother, writer and poet Karen Gershon, was born in Germany and came to England on the Kindertransport (see box). In 1968, Gershon and her husband, Val Tripp, a non-Jewish art teacher, came to Israel with three of their four children. Shmuel adjusted to life in Israel, but because her father was unhappy here, returned to England in 1973.

After completing a degree in anthropology at London University, she reflected on her identity.

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Most of her 14 books are in Hebrew for children. However, her upcoming book, *Beten Mele'a Dma'ot* (A Belly Full of Tears) – the manuscript of which recently won her the 2012 ACUM literary prize – is her first Hebrew-language book for adults.

"I had doubts whether I could write a book for adults in Hebrew, but being awarded this prize is encouraging," she says.

ACUM – the Israeli Association of Composers, Authors and Publishers of Musical Works – is an organization that protects its members' rights to their work, and it offers annual prizes in various categories.

On its website, the group praises Shmuel's writing, saying that although "the way to acceptance is long and difficult," she "dares to build a bridge of hope over the difficulties and limitations. The book's beauty is in its great restraint, its gentleness, similar to a watercolor painting.... With clear and compelling language, with courage, the author Naomi Shmuel reawakens an entire world that stares us in the face, but for most of us is strange and elusive."

*A Belly Full of Tears* is based on a true story – one of many that tragically make headlines every few months – about an Ethiopian woman murdered by her husband. Although the author interviewed



Shmuel is working to improve learning environments in heterogeneous classrooms. (Courtesy)

the victim's family while researching the book, they cannot be identified.

The story – which is optimistic and respectful of the culture, and is not judgmental – occurs on two levels: the family's attempts to cope with the

tragedy, and life in Ethiopia before their immigration to Israel.

"I dedicated the book to the memory of all the Ethiopian women murdered by their husbands. The book is meant to help people – Ethiopians and others

writer says. "I expose the problems as an observer. I don't pretend to have all the answers."

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After completing a degree in anthropology at London University, she reflected on her identity.

"I felt I had to return to Israel to figure out my Jewish identity," she says. "I don't think I had answers when I returned here, not until my children were born, and I had to decide how to raise them. I came to the conclusion that the glue that keeps family together is tradition."

She met her husband while working for the Jewish Agency in the Kiryat Gat absorption center. He had come to Israel on foot by way of Sudan in 1983.

"I'm often asked how my family accepted him, but the question should also be about how his family accepted me," she points out. "After all, I was considered a 'faranj' [foreigner] by the Ethiopians. Both our families accepted us."

They got married in 1986 and have four sons. The two recently became grandparents.

In recent years, Shmuel, who works for the Immigrant Absorption Ministry's Student Authority, has been a guest author at schools in Jerusalem and throughout the country, often lecturing at schools with both Ethiopian and native Israeli students. A principal from a school in Beersheba told her that because of her books, the Ethiopian children felt more integrated.



'The book strikes a chord with children from all backgrounds: Ethiopians, Russians and Israelis. It's about coming to terms with a multiple identity and accepting who you are'

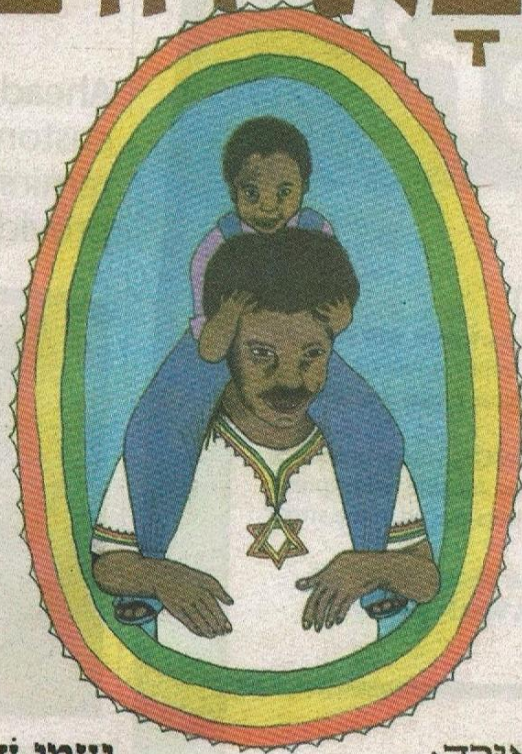
Naomi Shmuel

One of her books, which is popular among school-aged children, is *Yaldat Hakeshet Ba'an* (Rainbow Child), about a girl born in Israel to an American father and Ethiopian mother. In school, she faces children who meet a dark-skinned person for the first time.

"The book strikes a chord with children from all backgrounds: Ethiopians, Russians and Israelis. It's about coming to terms with a multiple identity and accepting who you are," says the author.

In *B'no Shel Tzayad Ha'arayot* (The Lion Hunter), a boy named Oren is born in Israel to Ethiopian parents. His father, Aharon, was a lion hunter in Ethiopia. In addition to the generation gap and the difficulties the family faces as new immigrants, there is a growing cultural gap that separates the father and his teenage son. The story that unfolds is told alternately by Aharon and Oren, offering insight into both perspectives. Although the constant

# אבא חום



נַעֲמִי שְׁמוּאֵל

כְּתִיבָה וְאַיִרָה:

Above: 'Abba Hum' (Brown Daniel) by Naomi Shmuel. Right: 'B'no Shel Tzayad Ha'arayot' (The Lion Hunter).

preschoolers, Daniel tells his playmates why his father is brown and why he made the journey to Israel from Ethiopia.

parenting facilitator and a graduate of the Adler Institute, founded the Project for Cultural Competence together with Manbrui Shimon, a social activist and

## נעמי שמואל בנו של צייד האריות



munity," Shmuel explains. "These issues include coping in a heterogeneous classroom with color and racism."

Together with Merhavim, the Institute for the Advancement of Shared Citizenship in Israel, she and Shimon have developed "Shades of Belonging," an educational pack for teachers in elementary schools that have pupils of Ethiopian origin. The pack includes lesson plans and activities for improving the social and learning environments in the heterogeneous classroom, and it encourages children of Ethiopian background to explore their cultural heritage and accept their identity. The pack was published with a grant from the German Future

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In *Abba Hum* (Brown Daniel), a book for



Naomi Shmuel receives the ACUM prize. (Yossi Zaykar)

נַעֲמִי שְׁמוּאֵל

בְּתֵבָה וְאַיֶרֶה:

Above: 'Abba Hum' (Brown Daniel) by Naomi Shmuel. Right: 'B'no Shel Tzayad Ha'arayot' (The Lion Hunter).

preschoolers, Daniel tells his playmates why his father is brown and why he made the journey to Israel from Ethiopia.

"This is a book I originally wrote for my son Daniel when he was four, and is widely used in preschool programs in Israel to foster cross-cultural understanding and talk about the issue of color," the writer explains.

Four years ago, Shmuel, who is also a

parenting facilitator and a graduate of the Adler Institute, founded the Project for Cultural Competence together with Manbru Shimon, a social activist and educator with experience in parent groups and children's workshops within the Ethiopian community.

"We provide workshops, training and lectures for teachers, social workers and community workers in both the Ethiopian community and general com-

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"Cultural competence refers to a set of skills that enable people (professionals and others) to function better in a multicultural environment," she says. "It goes beyond the classroom, and is relevant in every sphere of life in Israel." •

## All in the family

Karen Gershon – poet, Holocaust survivor, and mother of children's book author Naomi Shmuel – came to England on the Kindertransport from Germany at the age of 15. Her life is the subject of Vanessa Rosenthal's play *Karen's Way: A Kindertransport Life*, which will be performed in Jerusalem during the intermediate days of Passover as part of Beit Avi Chai's Stage 1 theater festival.

Based on Gershon's own words and poems, the play – a dramatization with live music – traces her story from an idyllic childhood in 1930s Germany, through her time as a refugee, and finally to her achievement of literary acclaim.

Gershon was born Kaethe Loewenthal in Bielefeld in 1923. Alone in England at 15, she would never see her parents again.

"After the war, my mother was in denial of Judaism," says Shmuel. "She felt it was better not to identify as a Jew. She married my father, Val Tripp, who was not Jewish, and in effect we grew up in a home with practically no traditional celebrations or

religious content."

In the early 1960s, Gershon returned to visit Germany, then started writing poetry. Her *Selected Poems* and *We Came as Children* – a collective autobiography of refugees – were both published in 1966, when the Holocaust was still a taboo subject for many. By the time she died in 1993, she had published six poetry collections, three non-fiction volumes and three novels.

Former president Zalman Shazar, a poetry lover who enjoyed Gershon's work, located her in England and invited her to participate in a delegation of writers visiting Israel in 1966.

"My mother was enamored with Israel, and this led to her aliya with my father and siblings," relates Shmuel. The family lived in Jerusalem for six years before returning to Cornwall.

In 2009, Yad Vashem published Shmuel's book *Fragments* (in English and in Hebrew), which is based on her mother's life story and recounts her journey to find both a home and an identity. – B.P.

