



Jewish Community Center of Paramus
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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday, November 5, 2021 ~ Parsha: *Toldot*

A Special Day for the Ethiopian Jewish Community

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Yesterday was a special day for the Ethiopian Jewish Community. It was the celebration and observance of the unique Ethiopian holiday of Sigd. It is not a holiday that most of world Jewry is even remotely familiar with. I'd like you to know more about it.

Sigd is a one-day holiday traditionally held on the 29th of the Hebrew month of Cheshvan — 50 days after Yom Kippur. On this day Ethiopian Jews would gather for prayer to God and plead to return to Zion.

The word Sigd is Ge'ez, (the traditional language of Ethiopian Jewry) for “prostration.” It is related to the word sged (same meaning) in Aramaic, the language of the Talmud. The holiday celebrates the renewal of the covenant between the Jewish people, God and the Torah. For centuries it also marked the community's belief that they would return to Jerusalem, and today Sigd provides an opportunity to give thanks for that dream becoming a reality.

There is good reason that most of world Jewry is unfamiliar with this observance. The Ethiopian Jewish community lived in complete isolation from other Jewish communities for many centuries, until the mid-20th century when many Ethiopians were air-lifted to Israel. For this reason, the Ethiopian Jewish community, called the Beta Israel, developed many holidays and celebrations that do not exist in other Jewish communities. Other isolated communities throughout the world often had similar unique customs and observances.

Today, since most members of the Ethiopian Jewish community have made Aliyah to the State of Israel, members of the community travel on Sigd to Jerusalem and visit

the Western Wall. The holiday serves as an annual gathering of the entire Ethiopian community, and its members view it as an opportunity to strengthen the connection with their roots and culture.

In 2008, The Knesset passed legislation declaring the 29th of Heshvan as a national holiday. Each year Sigd is an opportunity to raise Ethiopian Jewish visibility and educate Israeli Jews about their distinctive heritage.

Shabbat Shalom, Rabbi Arthur Weiner