

SUPPORT THE ORIT GUARDIANS MA AT TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

We need your support for a *global trailblazer* for Ethiopian Jews: the **Orit Guardians MA**, based in the Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies' Department of Biblical Studies, in cooperation with the Department of Hebrew Language and Semitic Linguistics. *All photographs below were taken at the MA orientation day in early September.*



This exciting new MA is dedicated to the academic study of Ethiopian Jewish sacred texts – notably the Orit, the Ethiopian Torah, written in the ancient language of Ge'ez – and their transmission. It aims at Ethiopian-Israeli students who are passionate about deepening and disseminating knowledge of their community's little-known contributions to Jewish history and culture, courageously preserved over centuries by their forbears. Too few Israelis have been exposed to the rich heritage and history of Ethiopian Jews and their heroic efforts to reach the Promised Land. And too many young Ethiopian-Israelis are growing up without knowledge of their cultural legacy, especially their sacred texts.

The immigration of Ethiopian Jews to Israel is a story of immense bravery and determination, but the integration of the community into Israeli society reflects myriad challenges. Today's Ethiopian-Israeli community includes women and men who, having survived perilous journey to Israel as infants and young children, went on to thrive in higher education and leadership roles. But a significant proportion of Ethiopian-Israelis still struggle with poverty, discrimination and barriers to their entrée to the mainstream.

The Orit Guardians MA gives Ethiopian-Israeli Jews the academic tools to study and share their sacred texts and their traditions, while boosting the presence of Ethiopian Jewish Studies and Ethiopian scholarship in Israeli academia and beyond. Alongside courses that are foundational for all Biblical Studies degrees, students will follow a study track dedicated

to the scriptures, oral traditions, and languages of Ethiopian Jews. They will also learn how to conduct oral interviews, enabling them to interview 'Kesim', traditional religious leaders, about the methods of translation and interpretive traditions used in the oral transmission of the Orit. Read [here](#) about the journey from Ethiopia to Israel of one copy of the Orit.

Finances

It's been challenging in Corona times to raise the money we need to guarantee the success of our new MA and get our students off to the best possible start. A non-Corona related challenge is that none of our 5 students has a background in Biblical Studies, and must therefore take preparatory courses to fill in the gaps. Though essential for MA studies, these courses are not eligible for funding by the university or the Government. The Department of Biblical Studies will contribute up to half of other Tuition cost, but we need to raise the rest.

As well as covering Tuition, we are committed to providing our students with stipends so that they can afford to dedicate the time required for this demanding degree – one or two days in classes, plus time for preparation. We are planning an enrichment program, including guided tours of the Diaspora Museum, the National Library's Ethiopian collections, lectures by significant figures in Ethiopian Jewish Studies in Israel, and a visit to an Ethiopian community to meet its spiritual leaders. We are hiring a part-time administrator from the Ethiopian-Israeli community who will enhance immeasurably the student experience.

Needs for 5 students	Costs	Raised /anticipated	Still needed
Tuition Fees	3 x \$3,000 + 2 x \$6,000 = <u>\$21,000</u>	TAU Biblical Studies should give \$8,500	\$12,500
Student Stipends	3 x \$3,000 + 2 x \$6,000 = <u>\$21,000</u>	\$11,000	\$6,000
Part-time admin	\$11,000	\$11,000	___
Student Enrichment	\$4,000	\$4,000	___
TOTAL	\$57,000	\$38,500	\$18,500



Students

Meet the five inspiring students who will begin their studies in October 2020.



My name is **Wanana Abrams**. I am 32 years old, married and the mother of three sons. I was born in Bilbuhah village in Ethiopia and made Aliyah with my family in 1991, when I was 3 years old. I grew up in the southern city of Ashkelon and studied in religious schools throughout my high school education. Today I live in Netanya and my main occupation is as a business consultant. I am also a volunteer at Negat, an organization that works to place young Israelis of Ethiopian origin in key positions in the Israeli business ecosystem. Additionally, I recently founded LAB, Lomdim Amharit B'yachad, a private Facebook group that encourages people to learn Amharic. As of today, the group has grown to over 1,600 members. It is an incredibly rewarding experience to build,

manage and engage with this community. My academic education includes a BA in Communication with a focus on public diplomacy from the Sammy Ofer School of Communication at IDC Hertzliya (2017); an MBA from IDC's Arison School of Business, where classes were held in English (2018). I am thrilled at the prospect of playing a key role in bringing the Orit to academia. I see this as an important opportunity to learn and transmit the deep wisdom of Beta Israel's religious leaders. Without academic programs such as this, the knowledge of Beta Israel's elders might pass on without reaching the next generation and broader Jewish world.



My name is **Tejitu (Taje) Asfawu Daniel**. I'm married to Bantehun Mesafint Bymot Daniel, who is training to be a Kes. I am the mother of eight, and I have been living in Yavne since 2005. I was born in Ethiopia in 1981 in Zagra-Wenz village in Gondar, the eighth of nine children. After the failure of our first three attempts to walk through Sudan, we finally came to Israel via Addis Ababa in 1991. I had my first learning experience at age ten, in the Public Religious School in Nazareth Illit, where we lived in an Absorption Centre (1991 to 1993). Later, we moved to Herzliya, and I attended a religious public school in the city (1993 to 1994). I studied at the Talpiot boarding school in Hadera (7th to 9th grades), and at Tzfira Ulpana in Moshav Tzafria (10th to 12th

grades), where I completed my Bagrut (matriculation). I did my national service duty at the Talpiot boarding school, in gratitude to the institution that laid the foundations for my future development. Through my pregnancies and births, I studied for a BA at the Women's College in Bayit VeGan, Jerusalem. I received it after the birth of my second son in 2004. In 2010, I received an MA in Educational Counselling. I have worked as an educational consultant for 16 years: as a facilitator in the "Know Where You Came From" program; a coordinator of educational and cultural resources for Ethiopian Jews in The Settlement Education Administration; and a Mindfulness-based NLP trainer. I have also volunteered in the Ethiopian community in Yavne since 2007, and from 2015 to 2018 in community centres in the Central and Southern District, on behalf of the Association of the National and

Regional Community Centre, in a project called Road Stories, stories of Ethiopian Aliyah. I shared stories of my own journey in private homes throughout Yavne, Ra'anana and Gan Yavne. The Orit Guardians MA will help me to fulfil my personal dream and my late father's last wish: to study and explore the Orit, which he loved so much and was for him "bread to eat and water to drink," and to study the ways of the spiritual leaders who fiercely preserved the Ethiopian Jewish community. This is my opportunity and I intend to seize it with both hands.



My name is **Addisu Kassa**. I'm 33 years old, married and a father of two, and I live in Netivot. I hold a BA in Special Education and Oral Torah and a Teaching Certificate from Hemdat HaDaron College in the Negev. In 1992, aged 5, I made Aliya to Israel from the village of Dado in the Amhara District of Ethiopia with my entire family - twelve people. At first, we lived in the Shalom Hotel, Jerusalem, and later in public housing in Ofakim. I was educated in a state religious elementary school, and at Ofakim's high school yeshiva. As part of my yeshiva studies, I devoted my time to Jewish Studies, but I always felt that I had nothing to bring from my own tradition. Something always seemed to be missing.

After graduating from high school, I studied at the Hesder Yeshiva in Netivot. There, I met rabbis and friends who were seriously engaged in practical Torah studies that lead to social involvement. One of the fundamental goals of the yeshiva was to encourage us take responsibility for our society, with an emphasis on the social periphery. The yeshiva showed me who I was by encouraging me to know myself and my community and created in me a passionate desire to learn about the older generations of the Ethiopian-Jews community. After yeshiva, I took on leadership roles in Netivot's Ethiopian Jewish Heritage Center, which I've held for the past five years, working to change the community's narrative in many significant areas. The Orit Guardians MA will enhance my knowledge and understanding of the scriptures of Ethiopian Jews.



My name is **Tamar Mengistu**. I am married and the mother of six. I was born in the village of Dzihun in the Gondar district of Ethiopia, and made Aliyah in 1984, aged 9, with my parents and two brothers and our extended family. We came to Israel via Sudan where, unfortunately, my two other brothers died; one was 14 at the time of his death and the other 9 months. In Israel, we were placed in the absorption center at Nazareth Illit. Five years later, my parents moved to Rishon Lezion, where I lived until I got married. My husband and I moved to Herzliya and have lived there ever since. My high school education was at the Neve Michael boarding school in Pardes Hanna. After I completed my

Bagrut (matriculation exam), I needed to improve my grades to enter a BA program at Ariel College. I also enrolled in extramural studies, including courses that were later recognised for my degree. In 2005, I received my BA in Criminology and Education from Ariel University, which operated then (1998-2001) under Bar Ilan University. Since 2000, I have worked for the Herzliya Municipality, first as a mediator between Ethiopian-Jews and the municipality in areas of education and welfare. In 2005, I was moved to the Human Resources

Department to work in welfare. In 2014, I was promoted to be a secretary in family therapy in the Welfare Division of Matya Herzliya-Sharonim. This year, I became supervisor of escorts and commutes for children under the care of the Welfare Department. For many years, I have wanted to study for an MA, but the time was not right. Today I am ready and eager to start Tel-Aviv University's Orit Guardians MA. I hope that in my studies, I will be a role model for my children and that I will have a role to play in preserving knowledge of the Orit, the holy Torah revered by our ancestors.



My name is **Mulualem Tameyet**. I am 47-years old, married to Michal and father of three. I was born in Ethiopia in the Abantonis village, near Gondar. I made Aliya in 1987 with my family through Addis Ababa at 11, to join my older brother, who was already in Lod. I studied first at Hofim boarding school, followed by four years at Yemin Orde studying Electricity and Electronics, and continued study at Kfar Batya boarding school. After my IDF service, I completed a BA degree in Sociology and Political Science at Bar Ilan University. In 2000, I spent 3 months in the USA mentoring in summer camps on behalf of the Jewish Agency and Yemin Orde. That was an unforgettable experience. On my return, my friends and I established an after-school program for youth in Lod. I worked in this program from 2000 to 2003, and for the North American Organization of Ethiopian Jews (NACIJ) from 2003-2005. I had responsibility for foreign relations. In 2005, I moved back to Yemin Orde with my family to work as an educator. In 2007, I returned to Lod, where I became the director of an absorption centre for Ethiopians, a joint project of the municipality and the Ministry of Absorption supporting Ethiopians in the fields of education, welfare, and employment. I now work in Quality Assurance. Today I live in the Elyashiv Garin Torani (Torah-based) community. Life in the community resembles the life we had in the villages of Ethiopia. We took two foster children, now aged three and two (they came to us as babies), a challenging yet rewarding experience. I chose to join the Orit Guardians program for personal reasons. My late father was a Kes in Ethiopia. His community activities often jeopardise his life and led to his imprisonment. In Israel, he continued his activities until the day he died. Currently, I am learning to be a Kes, and in that context I look forward to a formal education in the language of Ge'ez and the scriptures of the Ethiopian Jews.

Academics



The Orit Guardians MA was conceived and is run by **Professor Dalit Rom-Shiloni**, Professor of Hebrew Bible in the Department of Biblical Studies of Tel Aviv University, Israel. Born and raised in Haifa, Dalit earned her academic degrees at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in Hebrew Bible and Ancient Semitic Languages, including Ge'ez. She writes extensively on the formation of sixth century BCE literature, mostly prophecy and poetry; Hebrew Bible theology/theologies; group-identity conflicts; inner-biblical allusions and interpretation in prophetic literature; and nature and landscape imagery. She serves as Editor-in-Chief of the Hebrew Journal *Beit Mikra: Journal for the Study of the Bible and Its World*; and is the initiator and Editor-in-Chief of the DNI Bible project (The

Dictionary of Nature Imagery of the Bible, <http://dni.tau.ac.il/>). Author of 3 published books (and a 4th in print), co-editor of 5 books (3 more are in preparation), and about 30 articles in recognized platforms. <https://telaviv.academia.edu/DalitRomShiloni>



Orit Guardians MA will study Amharic and Ge'ez with **Dr. Anbessa Teferra**, Senior Lecturer in TAU's Department of Hebrew Language and Semitic Linguistics, Entin Faculty of Humanities, and the Rosenberg School, an expert in the languages of Ethiopian Jewry. He teaches several courses including Amharic and Ge'ez for both beginners and advanced students, as well as "Ethiopia: History, Language & Culture". Anbessa made history in 2015 when he joined TAU, becoming the first Ethiopian-born academic ever to be appointed as a Senior Lecturer at an Israeli university.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/in-first-ethiopian-born-linguist-scales-israels-ivory-tower/>



Orit Guardians students will study with **Dr. Ran HaCohen** of TAU's Department of Literature, Entin Faculty of Humanities. Ran has translated into Hebrew the epic "The Glory of the Kings," a 14th century account written in Ge'ez on Ethiopian ancient history. He has also created the only website to offer online the entire Ethiopic Bible, which comprises 84 books, in contrast to the 66 books in the King James Bible, including some that were rejected or lost by other churches; the website is used by tens of thousands of users, among them scholars of Ge'ez from around the world. Dr. HaCohen has published articles on Ethiopian Jewry and teaches a course on "Ethiopia and its Images: From the Queen of Sheba to

Haile Selassie." <https://www.tau.ac.il/~hacohen/Biblia.html>



The Orit Guardians MA Steering Committee is chaired by **Dr. Diana Lipton**. Diana completed her PhD on dreams in Genesis at Cambridge University, and spent the next 9 years as a Fellow of Newnham College, Cambridge, where she was Undergraduate Admissions Tutor, and active in Cambridge University efforts to widen access to ethnic minority students. In 2007, Diana joined the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at King's College London as Lecturer and then Reader in Hebrew Bible and Jewish Studies. After moving to Israel in 2011, she taught for 5 years at HUJI's International School, and is now a Teaching Associate in the Department of Biblical Studies at TAU. Diana has written, co-written

and edited 7 volumes, and is now working on a book on the Bible and the Climate Crisis. <https://telaviv.academia.edu/DianaLipton>



Selamawit Fsha will serve as part-time administrator for the Orit Guardians MA. Selamawit lives in Ra'anana. When she was 10 and her brother 7, their mother decided that the family should move to Israel. That was six years after their father attempted to walk to Israel through Sudan. He never made it, but they are here. Selamawit holds a BA in History and an MA in English Literature from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and hopes to progress soon to doctoral research. She is a teacher and a translator between three languages—English, Hebrew, and Amharic.

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<https://support.aftau.org>

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To donate in NIS, please email Rona Serfaty with your phone number, and she will contact you so that you can donate over the phone: ronaserf@tauex.tau.ac.il

If you have questions, or for large donations in any currency, please contact Dr. Diana Lipton, Diana@DLipton.com, or Prof. Dalit Rom-Shiloni, dromshil@tauex.tau.ac.il, so we can advise.

Thank you! Diana Lipton and Dalit Rom-Shiloni

