

# Forum Yerusalem

Forum Yerusalem was founded in 2016 as a coalition of social action organizations that joined forces to help integrate Ethiopian Jewish heritage as an indivisible part of the Israeli story.

It initiated its activity in the wake of the wave of public protest generated by young members of the community. Forum Yerusalem aims to create exposure for Ethiopian Jewry's history and culture among the wider public, with a view to changing the community's image; it endeavors to promote equal opportunity for its members and campaign against discrimination and racism.



Conferences for trailblazer leadership - expanding the ranks of the Israeli hall of fame

**Israeli society remains unfamiliar with the Ethiopian Jewish community's heroic figures. The Forum's "Trailblazer leadership" seminars shine a spotlight on the leaders of Beta Israel, their bravery and impact.**

The concept of expanding the ranks of the Israeli hall of fame offers a tool of empowerment with the capacity to create profound social change and the potential to uproot racist ideas that constitute a threat to Israel's social resilience and wellbeing. The compilation of information about the community's outstanding leaders and the process of rendering that knowledge accessible to the public at large guarantees the conservation of a rich cultural heritage, renews the Zionist vision and enriches Israel's cultural tapestry.

Dialogue about bravery within the community generates broader identification and, at the same time, impels others to take action to transform the community's outstanding leaders into figures that will be universally acknowledged as heroes, creating a new Israeli narrative with greater diversification that is also more comprehensive and more truthful.



## Journey to Ethiopia Change in Israel

Through more than two and a half millennia of exile, the Beta Israel community remained isolated from the mainstream of world Jewry. When their ancient dream of reaching Yerusalem finally came true, these olim encountered an impenetrable wall of suspicion, at best – and discrimination and racism, at worst.

A study visit under Forum Yerusalem auspices to Jewish villages in Ethiopia, alongside an unmediated encounter with the stunning landscape, culture and history, offers a rare opportunity for exposure to a wonderful and ancient world – and a chance for all participants to connect to our shared roots and explore their own, personal identity.

Tour members, be they senior office-holders or key figures shaping public opinion, return with an enhanced understanding of the community's strengths, gaining valuable insights into its struggle for improved integration in Israel. Their newly acquired perspective holds the potential to leverage crucial progress toward rectifying policy and attitudes within Israeli society in relation to members of the Ethiopian Jewish community.



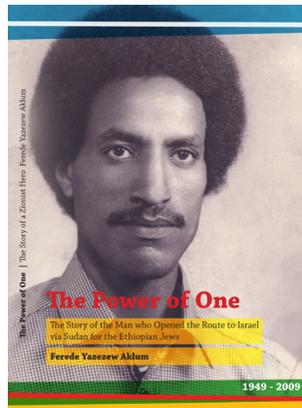
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## A different perspective on Israel, via study tours and enabling access to culture as heritage

Almost forty years have passed since the first major wave of Ethiopian Jewish Aliyah, yet ignorance and alienation continue to typify responses within major sectors of Israeli society. Visits under the aegis of Forum Yerusalem to Ethiopian Jewish heritage sites throughout Israel not only afford glimpses into a remarkable culture but also help bridge between diverse social groups. These fascinating encounters with a range of remarkable figures from the community enhance and intensify the unique Israeli mosaic, transforming each tour into an exciting and enriching experience.



## From Forum Yerusalem Publications



## Partners

Partners in the foundation of the Forum: Binah, The World Zionist Organization, Ma'oz, Hineini, Fidel, Mithabrim Le'atid Meshutaf, Kanfei Yonah and Beit Hatfutsot. For the much broader range of Forum partners today, please visit the Forum website.

## Activity Program

**Since its inception, Forum Yerusalem has conducted conferences on the subject of "Trailblazer Leadership", presenting accounts of bravery exhibited by leaders from the Ethiopian Jewish community – figures who have remained unacknowledged by Israeli society.**

These conferences are designed to generate dialogue about the persona and contribution by figures central to the community. The purpose of such encounters is to promote rapprochement between diverse groups within the population, reducing the scale of racist phenomena and generating change in the community's public image and the self-image of its members.

The first conference, held in June 2016 at the Bet Berl Academic College campus in Kfar Saba, was dedicated to Ferede Aklum, trailblazer of Beta Israel Aliyah via Sudan. The second conference, at Beit Hatfutsot (Museum of the Jewish People) in June 2017, focused on Baruch Tegegne, a leading Aliyah activist. The third conference, at the Tel Aviv Cinemathèque in March 2019, presented women trailblazers – spotlighting Herut Tekle, an Aliyah activist and Prisoner of Zion, and Asresi Getu, a nurse who worked to save lives at the refugee camp in Sudan. In addition to these two brave women, the conference featured the work of eleven other outstanding women leaders within Israeli society, across a range of spheres.

Another area of Forum Yerusalem activity focuses on educational tours of Ethiopia for groups comprising holders of public office, social activists, agents of change and formative forces in shaping public opinion. The itinerary for these tours takes in the main Jewish villages and population centers in Ethiopia, bringing fascinating encounters with Beta Israel's ancient history and its unique culture. Over one hundred participants have joined these journeys of exploration, including a number of Executive groups from the Israel office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, the Maoz organization and serving members in public office from Kiryat Malachi.

## Significance and Impact

Over 1,500 people participated in the first three Forum Yerusalem conferences. As a result, Beit Hatfutsot incorporated the figure of Ferede Aklum into its "Heroes of Israel" Gallery; in Beer Sheva, a square has been named in his honor. In Kiryat Ekron, the educational campus has been named in memory of Baruch Tegegne. An informative exhibit has opened at both the Israel National Library in Jerusalem and Beta Israel village in Kiryat Gat on Ethiopian Jewry's leaders.

Israel's general public-religious education sector, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education, chose Baruch Tegegne as a heroic figure and his story has thus become known to thousands of students in over 800 educational institutions; the Nahshonim youth movement also prepared an educational kit about Baruch's work that is currently in use by movement members across Israel.

Works published by the Forum Yerusalem document the community's heritage and offer an effective contribution towards dissemination of knowledge to the young generation, via schools and informal education frameworks. In a survey conducted by the Forum, among participants on delegations to Ethiopia, 96% of interviewees affirmed that since their excursion they view Ethiopian olim as a source of strength and pride. Moreover, 90% stated their intention to promote activity that would expose the Ethiopian Jewish story within their own social and professional milieu.



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## Forum Yerusalem

Ethiopian Jewry is a glorious community of over 2,500 years old, with a heritage rich in heroism and awe-inspiring Zionist activism. The Jerusalem Forum is working to expose the story of Ethiopian Jews as an integral part of the Israeli narrative through a variety of conferences honoring community heroes, study trips to Ethiopia, tours in Israel and the dissemination of the Beta Israel heritage among decision makers and the general public.

**Together we complete the country's social mosaic.**



Visit us on Facebook, YouTube and on the Forum Website [www.forumyerusalem.org](http://www.forumyerusalem.org)

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