

## Letter of Support from Rabbi David H. Shloush

Chief Rabbi of Netanya & Director of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate's Committee for the Spiritual Absorption of Ethiopian Jews

*I am a member of the Chief Rabbinate's Committee on Ethiopian Jews, and director of the educational program which has guided the Falash Mora's historic return to Judaism for the past seven years.*

*In addition to reports from North American advocates there have been many reports from Israeli Interior Ministry personnel, Jewish Agency Representatives and Addisu Messala (the only Ethiopian member of Knesset) himself dating back to 1992, which evidence the attacks and burnings of the Felash Mora huts.*

*The Felash Mora are a separate, distinct group among the Ethiopian population. The gentiles look on them as the Jews' descendants and they carry all the Jews' dishonorable names. The gentiles say to them, "This is not your land, go along with the Jews to Israel, your homeland."*

*All the Felash Mora who have come to Israel thus far have gone through the process of returning to Judaism in accordance with the requirements of the Chief Rabbinate. In Israel, the vast majority remain observant Jews and virtually all of the children are in the religious school system.*

*Many of the Falash Mora in Ethiopia have already returned to Judaism on their own, to the extent they are able (e.g. through observance of Shabbat and Pesach). I have seen this phenomenon with my own eyes. I am sure that the vast majority would undoubtedly return to the full practice of Orthodox Judaism, including ritual return through immersion in a mikveh, if they were able.*

*Unfortunately the assistance programs which enabled more than 7,000 Falash Mora to return to Judaism in Ethiopia have been discontinued. The Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) has completely terminated its programs in Addis Ababa despite the fact that more than 8,000 members of the Beta Israel community fled there because of pressure from their non-Jewish neighbors.*

*If any other community in the world manifested the same desire to return to Judaism as do the Felash Mora , it would be a cause for communal rejoicing. Only in Ethiopia have these people been abandoned by both the major Diaspora Jewish relief organization, i.e., the Joint (JDC), and by the State of Israel.*

*What the Felash Mora want is to Return to Judaism the old fashioned way, through Mikveh and mitzvot. G-d and history will not judge us kindly if we reject their pleas.*

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22 Heshvan 5759 11 November 1998

Rabbi David H. Shloush  
Chief Rabbi of Netanya and  
Director of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate's Committee for the Spiritual Absorption of  
Ethiopian Jews

*Shalom:*

*A pressrelease distributed by the Joint (JDC) on November 4, 1998, stated that the reason Falash-Mura in Ethiopia wanted to leave their villages and come to Israel was: To take the opportunity to join other Ethiopian Jews in Israel and achieve a higher standard of living.*

*In the same statement the Joint added that: according to the Ministry of the Interior, many of the Falash Mura community attend church services in Israel immediately after making aliyah.*

*On Israel radio, on Friday, November 13th, 1998, Mr Yuli Edelstein, the Minister of Absorption said: "All of the Falash-Mura community members are totally Christian and should not be brought to Israel."*

*As the head of the Committee for the Spiritual Absorption of the Ethiopian Jews, founded by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, and as a rabbi who had been very active with the issues of their Judaism and their status as Jews since their first arrival in Israel in 1980, I validated their Judaism and their right to enter Israel according to Halacha.*

*Today I am active in authenticating the Judaism of the Jews from Russia from the Halachic point of view, to integrate them into the Jewish people, because of the numerous mixed marriages that have taken place between Jews and Christians in the former Soviet Union. This is a challenge, and it is my duty to respond to it since we live in times of ingathering from the four corners of the world, to our homeland, as written in the Torah: "If any of thine that are dispersed be in the uttermost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy G-d, gather thee, and from thence will He fetch thee, and the Lord the G-d will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed." Duteronomy (30,4-5).*

*Therefore I see it as my duty to express my protest against the untruthful things that were said by the Jewish Organization, the Joint, and by a minister in the State of Israel as follows:*

*According to highly reliable testimonies that can be proven in facts, that the great majority of the Falash-Mura community that came to Israel keep the Torah and mitzvot.*

*They have synagogues and rabbis and kesotch (Ethiopian Jewish religious leaders) that guide them. There are amongst them some that do not observe their religion according to the Halacha, as in any other community in Israel, but it is a rule: Israel who transgresses is still Israel.*

*I will emphasize that out of 4,000 men, women and children of the Felash-Mura community who have recently come to Israel, 400 are pupils in Yeshivot and Ulpanot, all join the army with dedication and loyalty to our ideals, and it is not a secret that all the Ethiopian Jews are excellent combat soldiers in the IDF.*

*It is possible that exceptions, due to lack of livelihood, were tempted by the missionaries' propaganda, to visit the church in return for gifts and other benefits. It is also possible that a few people deceived the aliyah department, as also happened in aliyot from other countries and also in other communities in Israel. That is why Jewish organizations are active against the cancerous missionary activity in Israel, where unfortunately, proselytizing is permitted.*

*However, it is not permissible to punish all the Jews of the Falash-Mura community because of a tiny minority who create a false impression by lying and deceiving, as written: “because of the sins of one man, will You be angry at the whole community?” (Exodus 15,22).*

*The Falash-Mura communities in Addis-Ababa and Gondar are of the seed of Israel. Their desire is to return to Judaism and keep the mitzvot. According to Halacha (Jewish law) they are Jews. They live now in extremely harsh conditions. Some of them have died because of lack of food and assistance. It is a great mitzvah to bring them to Israel and save their souls: “Any one who saves one soul of Israel, it is as though he saved a whole world.”*

Sincerely,

Rabbi David H. Shloush

Chief Rabbi of Netanya and

Director of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate’s Committee for the Spiritual Absorption of Ethiopian Jews

\*Testimony of the Rabbinical Court (Beit Din), established by The Chief Rabbinate of Israel to determine the religious status of the recent immigrants from Ethiopia.

(Declares JDC (Joint) report slanderous)