



YEMIN ORDE MENORAH ILLUMINATES WHITE HOUSE HANUKKAH CELEBRATION HOSTED BY PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA AND FIRST LADY MICHELLE OBAMA

*Yemin Orde Youth Village graduate, **Ataklit Tesfaye**, 23, who immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia in 2008, recited the Hanukkah blessings alongside President Obama; the handcrafted menorah, made by children at Yemin Orde Youth Village, represents the friendships and diversity of the Village's youth.*



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE-Bethesda, MD, Dec. 18, 2014 -- Friends of Yemin Orde is proud to announce that a graduate of Yemin Orde Youth Village, in Israel, was honored with lighting a special menorah at the annual White House Hanukkah celebration in Washington, D.C. on Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2014. Ataklit Tesfaye, 23, an Ethiopian-Israeli who immigrated to Israel in 2008, recited the Hanukkah prayers alongside President Barack Obama and First Lady Michelle Obama. The menorah was handcrafted by children at Yemin Orde and delivered to the White House for this occasion. Other special guests participating in the menorah lighting included Dr. Adam C. Levine, a leading physician in the fight against Ebola in Africa and Rabbi Angela Buchdahl, spiritual leader at Central Synagogue in New York. The special menorah, made of olive wood, iron and clay, symbolizes the safety of a home and community provided to Yemin Orde's at-risk youth, as well as the cultural diversity of the children who live there. Among the more than 500 guests in attendance were prominent members of the Jewish community from around the U.S., Members of Congress, and Jewish celebrities. Friends of Yemin Orde is the U.S. based fundraising arm of Yemin Orde Youth Village and Yemin Orde Educational Initiatives, both located in Israel. The Village is home, safe haven and school to some 400 at-risk youth from around the world; the Educational Initiatives is an independent organization created to expand Yemin Orde's methodology, called the Village Way, to other youth villages, residential therapeutic communities and public high schools, including the Israeli-Arab sector. Visit www.yeminorde.org for details.

In his remarks before the menorah lighting, President Obama drew parallels between the powerful miracle of the Hanukkah story, and the power that faith and courage can provide to make miracles happen today.

"Yemin Orde is just one village. But the story of Hanukkah teaches us that there's no such thing as a futile act of courage, or a small act of faith. One doctor can save a life. One school can help a child. That life, that child may change a village. One person can be the spark that changes the world," said President Obama.

An invitation to be represented at the White House presented an exceptional opportunity for Yemin Orde. *“This is a great honor and privilege for Yemin Orde Youth Village and our organization,” said Charles Gwirtsman, Chair, Friends of Yemin Orde. “Hanukkah is a reminder of our freedoms as Jews. To have Yemin Orde, whose vulnerable children journeyed to freedom in Israel, represented at such an important symbol of American freedom, the White House, connects our two worlds and enriches us all.”*

Ataklit immigrated to Israel as a teenager from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia when he was 16 years old, with his older brother, who was post-high school age. They lived at an absorption center for new immigrants in Beersheva when Yemin Orde Youth Village welcomed Ataklit to its community shortly thereafter. He was bewildered by his new surroundings, had no knowledge of the Hebrew language and did not have friends or close relatives in Israel.

Yemin Orde’s unique educational methodology, called *the Village Way*, helped Ataklit adjust to his new environment. He developed confidence in himself, made friends and believed in a hopeful future as a productive citizen of Israel. Ataklit excelled in school and participated in robotics classes. He went on to represent Yemin Orde’s robotics team at the Israel-wide robotics competition. He also participated in the highly-selective Genesis summer program at Brandeis University. He completed his high school studies with top grades and advanced studies in robotics and English.

A few years later, he graduated high school with top grades and served two years as a paratrooper in the Israel Defense Forces. Today, he represents Israel as a liaison to a synagogue in suburban Washington, D.C. He plans to return to Israel after one year and attend university.

“If you have a value laden life, then you can live a good life. I am very grateful to Yemin Orde for teaching me this,” Ataklit said.

One of the important differences between Yemin Orde and other youth villages is the strong ties it maintains with its graduates, said Shmuli Bing, Director, Yemin Orde Youth Village. *“Our graduates know that the Village will always be there for them. We are enormously proud of Ataklit and his accomplishments.”*

The base of the menorah is made from an olive wood branch and the candle holders, made of clay and handpainted by Yemin Orde’s youth, reflect the many different cultures of the children who found their way to Yemin Orde. For example, there is a reproduction of an Ethiopian “Godjo” or hut; a Russian castle, a Brazilian hut, and a French-style home, among other buildings. The “shamash” or helper candle used to light all other candles on the menorah, is made of cast iron in the form of angels wings to represent the at-risk children at Yemin Orde. The Hebrew inscription carved is from the Bible, Isaiah 60:4, and says: *“Lift up your eyes all around, and see; they all gather together...”*

Many prominent U.S. leaders have visited Yemin Orde Youth Village in recent years including U.S. Ambassador to Israel Daniel B. Shapiro, former U.S. National Security Advisor Susan Rice, and leading Members of Congress, top educators, scholars and authors.

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