



# THE SECRETS OF SIGD

የሰግድ  
ሚስጥሩ

---

THE COVENANT  
RENEWAL CEREMONY

የቃል ኪዳን እድሳት





# ሰግድ SIGD

## WORSHIP, PROSTRATION

AN ANCIENT TRADITION PRESERVED  
FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS  
BY THE BETA ISRAEL COMMUNITY

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Sigd ceremony  
has additional names:

The *Mehelela* holiday  
(Beseeching)

*Amta Sava*  
(Gathering Day)



# YOM KIPPUR AND SIGD

**SIGD TAKES PLACE FIFTY DAYS AFTER YOM KIPPUR,  
ON THE 29TH OF HESHVAN**

It is a day of fasting, purification, and renewal, with the main feature being the renewal of the covenant between the nation and God, which includes reading excerpts from the Orit (Torah), blessings, and prayers for redemption.

## IN CONTRAST WITH YOM KIPPUR

when each individual reflects on their own actions,  
on Sigd, repentance is a communal act.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Orit (Torah)  
is written in the Ge'ez  
language, which is an  
ancient Semitic language.  
Ge'ez is one of the first  
languages to which  
the Bible was translated





**THE IDEA OF THE SIGD HOLIDAY WAS INSPIRED BY THE CEREMONY  
HELD BY EZRA AND NEHEMIAH TO RENEW THE COVENANT  
BETWEEN THE JEWISH NATION AND GOD IN THE DAYS THAT THEY  
RETURNED TO ZION.**



5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people for he was above all the people and when he opened it, all the people stood up

6 And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered:

'Amen, Amen', with the lifting up of their hands; and they bowed their heads, and fell down before the LORD with their faces to the ground. (Nehemiah Chapter 8)



1 Now in the twenty and fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackcloth, and earth upon them.

2 And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.

3 And they stood up in their place, and read in the book of the Law of the LORD their God a fourth part of the day; and another fourth part they confessed, and prostrated themselves before the LORD their God" (Nehemiah Chapter 9)

**DID YOU  
KNOW?**

Sigd is a significant day in the lives of the Beta Israel, and its observance aroused deep religious feelings and a strong yearning for Zion - Yerusalem (Jerusalem).



## RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT WHY?

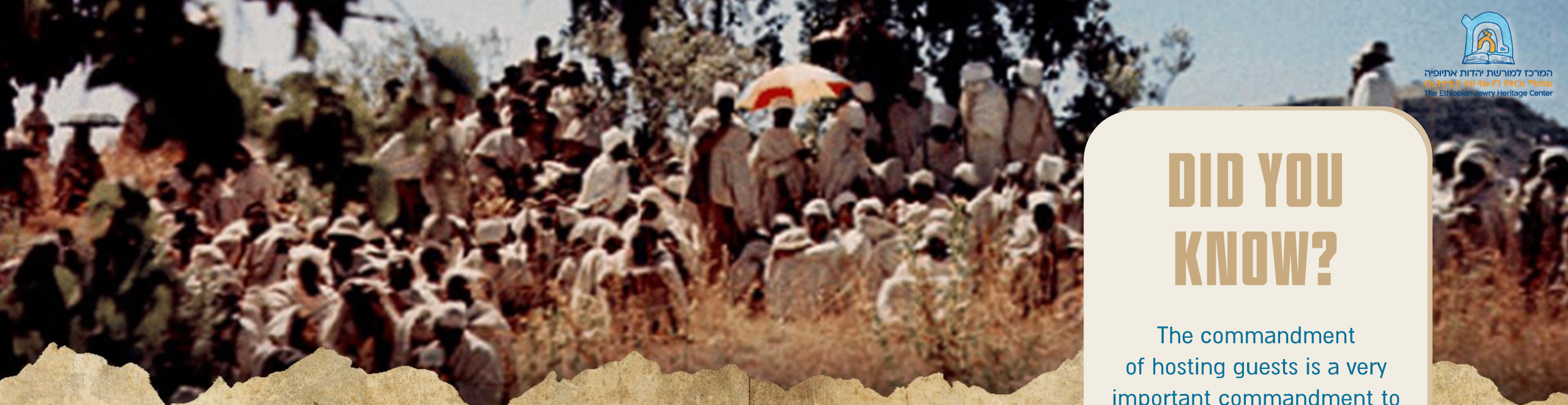
Beta Israel ascend to the top of a tall mountain, where the ceremony was held – similar to the receipt of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

**Renewing the covenant was meant to:** Strengthen their faith and preserve the religious, spiritual, and communal identity of Beta Israel despite the challenges and difficulties (persecution, dispersed communities, and some of the young people moving to the bigger cities).

## DID YOU KNOW?

As part of the perception of their life in exile, yearning for Zion and preventing assimilation were very important elements.





## DID YOU KNOW?

The commandment of hosting guests is a very important commandment to Beta Israel. During Sigd, this commandment was even more relevant due to the fact that many people came from afar.

## PREPARING FOR SIGD

### AT THE TOP OF THE MOUNTAIN

Preparing the location for the ceremony: Cleaning and purifying the top of the mountain  
Positioning a stage for the prayers

### WITH THE COMMUNITY

Preparations for guests and preparing a feast to break the fast

### ON A PERSONAL LEVEL

Preparing the Sigd clothing, washing and purifying oneself



## THE MORNING OF SIGD

Before sunrise, the members of Beta Israel immersed themselves in the river and got dressed in their holiday clothing.

---

At this point, the fast began and the people gathered in the synagogue for special prayers that called for the end of the exile and the return home, to Yerusalem.

---

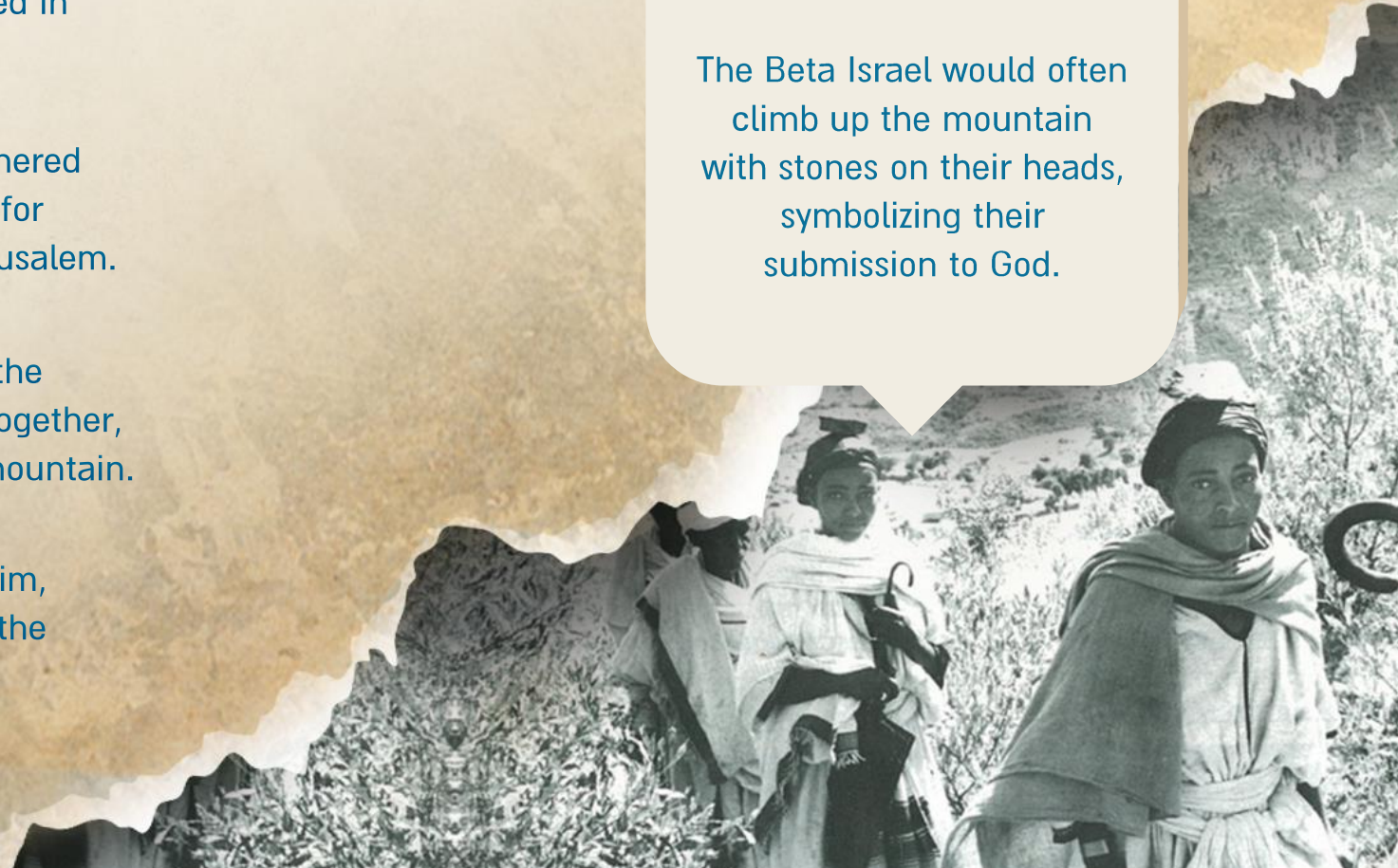
Later, as the community exclaimed cries of joy, the Kessim took the Orit out of the synagogue and together, everyone began to march toward the selected mountain.

---

At the front of the procession marched the Kessim, the Shimagloch, and the elders, and the rest of the community followed.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Beta Israel would often climb up the mountain with stones on their heads, symbolizing their submission to God.



## READING THE TORAH AT TOP THE MOUNTAIN

The Kessim open the Orit (the Torah) and read selected parts of it – the verses about the burning bush and receiving the Torah at Mount Sinai, chapters from the book of Leviticus, Kings, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel and Psalms.

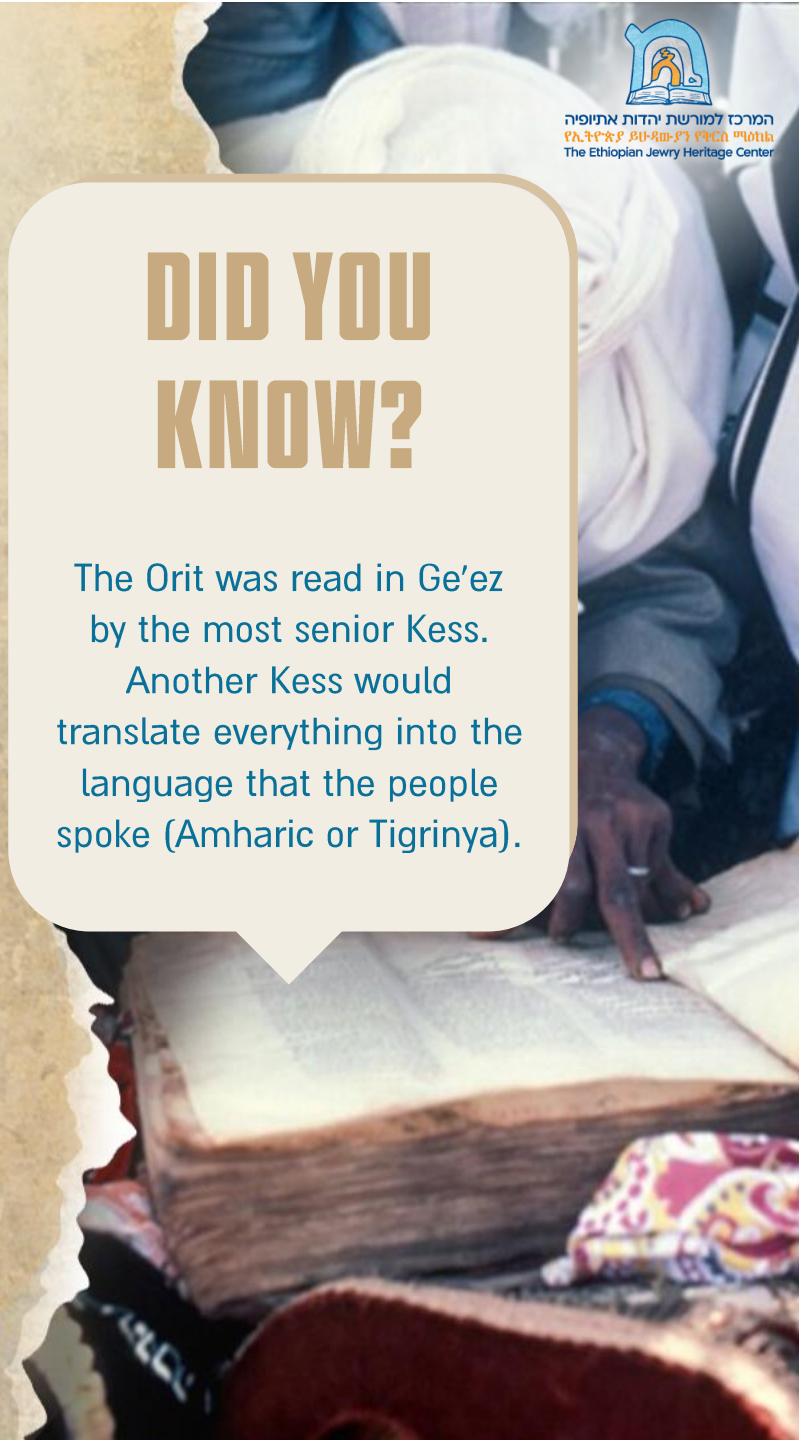
Additional prayers called for them to remain loyal to the Torah and to tradition, to observe the commandments carefully and to pray for the return to Zion.

Everyone stands facing the direction of Yerusalem.

## DID YOU KNOW?

The Orit was read in Ge'ez by the most senior Kess.

Another Kess would translate everything into the language that the people spoke (Amharic or Tigrinya).





## CONCLUSION OF THE PRAYER CEREMONY ON THE MOUNTAIN

At the height of the ceremony, the people would spread their arms toward the heavens, confess their sins, and prostrate and bow down to God.

Toward the afternoon hours, the ceremony would conclude with cries of hope to celebrate next year in Yerusalem, and trumpets were blown.

The descent from the mountain and return to the village was accompanied by song and dance; the Orit was returned to the synagogue and the Kessim would make a blessing on the dabo, slice it and distribute it to the congregation.

This is the sign that the fast is over and a festive meal begins that continues for many hours.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Dabo is a special bread that is eaten as part of the Sigd tradition. Dabo symbolizes the bread that was eaten in the holy Temple in Yerusalem.







# **SIGD**

## **IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL**



In Israel, Sigd is an opportunity for all of the Beta Israel to convene once a year, and it constitutes a source of connection to their culture and roots.

---

Crowds of participants make their way to Yerusalem, young and old alike, and convene at the Armon Hanatziv Promenade, overlooking the Western Wall (the remnant of the holy Temple).

---

Some hold the ceremony at the Western Wall plaza.

---

The Kessim conduct the prayer service with the participation of the public, and at the end of the service, a state ceremony is held with speeches and blessings from public figures.

---

The ceremony concludes by breaking the fast and eating the dabo bread.

## DID YOU KNOW?

In Israel, the Beta Israel celebrate Sigd in one place, in Yerusalem.





## THE STATUS OF SIGD IN ISRAEL

In 2008, the Knesset passed the Sigd Law.

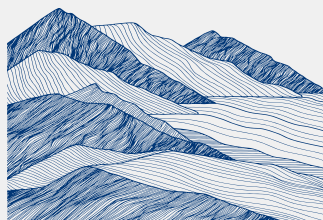
THE EXPLANATION ACCOMPANYING THE BILL STATED:  
"ADOPTION OF THE HOLIDAY BY THE KNESSET AND BY THE STATE  
OF ISRAEL WILL FACILITATE PRESERVATION OF THIS ANCIENT TRADITION".  
IT IS ALSO AN OFFICIAL OPTIONAL VACATION DAY FROM WORK.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Enactment of the Sigd Law  
was a joint effort of Knesset  
members from across  
the political spectrum.







## CONCLUSION



Sigd represents the historical event at Mount Sinai and the renewal of the covenant between God and the nation.

◆ This is a day of prayer, beseeching, and yearning for Yerusalem.

◆ It is also an annual opportunity for the community to come together and bond.

**EVERY JEWISH COMMUNITY THAT RETURNS FROM THE DIASPORA TO THE LAND OF ISRAEL  
BRINGS TRADITIONS AND CUSTOMS WITH IT THAT ARE PART OF THE JEWISH-ISRAELI  
MOSAIC AND BECOME CULTURAL TREASURES**







המרכז למורשת יהדות אתיופיה  
מנהל מורשת יהודית אתיופית  
The Ethiopian Jewry Heritage Center

# ONE LAST LINE TO CONCLUDE

A IDIOM OF THE BETA ISRAEL THAT IS FITTING  
FOR THE SIGD CEREMONY:

THE NECK WAS CREATED  
SO THAT A PERSON CAN  
LOOK BACK

አንገት የተፈጠረው  
አዙሮ ለማይት ነው

Credits:

Photo credits: Shoshana Ben Dor, Joan Roth, Mark Naiman — Government Press Office.

Recording of the prayer Yitbārek 'egzi'abəḥer (Kess Rahamim Nega) from the "Liturgy of the Beta Israel: Prayers of the Jews of Ethiopia," Center for the Study of Jewish Music, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.



## QUIZ ABOUT SIGD

---

The following are 15 questions about the Sigd holiday.  
We invite you to answer them and check your answers.



# INTRODUCTION

Every Jewish community that returns from the Diaspora to the Land of Israel brings traditions and customs with it that are part of the Jewish-Israeli mosaic and become cultural treasures.

---

Sigd is an excellent opportunity to discover, understand, and connect to one of the most ancient traditions, preserved for thousands of years by the Beta Israel community.



1.

## WHAT DOES THE WORD SIGD MEAN?

- A. A type of fabric
- B. An acronym for words from the prayers
- C. Worship and prostration
- D. An Amharic word that means holiday



1.

## WHAT DOES THE WORD SIGD MEAN?

- ✗ A. A type of fabric
- ✗ B. An acronym for words from the prayers
- ✓ C. Worship and prostration
- ✗ D. An Amharic word that means holiday



**2.**

## **WHEN IS SIGD CELEBRATED?**

- A.** 50 days after Yom Kippur
- B.** The 29th of Heshvan
- C.** In the spring in Ethiopia (beginning of the dry season)
- D.** All of the answers are correct



2.

## WHEN IS SIGD CELEBRATED?

- ✗ A. 50 days after Yom Kippur
- ✗ B. The 29th of Heshvan
- ✗ C. In the spring in Ethiopia (beginning of the dry season)
- ✓ D. All of the answers are correct



**3.**

## **THE HOLIDAY HAS ADDITIONAL NAMES – WHAT ARE THEY?**

- A.** The second Yom Kippur
- B.** The Mehelela (beseeching) holiday
- C.** Amta Sava (day of gathering)
- D.** B and C are correct



**3.**

## **THE HOLIDAY HAS ADDITIONAL NAMES – WHAT ARE THEY?**

- ✗ **A.** The second Yom Kippur
- ✗ **B.** The Mehelela (beseeching) holiday
- ✗ **C.** Amta Sava (day of gathering)
- ✓ **D.** B and C are correct



**4.**

**THE SOURCE FOR SIGD IS TAKEN FROM A SIMILAR  
EVENT DESCRIBED IN THE BIBLE. WHAT IS IT?**

- A.** The ceremony held by Ezra and Nehemiah upon their return to Zion
- B.** The Covenant between the Parts
- C.** The burning bush
- D.** The destruction of the first Temple



4.

**THE SOURCE FOR SIGD IS TAKEN FROM A SIMILAR  
EVENT DESCRIBED IN THE BIBLE. WHAT IS IT?**

- ✓ A. The ceremony held by Ezra and Nehemiah upon their return to Zion
- ✗ B. The Covenant between the Parts
- ✗ C. The burning bush
- ✗ D. The destruction of the first Temple



**5.**

**IN ETHIOPIA, THE BETA ISRAEL  
CELEBRATED SIGD BY ASCENDING TO...**

- A.** A temple
- B.** The top of a mountain
- C.** A palace
- D.** A tower



5.

**IN ETHIOPIA, THE BETA ISRAEL  
CELEBRATED SIGD BY ASCENDING TO...**

- ✗ A. A temple
- ✓ B. The top of a mountain
- ✗ C. A palace
- ✗ D. A tower



**6.**

**SINCE IMMIGRATING TO ISRAEL,  
THE BETA ISRAEL CELEBRATE SIGD AT...**

- A. The Ethiopian Jewry Museum
- B. Mount Meron
- C. Yerusalem – at the Armon Hanatziv Promenade
- D. Yerusalem – at the Western Wall plaza
- E. C and D are correct



**6.**

**SINCE IMMIGRATING TO ISRAEL,  
THE BETA ISRAEL CELEBRATE SIGD AT...**

- ✗ A. The Ethiopian Jewry Museum
- ✗ B. Mount Meron
- ✗ C. Yerusalem – at the Armon Hanatziv Promenade
- ✗ D. Yerusalem – at the Western Wall plaza
- ✓ E. C and D are correct



**7.**

## **WHAT IS THE REASON FOR ASCENDING TO THE TOP OF A MOUNTAIN DURING THE SIGD PRAYERS?**

- A.** To commemorate and symbolize the event at Mount Sinai
- B.** The top of the mountain is cleaner and purer
- C.** The effort of climbing the mountain is part of the Sigd fast
- D.** A and B are correct



7.

## WHAT IS THE REASON FOR ASCENDING TO THE TOP OF A MOUNTAIN DURING THE SIGD PRAYERS?

- ✗ A. To commemorate and symbolize the event at Mount Sinai
- ✗ B. The top of the mountain is cleaner and purer
- ✗ C. The effort of climbing the mountain is part of the Sigd fast
- ✓ D. A and B are correct



**8.**

**THE PRAYERS ARE LED BY THE COHANIM (PRIESTS).  
WHAT IS THIS COHEN CALLED?**

- A.** Cohen Tzedek
- B.** Kess
- C.** Son of Aaron
- D.** King Solomon



8.

**THE PRAYERS ARE LED BY THE COHANIM (PRIESTS).  
WHAT IS THIS COHEN CALLED?**

- ✗ A. Cohen Tzedek
- ✓ B. Kess
- ✗ C. Son of Aaron
- ✗ D. King Solomon



9.

**THE TORAH OF THE BETA ISRAEL IS CALLED:**

- A. Orit
- B. Torah
- C. Ora and Tefila
- D. Chumash Yisrael



9.

**THE TORAH OF THE BETA ISRAEL IS CALLED:**

- ✓ A. Orit
- ✗ B. Torah
- ✗ C. Ora and Tefila
- ✗ D. Chumash Yisrael



**10.**

**THE SPOKEN LANGUAGES OF THE BETA ISRAEL ARE  
AMHARIC AND TIGRINYA. WHAT IS THE HOLY LANGUAGE?**

- A.** Aramaic
- B.** Ge'ez
- C.** Amharic
- D.** Semitic



10.

**THE SPOKEN LANGUAGES OF THE BETA ISRAEL ARE  
AMHARIC AND TIGRINYA. WHAT IS THE HOLY LANGUAGE?**

- ✗ A. Aramaic
- ✓ B. Ge'ez
- ✗ C. Amharic
- ✗ D. Semitic



**11.**

**ON SIGD DAY, THE BETA ISRAEL'S CUSTOM IS TO:**

- A.** To hold a large feast from morning to evening
- B.** To prepare food at home with the family to fulfill the commandment of hosting guests
- C.** To make the pilgrimage from Tel Aviv to Yerusalem
- D.** To fast during the day and hold a feast after the prayers are over



11.

**ON SIGD DAY, THE BETA ISRAEL'S CUSTOM IS TO:**

- ✗ A. To hold a large feast from morning to evening
- ✗ B. To prepare food at home with the family to fulfill the commandment of hosting guests
- ✗ C. To make the pilgrimage from Tel Aviv to Yerusalem
- ✓ D. To fast during the day and hold a feast after the prayers are over



12.

## HOW IS THE FAST CUSTOMARILY ENDED?

- A. The Kessim make a blessing on the dabo, slice it and distribute it to the congregation
- B. By drinking water from the springs of the mountains of Yerusalem
- C. By eating a new fruit, over which the Kessim say the *Shehechiyanu* blessing
- D. The fast ends at sunset without any special ceremony or prayer



12.

## HOW IS THE FAST CUSTOMARILY ENDED?

- ✓ A. The Kessim make a blessing on the dabo, slice it and distribute it to the congregation
- ✗ B. By drinking water from the springs of the mountains of Yerusalem
- ✗ C. By eating a new fruit, over which the Kessim say the *Shehechiyanu* blessing
- ✗ D. The fast ends at sunset without any special ceremony or prayer



**13.**

## **WHAT ARE THE MAIN THEMES OF SIGD?**

- A.** It symbolizes and reminds the people of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai
- B.** A reminder to renew the covenant and loyalty to the Torah and its commandments (like in the period of Ezra and Nehemiah upon their return to Zion)
- C.** Repentance (in contrast with Yom Kippur, a day of individual atonement, the repentance is an act of the entire community)
- D.** All of the answers are correct



13.

## WHAT ARE THE MAIN THEMES OF SIGD?

- ✗ A. It symbolizes and reminds the people of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai
- ✗ B. A reminder to renew the covenant and loyalty to the Torah and its commandments (like in the period of Ezra and Nehemiah upon their return to Zion)
- ✗ C. Repentance (in contrast with Yom Kippur, a day of individual atonement, the repentance is an act of the entire community)
- ✓ D. All of the answers are correct



**14.**

**SIGD WAS OBSERVED FOR THE FIRST  
TIME DURING THE DAYS OF**

- A.** David and Solomon
- B.** Genesis and Exodus
- C.** Ezra and Nehemiah
- D.** Hillel and Shammai



14.

**SIGD WAS OBSERVED FOR THE FIRST  
TIME DURING THE DAYS OF**

- ✗ A. David and Solomon
- ✗ B. Genesis and Exodus
- ✓ C. Ezra and Nehemiah
- ✗ D. Hillel and Shammai



**15.**

**SIGD IS A DAY OF RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT.  
WHY DOES THE COVENANT NEED TO BE RENEWED?**

- A.** To strengthen the faith
- B.** To maintain the connection between Jews in the Diaspora and in the State of Israel
- C.** To maintain the religious, spiritual, and communal identity of the Beta Israel
- D.** A and B are correct



15.

**SIGD IS A DAY OF RENEWAL OF THE COVENANT.  
WHY DOES THE COVENANT NEED TO BE RENEWED?**

- ✗ A. To strengthen the faith
- ✗ B. To maintain the connection between Jews in the Diaspora and in the State of Israel
- ✗ C. To maintain the religious, spiritual, and communal identity of the Beta Israel
- ✓ D. A and B are correct



ምስጋና እና  
ሰላምታ

THANK YOU  
AND MAY YOU  
BE BLESSED