



Friends of Yemin Orde



**KOL HAMERCAZ**

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## Wovite Worku, PhD: An Amazing Journey

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When Wovite Worku received her PhD at the recent graduation ceremony of the School of Education at Hebrew University's Mt. Scopus Campus, it was an amazing highlight on the remarkable journey she has undertaken so far, both personally and professionally.

Born near Gondar in Ethiopia, Wovite aged 10, together with her mother and seven older siblings, made their way on foot through Sudan to make Aliya during Operation Moses, in 1984, a journey that took two years. Unfortunately, a few years after they arrived in Israel, her mother passed away. Wovite was lovingly looked after by her older siblings. She spent her high school years as a boarder at Yemin Orde and after graduating, did her national service as a teaching assistant at a school in Safed. This was to be her first step on the road to an interesting and fulfilling career in education.

With her national service completed, Wovite registered for a BA in Informal Education at Bar Ilan University, followed by a Teacher's Certificate and an MA in Educational Administration. Throughout her studies Wovite worked in the field, first as a counselor with at-risk youth, then as a facilitator/advisor at the Leadership Center for Ethiopians in the education system, where she trained teachers how to deal with youth and multiculturalism. For a short period she managed a neighborhood center in Ramle for the Ethiopian community, before going back to work with Ethiopian youth on the Ethiopian National Project sponsored by the Ethiopian Community, the Jewish Agency, Joint-Israel, the New Israel Fund, Keren Hayesod and the Jewish Federations of North America.

With two degrees in hand, Wovite's remarkable journey continued with her being chosen to participate in the prestigious Mandel Leadership course, an experience she defines as life-changing. She then returned to academia to do her PhD, to further her research on Ethiopian youth – a subject she holds so close to her heart – choosing to focus her research on Ethiopian youth and the connection between ethnic identity, perceived discrimination and the drop-out rate from the educational system. In her search for an advisor, Wovite was fortunate to find herself in the office of **Prof. Gabriel Horenczyk** who specializes in issues of acculturation and adaptation of immigrants in general, and Israeli Olim in particular, at the School of Education at Hebrew University. They found common interests in the study of factors associated with “hidden dropout” among Ethiopian immigrants in Israel and she immediately began her research under his supervision. As Gaby was director of the Melton Centre for Jewish Education at the time, Wovite soon found herself in the supportive environment of Melton, which she describes as a second home. It proved to be a place that enabled personal and professional growth and development, providing her with ongoing support and advice. Wovite's face lights up and her enthusiasm bubbles over when she speaks about her experience at Melton and carrying out her research with Prof. Horenczyk. She is also grateful for the emotional and practical support she received from **Eti Gershon-Cohen**, administrator of Student Affairs, and **Anat Haim-Jani**, then-administrative assistant at Melton. Her wish is for all doctoral students to be fortunate enough to study in such an environment.

Wovite's research revealed interesting findings indicating a connection between drop-out rate and discrimination, and between drop-out rate and support from parents and teachers. Recommendations have been made to develop intervention programs for teachers to prevent this discrimination (both hidden and overt), and to provide tools to increase parents' involvement in their children's education.



Wovite Worku at graduation on Mt. Scopus

Throughout the years that Prof. Horenczyk worked with Wovite, he was deeply impressed by her willingness and motivation to study and develop further, as well as her strong commitment to education, in general, and the education of youth from the Ethiopian community, in particular – through research and work in the field.

Wovite's research reflects her many years in the field. She feels that the courses at The School of Education, so varied in scope, gave her an interesting perspective on her work in the field and taught her how to be both creative and critical. In addition, Melton's work with a wide range of communities around the Jewish world provides a unique way of dealing with different cultures and has provided Wovite with new ideas and tools.

Obviously your discussion led to the situation of Ethiopian Olim in Israel today and their recent demonstrations against discrimination. Naturally, Wovite has strong feelings about the issues at hand, both individually and for the community as a whole. She has no doubt that changes in the situation in the country have to come from the top down, as well as through education from an early age.

Wovite for the past 13 years has been the national supervisor for new immigrant at-risk youth at the Ministry of Education, a field she loves and in which she is dedicated to making a difference. In addition, she teaches one day a week at the David Yellin College of Education; is a mentor to two talented Ethiopian students through the organization "Olim BeYahad"; and volunteers on the Parents' Patrol in her hometown of Nes Ziona. She is married to Yossi, an educator, who also arrived in Israel on Operation Moses and they have two daughters, Linoy (12) and Tehila (8.5).

In 2013 Wovite was the recipient of the Matanel Prize for Education awarded by the Van Leer Institute. Her dream is to continue to strengthen the connection between academia and the field, to continue to carry out research and develop in her career and to make a difference in the education system to ensure equal opportunities for all and that the voice of the weak is heard. At Melton, we all look forward to hearing about the next stages of Wovite's amazing journey.