



Asher Seyum

"I remember the shock we all felt at the difference between our dreams of Israel and the reality. I was 13 and I knew very quickly that if I wanted to integrate and become part of Israeli society I must invest all my energy in getting a good education."

At the age of 13, Asher Seyum and his family left their village in the Gondar region of Ethiopia for Israel. They went through terrible tragedy, including the imprisonment of Asher's brother and their separation from him for the next seven years.

Arriving at the Netanya Absorption Center in 1984, Asher and his family found themselves in the midst of demonstrations revolving around the religious establishment's recognition of the Ethiopian Jewish community. Children were not sent to school, but Asher snuck out and was the only boy in his class. "I received private lessons and learned Hebrew before anyone else."

With his grasp of Hebrew, Asher, like his father in Ethiopia, became a leader. People turned to him for assistance and many times he was the voice of his community. "I understood that in order for our community to move forward we needed to learn and to understand the society."

Although he faced some difficult times, Asher says that every crisis made him stronger and more determined to succeed. He was accepted to the Israel Defense Forces Academic Reserve program and received his B.Ed. in physical education from the Wingate Institute, Israel's National Center for Physical Education and Sport.

Asher also went to Russia through the Jewish Agency to meet with Jews from the former Soviet Union (FSU). "Everyone thought



I was crazy going to Russia. But we live in an integrated society and I felt it was important to get to know each other. I broke down a lot of barriers and connected to the people. The bottom line is we are all Jews."

For the first eight years of his professional career Asher worked as a counselor at the Ben Yakir Youth Aliyah Village, where many Ethiopian youngsters reside. He then went on to serve as the director of the Merom Absorption Center in Safed, where he narrowly escaped death when a Katyusha rocket landed in his office.

Married, with two young children, Asher, 37, is currently the director of the Ashdod Absorption Center. He interacts daily with new immigrants from South America, France and the FSU. "I am proving something very important to Israeli society, and breaking down many stereotypes through my work," says Asher.