



Taking Torah to Africa

August 2007 Newsletter



SHALOM

Our Journey to Moroto *(Emily's insights on the journey)*

Our eleven-hour journey to Moroto was on the oldest and noisiest bus I have ever seen or been on in my adult life. As we sat in our seats waiting to depart we found a new use for toilet paper: we stuffed it (the toilet paper) into a hole in the floor, so that we wouldn't eat so much dust. The windows next to my ears rattled so badly that I also stuffed toilet paper between the two panes. An hour later we stopped in Mbale where I took the leisure of using a toilet; that would be the last time until our arrival in Moroto at six p.m. in the evening. As you travel north, the army is quite visible. I even saw a tank at one of the bases. Now, how would you use a tank against naked warriors running on foot? Upon our arrival in Moroto, we were assured that the bus was safe because the Karamojong

warriors will not shoot at a bus. One of the warriors ambushed a bus and then went home to find out it was his brother he had shot and killed. So then they decided since their mothers and grandmothers ride the bus, they will not shoot the buses.

A Visit to the Village

The next morning was difficult, my stomach was painning and I had terrible diarrhea. I decided to not eat and keep going, as a visit to a village had been planned by Isaac and Peter. The Karamojong people do not welcome strangers to their villages; we could only go if taken by someone. We were introduced to Pastor Peter, who would take us to his home village. Peter had been a respected warrior who went ahead of the warriors to start a raid. They raid each other for cattle, stealing and killing each other. Somehow, Peter ended up killing his brother. According to Karamojong culture the family should have killed him, but since he was family, they took him to the authorities instead. He spent 10 years in prison and there, he got saved. When coming back home he did not want to enter the old life style, so he did not return to the village. He is now married, has a semi - permanent home in the town of Moroto, and is the assistant pastor with our friend Isaac. This man is, indeed, a new creature in Messiah!

Leaving town we rode the back of a pickup for about 3 miles and then had to “foot“, walking through mud, as it is the rainy season. The mud stuck onto your shoes so badly that walking became difficult, the heel on Russell’s shoe was even torn loose. We were actually walking on the very ground that had been given to the Jewish people in 1942, as a place to settle. After struggling to avoid mud and thorns, I said, “I need a camel! Where are they? I want one!” They replied, “They are out in the bush”. I thought, “Yeah, right, you expect me to believe that?” We walked at least a mile crossing a number of river beds. The river beds were small canyons, but become dangerous rivers when it rains on Mount Moroto. Many lives have been lost when the water flows down from the mount and fills the river beds. A woman digging in a field shouted to us in the local vernacular “We need food!” Pastor Peter answered, “Quit shedding innocent blood, that’s why you’re cursed.” Being one of them, he can talk to them in this manner. Before entering the cluster of huts inside the fence of thorns, we met the men who were outside, some where lying down, others were doing some iron works making spears and knives. In their culture it is the woman’s job to support the children and provide for the family. Any work done by the men to make money will be spent on a local alcoholic drink, not on the family. Sorghum is the main crop grown as the growing season is so short, and then drought comes. Only one meal a day is served to the family, including the children. Finally we entered the main gate, and crawled through a small entrance to visit the family huts.



The Karamojong People

by Russell

In Northeastern Uganda there is a tribe called the Karamojong. In order to survive, they basically raise and herd cattle because the land where they live cannot sustain the growth of vegetables due to regular droughts. Along with the droughts, neighboring cattle-keeping tribes constantly attack the Karamojong in violent efforts to raid their livestock.

In a planned attempt of ACTS For Messiah Ministries to take Torah to the northern part of the country, Emily, John and I took a mission trip to a Karamojong town of Moroto on June 21, 2007. A Karamojong pastor, Isaac Ocan, of Moroto Full Gospel Church hosted us. It is through Pastor Isaac and his assistant, Peter Loyolo that we came to learn and experience the Karamojong way of life. The two helped us to catch a ride on the back of a pick-up truck heading towards Peter's village. Our adventure on the truck was short-lived about three miles away from town when we had to get off the truck and walk along muddy foot-paths that stretch across a number of rivers. After about an hour of struggling through the sticky mud, we came to a typical Karamojong homestead where we came face to face with the warriors. Their homestead is surrounded by a large perimeter fence made of a thick pile of thorny branches with only one main gate. Every family lot within is also fenced from one another. No stranger is safe to enter a homestead of the Karamojong unless he or she is brought in by a member of the homestead. The warriors suspect any intruder to be a spy working for an enemy group intending to raid the homestead. In our case, Pastor Peter, who was a harden warrior of the homestead, introduced us to the elders who gladly shook hands with us as we entered through the one and only gate. We worked our way through very narrow gates within the homestead crawling just like Isaac and Peter. We ended up in front of two little huts having very small doors. "Here is Peter's home!" Isaac said. Peter quickly crawled into one of the huts and came out with something for us to sit on. It was a large, dry and flat skin of a cow. A young man told us it is used as a mat for sleeping at night. We comfortably sat on the "mat" and visited as Isaac and his team unfolded the history and lifestyle of their people.



According to Isaac, cattle to a Karamojong are unique members of the family and of the community. They are not revered as divine though, but are considered more as the most significant members of a man's family. In a land where food crops are very unpredictable due to the capricious nature of the climate, cattle are relied upon to provide the foundation of nutrition through milk, blood, and meat. The wealth attached to cattle also provides the Karamojong with a measure of control and power over his peers in the community. But for the Karamojong, cattle are even much more than money in the bank or food on the table. Cattle are not supposed to be killed for food or sold for money.

One of the things we failed to comprehend is the fact that the Karamojong culture is absolutely not in support of women and children. As a result of this odd culture, nearly 70% of the street children in the country are of Karamojong origin. During the short rainy season, the women and girls get up early morning and head to the gardens where they cultivate a drought resistant cereal crop called sorghum. It is the women who literally do the entire garden, domestic and building work including the provision of food for the family. After digging all morning, they go hunting for wild vegetables to bring home for their starving children in the afternoon. There is only one meal a day and the children are well aware that it comes only in the evening if their mother and elder sisters succeed in gathering something to cook. Failure to find something to cook means no meal for the day and everyone in the family, except the father, goes to sleep on an empty stomach. The man gets to eat at the expense of his family, while accusing and hitting his wife for failure to provide food for the family. Now you may be thinking this is very unjust. Yes, of course, it is, but this is just a little bit of what this culture does to its people.

On the other hand, the men remain at home enjoying their sleep till sunrise. As soon as the sun is up, they move out and sit in small groups outside the perimeter fence visiting with each other and enjoying the warmth of the rising sun. It was during the morning hours that we approached Peter's homestead and the first group of men we met were comprised of old men. Some of them were making spears, arrows and knives to be sold later in the afternoon. The money from the sales would all be used to buy a local brew which serves as an intoxicant drink and food as well. We were informed by Isaac that all

the money made from such sales is spent on a drinking spree that brings together men of the homestead that same day. The children and women have no share in that kind of money. A few meters away from the old men were smaller groups of young men doing nothing but waiting for the meal and drink for the day. When evening comes, they get back home drunk and full, yet, expecting to eat a meal provided and prepared by their wives. This is a normal lifestyle condoned and practiced in the entire Karamojong community. The men do whatever they want as they continue to produce more and more children who eventually end up on the streets of a different town, starving and feeding from garbage containers.

Three of the children we have in our program are Karamojong children picked up from the streets of Tororo, rehabilitated and put in school. From our experience with them and the Karamojong community around us, it is clear that a change in the culture of these people can make a great change in their future. We are trying to get across to them that the God-given culture in the Torah is the best. The women are overloaded and they need to be supported and encouraged. The children need to be fed and educated in order to give them exposure and a different mindset. We ask you to pray that God may give us grace to bring a better meaning of life to the disadvantaged and despised Karamojong people we encounter.



Walking back from the village

(Emily continues the journey)

It was decided there was too much mud in the beaten path back to the road, so we cut across and walked back to the town. The next 3 miles would be in the noonday sun, and across five different riverbeds, but low and behold in the distance we saw a herd of camels. I truly felt like I was in the land of Israel. When we entered town we were all too hot and tired, even drinking soda took too much strength.

The Congregation and its Outreach

The born-again or savedees, (a local description of those who teach salvation) are not wanted or welcomed in Moroto. One mistake the Pentecostals made was telling the local people they could not drink their local brew. They make the brew out of millet and then drink the brew and eat the residue, getting both a drink and food. Handling these issues truly takes the wisdom of God. When Pastor Isaac's congregation wanted to build, they were sold a piece of land in an obscure, dangerous area and told to go die there. On the land sold to them was a shade tree, under the tree dead bodies used to be found every couple of weeks. The congregation has prospered and the land all around them is being developed. Right next to the church is a slum where some of the Karamojong people dwell. These are the poorest of the poor.

The congregation started a feeding program along with Bible lessons for the children. Because of their outreach, the government took notice and built a brand new primary school right next to the church land. As we watched the feeding program, done by the youth who also were former street children, I saw so much malnutrition, scabies, open sores etc. Just getting porridge twice a week has prevented some of the children from dying of starvation. This poor congregation spends about \$15 for each feeding which feeds 250 children. They used to do it three times a week but had to cut back to two times from a lack of funds. I now understand why my own street children left home at 4 and 5 years of age to look for food on the street and in the garbage, they did this because there was no food at home. When we ate at the restaurant the street children stood outside with plastic bags waiting for us to motion to them to come and let us scrape our leftovers into their bags. When given our leftovers they rejoiced and thanked us for the meal. Maybe a family or Bible study class would like to sponsor one of the feeding times. If too many people volunteer to help, don't worry, they also need clothes and medicine, they used to come to the church naked, but the congregation provided them with used clothes.

The Death of Isaac's Grandee (grandmother)

(Emily's boy's loss)

Isaac's grandfather came to our door with distress marked on his face, reporting that the grandmother's condition was so bad that she was about to die. So we went to the Bison community of the Karamojong peoples and conferred with the chairmen there. He informed us that we were wise not to give the husband money as he was arguing with

everyone there, and no one was happy with him. We took her to the hospital, but we were informed that someone had to come to take care of her. You only get a bed in the hospital. We took Isaac out of school and headed to Busia (about 30 miles away) to find the daughter, Isaac's mother. By divine favor we found her and for the first time in five years Isaac saw his mother. He refused to leave her as we went for lunch while she prepared herself. At the hospital the daughter (Isaac's mother) cried as her mother tried to give her the traditional Karamojong greeting, but did not have the strength. They had not seen each other in years, but only 45 minutes apart. We provided sheets, blanket, basin, food, etc. and hoped for healing as they started IV's. The next day it was reported that she had died. Then there was nowhere to bury her. The chairman again organized and we bought land for about \$10, a white cloth to bury her in and were informed that we should come back in the morning to pick up some young men to go to the hospital for the body. I assumed the hospital would put her body in the morgue. That was not to be the case. When she died the daughter walked away and left her. That is how we found her at noon day the following day. She had remained in the women's ward of about thirty other women, lying there dirty and stinking, no one had even washed her. Everyone was pleased to have her body brought back to their village and we were thanked by all, even the local government official. We were told they are trying to teach the Karamojong to bury their dead, otherwise they just leave them. If they die in the hut they just leave the hut.

The Burial Ceremony, by Russell

Traditionally, the burial of an adult person takes place by 2:00 pm. Isaac and I (Russell) went back to Bison a few minutes before the burial time, everyone around was drunk including Isaac's mother and grandfather. The land bought for the burial was a distance from the hut where the body was and as the body was being taken, the only person mourning was Isaac, the rest seemed excited as they walked along with the body. The grave was dug in the middle of a sugar cane field. In the burial process the drunk elderly men started arguing on how to lay the body in the grave, one of them slid backwards into the grave. As soon as they started putting back the soil on the grave the rest of the crowd rushed to start breaking sugar cane illegally, or stealing, as they walk around. Isaac, his mother, grandfather, and sister were called forward to put the soil back on the body. After the burial they started back, laughing and talking about the behavior of the drunken men.

In closing, we feel drawn to these people, and that God is going to use us to minister the Word of God into their lives and their culture. Even now the chairmen is calling us back and wants us to get involved in the health of a women who has tuberculosis. Pray.

Thank you for your support and love.

Emily and Russell

Taking Torah to Africa



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