TAWKALECH: I'm passing to my kids to make sure that they will learn and be grounded with their ancestors' stories and roots as an Ethiopian Israeli—as a Beta Israel.

SARAH: This is Heritage Words, a podcast about the words we've inherited from our ancestors and the meaning they bring to our lives. Heritage Words is produced by the HUC-JIR Jewish Language Project, which raises awareness about Jewish ancestral diversity through the lens of language. I'm your host, Sarah Bunin Benor. Today, we are thrilled to have, for the first time, two guests: Michal Avera Samuel and Telahun Liad Samuel, mother and son. Michal is a researcher and coordinator for the Shalom Curriculum Project at University of Wisconsin-Madison, and previously she was a senior community shlicha in Ohio, and in Israel, Michal served as the CEO of Fidel Association, advocating for the successful integration of Ethiopian Israelis, and she served on the prestigious National Round Table Panel on Social Issues, and she was the research assistant for the Israel Democracy Institute. Telahun Liad Samuel is 19 years old, and he is currently a college student at the Ohio State University at Newark, majoring in computer science and engineering. Welcome to the show, Michal and Telahun.

TAWKALECH: It's good to be here. We are excited to be here.

TELAHUN: Yeah.

SARAH: I'm glad that we have you both. So let's just start out by telling us about your names. I know you both have multiple names, and maybe you could just tell us how you got those names, if they have any special meaning to you, and which names you use in which situations. Let's start with Michal.

TAWKALECH: I was born in Ethiopia, and my Ethiopian name is Tawkalech. This is the name that was given to me by my parents. In Ethiopian culture, you have multiple names. Your parents give you a name, your grandmother, your brothers. So my main name is Tawkalech. Tawkalech means wise girl. I'm the youngest in the family from nine brothers and sisters. So I think this is the vision that my parents had for me. And I have a Hebrew name, when I came to Israel in 1984, during Operation Moses. So the Israeli, they didn't know how to pronounce my name, Tawkalech, so unfortunately, Michal is the name that was given to me by one of the Ulpan teachers—Hebrew teachers—and Avera it's my family name and Samuel is my marriage name.

SARAH: Before we go on to you, Telahun, I just want to ask, Michal, so your family name was Avera. Was that in Ethiopia? Was that your family name also?

TAWKALECH: So in Ethiopia, it's interesting how family names are given. You always follow your father's name. There is no family names. There is your grandparents' names, and women, my mom, she kept her family names. Avera is my grandparents' name. My father, his name is Melkenech. So, in Ethiopia, I was called Tawkalech Melkenech, by my father's name. There is no one main family name. This is something very European thing, I think. In Ethiopia, women had the power to keep their family names. They never change this when they get married. So my mom was Simones Deleke. So she kept her family name. So, only when we came to Israel, the authority decided to create a family name. So, because my father was still alive, they chose my grandparents' name, Avera, Melkenech Avera. So Avera is my—our family name, all my brothers and everyone. But this is a very special feminist act that the women can keep their own family names, and they don't have to adopt any other family name. So, because of that, I added my husband's name for my kids and for myself, but I keep my Avera as a main family name.

SARAH: Okay. And so your husband's last name is Samuel, and you took that when you got married. Is your husband also from Ethiopia?

TAWKALECH: Yeah. My husband is also from Ethiopia. Born in Ethiopia. He's Ethiopian-Israeli, did the same process, he made Aliyah from Ethiopia during Operation Moses in 1984.

SARAH: Okay. And so it sounds like two of your four names are imposed on you from your immigration experience in Israel.

TAWKALECH: Definitely. But all of my names, they—because people didn't know how to pronounce Tawkalech, so I kept my name Michal. And then sometimes I don't have any emotional attachment with the names, but I was lucky. I'm joking all the time. I'm joking about that. I'm lucky to have the name Michal because Michal is a beautiful name. It's in the Bible. Because some of my family, they have Avraham, Yitzchak, Yaakov, Sara, Leah. All of the names from the Bible. So I do feel that my name is also representing the process of my immigration to Israel, my Aliyah to Israel, my family's Aliyah to Israel. It's reflecting the whole process. Like how—what does it mean being Israeli—becoming a newcomer to Israeli society, and a name is representing all of my identity. But I always keep telling people that my original name is Tawkalech. Michal is my Hebrew name.

SARAH: So, which would you prefer that I call you today?

TAWKALECH: Tawkalech.

SARAH: Okay, I will call you Tawkalech. And now we turn to Telahun. Please tell us your name story.

TELAHUN: Okay, so I got both of my names, Telahun and Liad, from my parents. They wanted me to have both an Ethiopian name in Amharic, and they also wanted me to have a Hebrew name for when I'm in Israel. So, Telahun, its meaning is my umbrella or my protector. So, as the eldest kid in the family, they kind of wanted me to take on this protecting-the-family kind of role in the family, which I have grown into. And that's really the reason why they named me Telahun. And I've kind of grown into it. I make sure I always—that my sister and my brother are both all safe, all good. I make sure I treat them well, buy them all the stuff like the older brother I am. And Liad is more of a connection to the parents. It's LEE-AHD, it's kind of two parts. So its meaning is 'mine forever'. So my parents' kind of connection that they will have me forever.

SARAH: That's beautiful. So we have Tawkalech, 'wise girl', Telahun, 'protector', Liad, 'mine forever', and Michal from the Tanakh. That's beautiful. Which name would you prefer that I use for you? Telahun or Liad?

TELAHUN: I personally do not have a preference. Whichever one you find easier to say, I'd say.

SARAH: Got it. Okay, so now we've heard about Tawkalech's immigration story a little bit. Let's turn to Telahun. What is your immigration story? You were born in Israel?

TELAHUN: Yeah. I was born and raised in Israel until I was around 15. And that's when I moved here to the United States.

SARAH: And now you live in Ohio?

TELAHUN: Yeah. Now I live in Columbus, Ohio.

SARAH: Okay. And so I'm assuming in your first 15 years, you spoke a combination of Hebrew and Amharic? Or just Hebrew?

TELAHUN: So, I personally only spoke Hebrew with the family. For me as a kid, I didn't really see the importance of learning Amharic, which was a little bit of a mistake by my part. But I only grew up learning Hebrew, and right now I am taking classes. I was actually—I just came back from a class about learning Amharic. I'm trying my best to learn the language and have that connection with my parents. And it's going good for

now, but I'm trying my best to stay consistent with it. Slowly but surely, learn the Amharic language.

SARAH: That's great. So growing up, you spoke Hebrew with your friends and your family. And then, when you moved to America at age 15, how did you learn English?

TELAHUN: So I was really lucky to have a really good program in my class back in Israel for my seventh and eighth grade years. They didn't, like, force us, but they kind of forced us to speak English in class. They were trying their best to make sure that we don't just, like, know how to write and know the words in English. They wanted also to be able to speak English. So I was able to do that, and I was able to make some small talk, and from there I just kind of adapted while learning some other new stuff.

SARAH: And when you moved to America, you started in school. Did you go to a Jewish school?

TELAHUN: Yeah, I went to Columbus Torah Academy. It's the Jewish school that we have here in Columbus. Luckily for me, there's a lot of guys in there that already knew how to speak Hebrew. While they either moved from Israel to Columbus or when their parents had moved earlier, and they knew how to speak Hebrew, and kind of went down and made sure that their daughters and sons knew how to speak Hebrew. So I was lucky to also have that kind of connection to—if I had any questions, if I didn't know a word in English, they were able to help me.

SARAH: So you didn't grow up speaking Amharic, but did you grow up exposed to Amharic in any way?

TELAHUN: Yeah. So we have a holiday called Chag Sigd. It's a holiday where we go to—back in Ethiopia, the origin of it, they went up to the tallest mountain in order to pray for them to come to Israel and get to Israel. They had their prayers, and then after that, they had a feast. They had food, the traditional food. But when they got to Israel, they kept the tradition going. They went to a mountain in Yerushalayim and had, of course, the prayer, but they had a bunch of other little tents, so you can learn about the Ethiopian heritage of the Ethiopian Jews. And my mom, as you said, she was working at Fidel, so she had a tent in there. And ever since I was young, she always used to take me and teach me and kind of get me to go. And when I got older, I wanted to keep that tradition going. So I kept going with her. I missed a day of school, which is okay. And…

SARAH: Okay, so tell us what exposure you had to Amharic at that ceremony.

TELAHUN: So, to the Amharic language specifically, my mom always taught me a couple of words. My mom and my dad, they always taught me *govez*, they always told me when I was doing something—it was like 'Govez!' Like, you're doing a good job, like a hero. They tried to teach me a little bit of the basic when I was younger, but like a kid, I didn't have the patience to do all of that. I was like, I already know Hebrew, I think I'll be fine. I didn't have the patience. So I knew a couple of basic words, but I didn't have too much of exposures to it. But I do know about the traveling that they did all the way from Ethiopia to Israel, to Sudan first, and about their travels.

SARAH: And so, tell us more about the Sigd ceremony. So you mentioned attending those as a child in Israel. In what ways was Amharic used? Were there songs? Were there prayers? Was there also Ge'ez, another language that's used ritually by Ethiopian Jews?

TELAHUN: Yeah. So I wasn't specifically at the prayers. I was helping my mom set up the learning centers that she had. She invited people from a couple of the Fidel centers that she had as dancers, to dance for traditional Amharic music and have a little show. So other people who visited because they've heard about it, they want to know about the Ethiopian Jews, so she had a little ceremony of traditional Amharic dances. And I was trying my best to kind of know about that. Her and my dad taught me a little, a few moves, so, if, for some reason, I go to an Amharic party with them, or I just decide to go, I know a couple moves up my sleeve, so.

SARAH: Nice. And Tawkalech, do you want to add anything to that?

TAWKALECH: Yeah, definitely. One of the things that was important for us as parents, is how our kids can learn about our tradition and our history, besides learning about our journey from Ethiopia to Israel, our lives in the village, how our community kept 2,050 years the tradition and the culture. And the Sigd holiday was celebrated 50 days after Yom Kippur. The mourning for Jerusalem, and praying to be part of the Israel, the Jewish community, back to Israel. And for this holiday, it's also important for us to talk about the *kesim* tefilot, how the *kesims'* prayer brought us here to Israel because as a young child, I remember when the whole family's coming for Sigd in Ambober, and we were living next to Ambober, so I remember all my cousins coming to this holiday and walking with stones for the holiday, so it was really important for me to educate the next generation to learn about the tefilot, the prayers of *kesim*, what *kesim* means, the Ethiopian rabbi, and the songs and telling the journey, the story of journey. Our intent, back in Jerusalem, was really to educate not only the Ethiopian community and the Israeli community to learn more about Chag Sigd, the meaning, to show the heroes, our leaders in the community. This is also the part of really going to bring my kids to my

work and my life to just introduce them to the culture and not only to talk, just to make sure they are sitting and doing tashbetzim. I don't know how it's called. It's like, to find the word about Sigd, about Ethiopian tradition, holidays, names. This was the most important for me, besides giving them two names, just to walk the tradition in our life, knowing that—saying *govez* or *nefsu*, *jegnau*, those words that are encouraging words in Amharic, *nefsu,* it's 'you're my soul, my neshama.' *Jegnau,* 'you are really one of the tops,' 'hero.' Those words in Amharic are just reflecting the encouragement and the culture. And you have to know that Ethiopian culture has always been taught by oral and also by short words—pitgamim—how do you say pitgamim? Expressions and words with home or with hiding words. You can tell a story by saying only one word. And this is how I learned. This is what I've been exposed to, my father, he was one of my heroes, saying *lije*, *govez*—my daughter, you are so wonderful and great. Those things that I'm passing to my kids, to make sure that they will learn and be grounded with their ancestors' stories and roots. As an Ethiopian Israeli—as a Beta Israel.

SARAH: Yeah. That's beautiful. Tawkalech, how old were you when you moved from Ethiopia…

TAWKALECH: To Israel. We left Ethiopia when I was eight years old. We walked from Ethiopia to Sudan. We walked about six weeks during the night. We were hiding from the robbers and from Ethiopian soldiers because it was illegal to leave Ethiopia in that time. And then we stayed at the refugee camp in Sudan a year. After a year, I moved to Israel. We made Aliya to Israel when I was already, I think, nine years old. Yeah, it was a very unique experience as a kid. We had a dream. We heard the story about Jerusalem, about the Holy Land. And we were so excited to be in Jerusalem, and even we didn't know what Israel is about. I remember as a kid, we never complained when we walked. We were in the front of the line and just happy to be there. And I remember when we were in Sudan, in the refugee camp, how far it was. Like, you promised us the Holy Land, honey and milk, and very sweet. But it was far away. It was a long way to wait and to suffer and to see all of the Beta Israel, close to 4,000 people died during this journey. It was a hard situation to stay in the refugee camp in Sudan. And at the same time, we didn't lose our faith to be in Jerusalem, to be in the Holy Land. And it was a dream come true for my family. And when we flew, I thought, we are going to fly. We are flying on the wings of an angel to Jerusalem. So it was a really wonderful experience to see, when we landed, my family and my parents falling down and kissing the ground, and happy to be in Jerusalem, and they just forgot to tell us it was Lod at Ben-Gurion Airport and not really quite Jerusalem.

SARAH: Wow. And so, Telahun, it sounds like this story of immigration was a big part of your childhood. You said that you learned about it growing up and also experienced the

Sigd holiday. So what else did you gather from your family's Amharic? You mentioned the word *govez*, meaning 'hero' or 'you're doing a good job.' What other heritage words do you have from Amharic?

TELAHUN: We do have a traditional meal that we do every Shabbos or every Saturday. So we get together all the family. We go and get *dabo*, which is the traditional Ethiopian bread, and *aguwat*, which is—it's shamenet.

TAWKALECH: It's a kind of cheese, sour cheese, that we use special with salad and with…

TELAHUN: Yeah and we get together, we do the kiddush with grape juice, and then we do hamotzi with the dabo. And we just kind of have that tradition and tradition of every Saturday. And we keep it going in here. It's a little something that we picked up, and I—hopefully I'll be able to, one day I'll hopefully do it in my own house.

SARAH: Wow, that's beautiful.

TELAHUN: Yeah.

SARAH: I'm struck by the combination of Hebrew and Amharic, like when you first mentioned the Sigd holiday, Telahun, you said Chag Sigd, and so, I'm assuming that's a combination of the Hebrew word chag and the Sigd that you took with you from Ethiopia, that your families took with you, and then also Tawkalech, when you said *kes*, you pluralized it with the Hebrew -im. *Kesim*. Is that how it's also said in Amharic? Or is that specific…

TAWKALECH: No, actually, we should say *kesoch*. In Amharic it's *kesoch*. But *kesim* is just something that we always combine between Amharic and Hebrew. *Kesim*. No, it's not *kesim*, it's *kesoch*. There are a lot of words that we are using both in, you know, Amharic and Hebrew that we will use. *Govez*, *sanana*. There is the word that we only use in our family as teasing each other, and this is some important thing to combine both of them. And also one of the things that's why my kid doesn't know Amharic is because the Ethiopian community coming from villages, not all of them knew how to write and read even in Amharic. So for me, even though I knew how to write and read in Amharic when I came to Israel, it took me a while to understand how important it is to keep my language and my culture, because in the Israeli school system, they never encourage us to keep our tradition or our language. They told us, you have to be Israeli. I don't know now—what does it mean to be Israeli? We are so multicultural and diverse society. So they keep told us, educated us not to keep the language, speak Hebrew, to

be assimilated in Israeli society. And then at the age of I think 16, 17 or above, I realized how it was important to go back and to keep the language and the tradition. And it's not that we don't want to be assimilated. We want to be integrated, to keep our tradition and to keep our heritage. This is the challenge we have as the second generation or the middle generation of really challenging to be integrated to the Israeli society, to be part of the Israeli society, and facing all of those challenges of prejudice, racism, and other challenges of cultural differences, and helping parents. With that, it was really hard to teach ourselves and our kids languages besides Hebrew. So now, we feel like—I feel how it's important to invest in his education to keep learning the languages that are part of our culture, besides knowing that we keep our holidays and our cultures and the Shabbat tradition. I teach a lot that the Jewish community is so diverse. The challah, it is something that European things have been adopted. So you can see many, many other cultures that they have their own tradition, the *dabo*. It is the way that I bake the *dabo* with my daughter and light the candle—nerot. And then having the Shabbat ceremony with the *dabo*, with the *fitfit* with the salad and speak blessing. Sometimes my husband blesses in Ge'ez, and beside both of this, I think it just showed our kids how it's important to keep the tradition, having *dabo* as the Ethiopian community, the Yemenite has the kubaneh, and others have their own things. So this is the richness of our community, our society, to bring the culture not only in the family. So we are bringing to our community, even here in Columbus.

SARAH: Mm. That's beautiful. Tawkalech, what made you more interested at age 16 in your ancestral language and culture?

TAWKALECH: I think because I was sent to a boarding school in Israel. Most of the Ethiopian kids have been sent to a boarding school. So I didn't grow up among my parents, learning. So I saw the gap between me learning a very Ashkenazi version of halakhot, tradition, and Shabbat, and prayer. And I didn't find all of those prayers of my parents, or the kessim, the rabbi, in my synagogues in school, and when I went back home, I was exposed to the tradition I knew—having *dabo*, having *injera*, the Ethiopian bread. Ethiopian food. And speaking the language with my parents and going to their shul. Speaking with the *kessim* and doing a lot of traditions among the family. And when I went back to school, I was very empty and lonely sometimes, not knowing my tradition. It's not keeping in this school. So I realized that if I'm not going to keep it and I combine both of those traditions, it's going to disappear.

SARAH: Mm.

TAWKALECH: And from there, I was very intentionally learning, reading books in Amharic, speaking with my family and friends in Amharic—alongside Hebrew—and

making sure that I knew some of the events that the community organized, that we should be there to keep tradition. I think this is something that, at a very early age, understanding that we are in a different position as a kid because our parents, they didn't have the ability, language, and cultural education to educate us or to keep our traditions. So we, as a kid, we made a decision to continue our culture. I made a decision that I have to fight for my family, because I knew how much they sacrificed to be in Israel and to be in Jerusalem and not be honored or celebrated in their history in the Israeli curriculum or history, and be seen as weak. Like, 'we brought you, we did it for you.' So I took an action to make sure that my community and my family will be celebrated and will be acknowledged in the Israeli society. This is what I did when I was CEO, and I think that it starts there. And when I was 16 and making a decision that this will be one of my missions, shlichut, in life, to educate others about the Ethiopian community and heritage and history. That we have leaders, we have rabbis, we have guidance. We have kept the tradition many years, we faced antisemitism back in Ethiopia. And we didn't come to Israel because it was hard in Ethiopia, but because we were Zionists. We believe that we belong to the Holy Land as other Jewish people around the world. So it's taken a while. It took time. But due to our activists, leaders, we made it. Our prayer. I'm the seventh generation of a family of *kessim* in my family, so this is something that we are not going to be forget.

SARAH: Wow. So your—is your dad a *kess*?

TAWKALECH: No. My dad—this is past my dad. But my cousins—they are *kessim*. Yeah.

SARAH: Oh wow. So you come from a rabbinic line, and Telahun, does that make you want to become a rabbi or a *kess*?

TELAHUN: I don't think that's going to be my—I just, I don't see it right now happening. But, I mean, you never know. You never know where life takes you, so…

SARAH: That's right. You're studying engineering, right?

TELAHUN: Yeah. Computer science.

SARAH: Oh, got it. Okay. And Telahun, it sounds like your mom has done so much to raise awareness about Ethiopian traditions in Israel and also in the US. How do you see that playing out in the US in your community in Columbus, Ohio, for example, do you have a Sigd celebration?

TELAHUN: We don't have the same Sigd celebration that we used to have in Israel. But my mom always, every year, goes—either goes through Zoom, because when we got here it was through Covid, or this year for Sigd, she has went to the school and taught about the Jewish community that we have here about Sigd. So that's our tradition for Sigd to kind of keep it going. So we teach the Jews that we have here in the United States more about the Ethiopian Jews' tradition. And it's been going pretty—pretty amazing. And I try my best to help also my friends with any questions that they have. When I—when I got here, they—they weren't really as educated as they are now. So they had a couple of questions about Sigd and I was always ready to answer them, being proud about by—by my own heritage.

SARAH: Nice. Are there also other Ethiopian Jews in Columbus?

TELAHUN: From what I know, there's not Ethiopian Jews in Columbus. I do know half Ethiopian—so an Ethiopian Jew, but it's only half. His mom is Ethiopian, and then his dad is not Ethiopian. There's one family in Cleveland, but except those people, the closest one, I think, is in Wisconsin. And Silver Spring. We—we met them two years ago. My mom knew the parents, so we met them two years ago.

SARAH: So it's a very different experience than some of the other people I've interviewed who have grown up in communities where there were many people from their immigrant community.

TELAHUN: Yeah, it was—it was an adjustment. But in Israel, it was kind of the same. We went to a public school with mostly just Israeli kids who I—I knew a couple of Ethiopian Jews because of my mom, of course, working in Fidel, and other family friends. But I was always kind of, I guess you could say, the odd one out. But it was fine by me. I was a good kid. I was a bright kid. I was always just looking at it positively. And I was like, okay, well, I guess I could—I could do my best in trying to teach them about where I come from. And—and back then they—I had a couple of good friends in Israel who were—I had one friend who was Russian, so he taught me about his heritage. I had a couple of other friends who were just very curious about my own heritage. So, I mean, it was okay by me. I was just trying to keep the positivity.

SARAH: Nice. So you both mentioned a bunch of words. I want to ask about some of these words. So at one point, Tawkalech said the word *sanana* and Telahun, I want to know—I want *you* to tell me what that means.

TELAHUN: So, it's usually used while we're doing something—something, yeah—something silly. Something not good. So my mom says *ante sanana*. Which *ante* means

‘you’ and *sanana*, I don’t know exactly the translation. But ever since I was young, I knew that meant I was doing something wrong, so I was like, sorry, sorry, sorry, slicha, slicha—beseder, beseder, it’s okay, it’s okay. So that's kind of how I see it. The second she says *sanana,* I'm like, I got myself in some trouble.

SARAH: Okay, I got it. How would you define *sanana*?

TAWKALECH: So *sanana* it's just like you are doing something not nice, in a good way, in a fun way.

SARAH: And Telahun, can you imagine yourself, in the future, using that with your children?

TELAHUN: *Sanana*? I can see myself using it, but then explaining it to them, and I can see myself using it in the future. And hopefully they won’t…

TAWKALECH: You are already using it with your brother.

TELAHUN: I use it a lot with my siblings, I'll be like—

TAWKALECH: And your friend, too.

TELAHUN: My friends, yeah. It's just a force of habit at this point.

SARAH: So you use that word when you're talking to your siblings. How—how many siblings do you have?

TELAHUN: I have one sister and one brother.

SARAH: Okay.

TELAHUN: Both younger than me.

SARAH: And you're the protector, so you have to—

TELAHUN: Yeah. I have to make sure everything is in check, have to make sure they're doing their things right. And yeah, sometimes I use it a little bit.

SARAH: And you said you also use it with your friends. Can you give us an example of how that might play out?

TELAHUN: So, like, I have a lot of really—really good friends that I have. So, occasionally I think of them as like my siblings, I think of them as brothers because they're so close to me. So sometimes I—I slip it, just, like, a little bit. I slip accidentally like *sanana*. And they're like, what did you say? What'd you say? And I'm like, it's just an Amharic word. It's okay, it's okay. Don't worry about it.

SARAH: Are these friends Jewish or not Jewish?

TELAHUN: Jewish. They're Jewish. I have a lot of friends here in the Jewish community, so a lot of them I've grown really close to. So.

SARAH: That's great. I love that you're sharing not only your traditions, like Sigd, but also some of your words. And it sounds like you also do a lot of Ethiopian traditions over Shabbat. Do you ever have friends over for Shabbat and share the *dabo* and the *fitfit* and the *aguwat* with them?

TELAHUN: So the *aguwat* specifically, I haven't had the opportunity quite yet, but a lot of my friends have tried the *dabo*. A lot of my friends also have tried the *injera*. So *injera* is kind of a flatbread, and you use it with traditional sauces that we have. You put it in, you pick it up with your hand, pick a piece, you sometimes have it with *siga*, which is traditional meat that my mom makes. And I've had them try it. As of right now, we didn't have any bad reviews. They both like the *dabo* and they like the *injera*. So it's— it's always good to hear. I always try my best, but *aguwat* not quite yet.

SARAH: You wouldn't have the dairy with the meat.

TELAHUN: Yeah. No.

TAWKALECH: We don't mix. On Shabbat, it's only the *dabo* with the *fitfit*. So we keep kosher. The *injera*, it's just a different way of meals, but it's also one of the things about *dabo,* that this is a beautiful tradition of hosting family and friends. I was part of the Midwest Sukkah Hop, and we hosted an Ethiopian traditional sukkah. I baked a *dabo*. We talked about *dabo*, we talked about our tradition, how we kept a sukkah in Ethiopia and in Israel. So, *dabo* is a kind of bread that we bake for every special occasion. So when we host for Rosh Hashanah, when we host different friend gatherings, Jewish and non-Jewish. So I bake the *dabo* and my husband bakes the *dabo,* and we introduce to the people what it means and how it's important getting together and eating *dabo* as a part of feeding the community, and hosting the community. This is one of the beautiful things that we will always be representing through this, through food, through *dabo* and

others, and the coffee ceremony. *Buna*, we didn't talk about the *buna* that we have, the *buna,* the coffee ceremony that we always do here at home as a part of our tradition, Saturday night or any other occasion that we have the *buna* ceremony or coffee ceremony in our home with friends and family.

SARAH: And is that ceremony conducted in Ge'ez or in Amharic or...

TAWKALECH: Yeah, it's in Amharic. It's in Amharic. *Buna*, it's the coffee. It's how we roast the beans and the whole ceremony, and how many times the beans serve the *buna*, the coffee, it's three rounds, that's how we have the coffee served. It's beautiful the way that the coffee ceremony is, it's just the time getting together to discuss, to consult, to share stories. This has been really one of the tools that's been used in Ethiopia and the village that women can get together and have *buna* together, that they didn't have any psychology, any guidance. So this was the women—when the men would go to the field work, they used to get together and just have conversations and get consulting and help from each other and share with each other. And it can take a long time, like, hours, sitting there, eating, and having discussions. And then I did some of those traditions, come and drink *buna* workshop to the community here and outside to share through this, the feminist act it is, and then how it helps to create community to support each other.

SARAH: Hm.

TAWKALECH: So there is a lot of tradition and Ethiopian community tradition that bring people together and help each other. And the orientation of the community is just helping each other, and no one is left behind. If it's in a wedding, if it's in a funeral, it's in any other celebration, occasion, how the community comes together to support and help each other by cooking together, by bringing things together, by driving from Be'er Sheva to, I don't know, Tel-Aviv. So it's an important thing that I feel like, this is on our shoulders. I feel it's the continuation of the tradition and then, because we didn't have a lot of written history, this is our way to make sure that our tradition will exist for many, many years to come.

SARAH: Beautiful. And are there any Amharic songs that are part of these rituals? Either the *buna* or Shabbat or Sukkot or Sigd? Do you have any Amharic songs that are part of these rituals?

TAWKALECH: Sigd, one of the songs that we used to sing, it's shmela shmela. *Shmela shmela garachin Yerusalem de'hena*. This is the shmela, it's the chasida. How would you say shmela? Chasida? Throat. I don't know the word in Hebrew, what it's called,

shmela. Shmela, it is the bird, the yona that—the chasida—that we used to sing for her that brings us a letter or a note from Jerusalem. If it's Jerusalem, it's okay. *Shmela shmela garachin Yerusalem de'hena.* This is the song that we used to sing a lot when I was young. And during the holidays, during Shabbat, this is my song as a kid. And then also that because again the history has been told by oral. So I always hear the prayer of the *kessim* in Ge'ez.

SARAH: And tell us more about Ge'ez. How does it compare to Amharic?

TAWKALECH: Ge'ez, it's an ancient language that only the *kessim* know how to read in the Bible. This is written in a Bible and they used to read and translate it to the Amharic. Ge'ez is a really different language and ancient language that no one really knows besides the *kessim*, the rabbi, the *kesoch.* The *kesoch* know only that they used to pray, and it's a really unique sound, and it sounds a little bit like Aramaic, Amharic, and Hebrew, a little bit, it's a combination of the languages that is really known by the Ethiopian Jew, reading the *kessim*—the *kesoch*. They knew how to read it and translate it, and pray.

SARAH: And you mentioned that your husband recites a prayer, a blessing, in Ge'ez on Friday night. Tell us more about that.

TAWKALECH: My husband, he didn't know how to read and write in Amharic when he came to Israel. And one of the amazing things he did—he's an engineer, and he worked at a high-tech company—and one of the things that's amazing to learn from him is how he educated himself in Amharic and knowing the reading and writing in Amharic also, because he was in village that they didn't go to school. When he came to Israel, not knowing anything, to write and read in Amharic, in any language. He educated himself and learned Hebrew and became an engineer, learned Amharic, writing and reading. And one of the things he started really practicing and learning how to bless in Ge'ez, and sometimes, like, it's really important in Shabbat to say both of those blessings in Ge'ez and in Hebrew and in Amharic.

SARAH: Do either of you know that blessing in Ge'ez?

TAWKALECH: We don't know. We know that it's a blessing. And it's like, we know what it means, but this is not something that we are practicing daily, because it's really a tough, difficult language to learn. And spiritual. It's highly spiritual when I hear my cousin Ephraim Lowey blessing in Ge'ez, or other *kessim* that's really using those words, it's spiritual—so powerful, so meaningful.

SARAH: Mm hm. So we're almost out of time, but I want to leave the last minute or two for you, both of you, to tell us anything else that you haven't yet shared.

TAWKALECH: I think you can share about your experience learning in Israel in a secular school, and coming here in America, studying all the Gemarah, Mishna, and knowing that this is a new experience for you.

TELAHUN: Okay. We ended up deciding to go to the religious Jewish school. And for me, it was a little bit of a switch because I had my own encounters with religion. But here in the United States, what I've thought when I went to Jewish school, I thought that it was going to be just, you know, learning Gemarah and Chumash a lot, everybody wearing the black kippahs, the hats, wearing full-on suits, making sure they show up all good. But it was almost like I was in a regular high school. Of course, they still had the Gemarah and the Chumash periods of study, but the school itself kind of gave me a little—a different point of view about the Modern Orthodox Jews that are living in the United States. There are kids just—just like me. Played video games, played sports. But they also kept Shabbos. They kept kosher. They tried their best to learn as much. And they even had programs of learning after school for kids who wanted to learn a little bit more about the halakhas, a little bit more about what it means to be a Jew in America. And it kind of enlightened me about how much different it is from where in Israel, all there is, it's either there's extremely religious Jews or there's secular Jews. Like, it's, there's no in between. And when we got here, I kind of found that in between in this community that's really awesome. They accepted me. They helped me even though I—they knew that I wasn't religious, they still accepted me to the school, helped me with however much they can and still invited me over to like Shabbos meals and still invited me over to hang out with them on Shabbos and kind of helped me kind of transfer into the community in here very quickly and very easily. I think it was really, really gave me a different point of view and helped me realize a little bit more about the Jewish religion—kind of helped me more understand about it.

SARAH: Mm. That's beautiful. And so it sounds like both of you had similar experiences of, born in one country, moving to another country…

TELAHUN: Yeah.

SARAH: …into your new society. But at the same time, maintaining elements of your ancestral cultures and what makes you distinct and special.

TELAHUN: Yeah.

TAWKALECH: It's so funny how my childhood is being duplicated through my kids here. It's much easier for them to adjust to the American society or the Jewish community here and being accepted and really being part of a shlichim here as people of color, as a Jew, as an Ethiopian, Israeli, as a minority within the minority group here in a society. In a community. I think my point always—my perspective about life, about my mission in life, is how I can educate others to learn more about their environment, and who they are and who I am and what can be taught and bring impact to make sure that our world can be better for the second generation.

SARAH: That's wonderful. And I know that you're doing that, Tawkalech, in your work. Can you tell us a little bit about the children's books that you're working on?

TAWKALECH: So I'm working at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, doing research and developing curriculum for early childhood education reflecting diversity in the Jewish community. One of the things I learned is that, really, people don't know much about the richness and diversity in the Jewish community. One of the things we are doing at the Shalom Curriculum Project is creating educational play materials that, through those educational play materials, you can educate teachers and kids about diversity in the Jewish community, showing images in a book that show the diversity of the Jewish community. They are not only European Jews, white, and there are other Jews around the world that kids need to see their image in those books and those educational/play materials, images, school, books, reflecting and representing their culture and history. This is one of the things that we are doing. We are doing teacher training, how to talk to their own kids about—in school—about the diversity in the Jewish community through books, dolls, and songs, and baking *dabo* and challah and kubaneh and you name it. There's so much richness in our culture and our history as a Jewish community that we need to educate the young generation to reduce antisemitism, bring awareness, and really reduce prejudice against minority groups and the Jewish community. This is my mission at the university.

SARAH: That's wonderful. And I should also mention that you're a board member of the Jewish Language Project Advisory Board. So, thank you for that. And I want to thank both of you for all that you're doing, both in this interview and in your lives, to raise awareness about the beautiful tapestry of the Jewish people.

TAWKALECH: Thank you so much.

TELAHUN: Thank you.

TAWKALECH: It's really an honor to be part of this beautiful, beautiful project. And it's just part of the mission to teach the world, the Jewish community, about languages and cultures. Thank you for doing that.

SARAH: Okay. Well, thank you again and have a great day.

TAWKALECH: Thank you.

SARAH: Heritage Words is produced and edited by Avishay Artsy, with help from Kyle Fingerhut, Annabel Noar, and Hannah Pressman. I'm the executive producer, Sarah Bunin Benor, founding director of the HUC-JIR Jewish Language Project. The theme music is from Maurice El Medioni's French and Algerian Arabic album Cafe Oran, featuring The Klezmatics' David Krakauer and Frank London, courtesy of Piranha Records. Heritage Words is a collaboration of the Jewish Language Project and HUC Connect with support from listeners like you. Your tax-deductible donation supports the important work of documenting endangered Jewish languages and raising awareness about Jewish diversity. If you'd like to make a financial contribution or sponsor an episode, you can contact us at jewishlanguages.org.
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