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Roy Chen (third left) and his wife Yuk Lynn Chen Woo (second left) visit Ethiopia.. (photo credit: COURTESY ROY CHEN)

Hong Kong entrepreneurs and philanthropists Roy Chen and his wife, Yuk Lynn Chen Woo, are devout Christians who believe they were instructed by God to bring [Ethiopian Jews to Israel](#).

It took them a while to figure out and fulfill their mission but, in late November, they flew to Ethiopia to meet the Falash Mura

still waiting to come to Israel, and then came to Israel to meet some of the immigrants they had funded on Operation Wings of the Dove from 2012 to 2013.

“We sponsored 1,372 immigrants from Ethiopia during Operation Wings of the Dove,” Roy Chen told *The Jerusalem Post* during a visit to Jerusalem on Thursday. “For us, it has been like seeing the Bible come alive.”

Their philanthropic SEEDS Foundation also has provided scholarships for higher education to a number of promising youth from the existing Ethiopian community in Israel which now numbers some 135,000.

Following a government decision this year to bring the remaining 9,000 Falash Mura to Israel (1,300 a year for seven years), the Chens decided to contribute to the current campaign, as well, via Keren Hayesod-United Israel Appeal.

How did this partnership between the Chens and KH-UIA happen? They related their fascinating story over dinner at the Waldorf Astoria.

Although both Roy and Yuk Lynn grew up in wealthy Hong Kong families, they met while attending business school at New York’s Columbia University in 1989 and married in Los Angeles in 1993.

Their marriage went through “good times and tremendously bad times,” and at one point, Yuk Lynn asked God, “Why are things so difficult for us when other Christians seemed to be doing so well?” The response she heard was: “You need to learn how to pray.”

She found a local ministry in Hong Kong, and Roy joined her a week later “just to be sure it wasn’t a cult or something.”

Roy took up the story: “From then on, March 2005, we both had very powerful encounters with God. We thought things were going to be fine, but that was followed by three of the toughest years ever. It was like God ripped out all the band aids, opened the old wounds and stuck His right hand in the depths of our hearts. But in the midst of the darkness, He began to heal us, bit by bit, individually as a man and woman, learning how to become a husband and wife and gradually how to be a father and mother.

“We also used to be addicted to a type of computer game called role-playing games (or RPG for short). She’s the puzzle solver and I’m the action man.

God actually redeemed the situation by giving my wife these rather cryptic messages, which she then had to solve and piece together, and I would pray for confirmation and then put them into action. We began learning to work together as a team.”

Yuk Lynn explained: “Since we encountered the Holy Spirit in 2005, I find that I hear Him quite frequently. This happened on November 11, 2006, at five o’clock in the morning, for instance, when the Lord woke me up. He said, ‘I’m going to tell you something about my end-time plans, and they all come out of the Bible.’ So I found verse 11 of chapter 11 in certain books of the bible. The Book of Isaiah, 11.11, for example, talks about God bringing back all his children from the four corners of the world. In that Scripture, it also talks about how He is going to bring his children back from Kush, even though I had no idea what or where that was.

“Then he showed me Psalm 68, the psalm that David sang when he brought the Ark of the Covenant back to Jerusalem.

He asked me to read it all, and then He highlighted Verse 31, which is about Kush reaching out to Him. I got frustrated and tried to block it out because I couldn’t understand it, and then He said: ‘Read the New Living translation.’ So I read it, and it said, ‘Ethiopia.’ And I said, ‘Okay, so this is some place in Africa, but what’s that got to do with me?’” For two years, from 2010, the couple tried to work this assignment out, but to no avail. Then the breakthrough came.

Roy took up the story: “On November 11, 2011, at 11 a.m., I surprised Yuk Lynn by getting her onto a helicopter and flew her above Hong Kong Harbor where I re-proposed to her.

I knew she felt very strongly about the numbers 11/11 so she wouldn't say no. So we got reengaged and, in August 2012, we got re-married in our church to make right everything that was wrong before.

Not only that, but we had a huppa and a handmade Ketuba from Jerusalem. We had all our five children as our wedding party, with our No. 1 son as our best man and our No.2 daughter as maid of honor, and the other three as bridesmaid, ring bearer and flower girl. After that, and once the foundation of our family was properly established, things then started happening very quickly.”

Within a week Roy found himself at a luncheon in Hong Kong with a few Israeli venture capitalists.

“As we were sitting around the table, I asked the gentleman next to me if he knew anything about Ethiopian Jews. To my surprise, he said, ‘My late father was known as the father of Ethiopian Jews.’ The gentleman turned out to be none other than Yair Shamir, and his father was Israel’s prime minister Yitzhak Shamir who authorized Operation Solomon to airlift 14,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel. He said he could connect me with the relevant people, but added that all the Ethiopian Jews were back in Israel.”

Yuk Lynn adds: “So, we thought, maybe the assignment is finished. Maybe we’re just too late, and God found someone else, so it’s already done.”

On November 15, 2011, which was the day of Roy’s birthday, Yuk Lynn asked him to pick up a piece of jewelry from a local jeweler before a meeting they had scheduled with Irit Barash from Keren Hayesod-United Israel Appeal.

“Actually, I had told the jeweler, who is a friend of mine, that Christian jewelry is too boring, and that she should think of something more interesting,” Yuk Lynn says, smiling. I hadn’t intended it to be for me, but the weekend before, I saw my friend at her kid’s birthday party, and she said my jewelry was ready. So I couldn’t refuse her and asked Roy to pick it up instead.”

Roy got to his office just in time for the meeting with Barash.

“As soon as Irit sat down, and I had never met her before, she announced she had good news to share. The Israeli government had apparently just authorized a new operation to bring back more Ethiopian Jews called the Falash Mura. She said the name of it is Operation Wings of the Dove. When I heard that, I pulled out the piece of jewelry which you now see my wife wearing, a diamond encrusted dove with wings opened. At that moment, everyone was in shock, including us.”

Roy then asked his wife to remind him of the two scriptures she had received previously in prayer.

“At that very moment, Irit handed me a brochure. On the cover, it said, ‘Biblical Prophecies Fulfilled,’ with a photograph of a black woman and then underneath were printed two scriptures. It turned out that they were the exact same scriptures, Isaiah 11:11 and Psalm 68:31. By this time, Irit was in tears and all of us in awe. We knew right there and then that this was of God. You could feel God’s presence in the room.”

They gave their first sum of money to KH-UIA from the proceeds of the sale of their house in Hong Kong, which broke all records. How did they give and how did they know how much money to give? Before making the first donation, in May 2013, the couple had visited Israel with another director of their foundation as well as a consultant “to conduct due diligence on KH-UIA.”

Said Roy: “I want to give particular credit to Irit Barash. She really delivered the first time we gave, which gave us the confidence to continue. She told us all about those we sponsored and explained exactly where the money was going. We didn’t want to give everything through Keren Hayesod, and wanted to track some of the families after absorption, especially the youngsters, to see how they progressed through education, entering society and becoming contributing members. So we held back a smaller amount of money for them. We applied the same practice as our private equity investments because we want to see this through, and see its impact.

“Also, before we left for that trip, the Lord spoke to us and told us to look for Sheba’s gold, from Isaiah 60, where it also says that foreigners will bring your children home. And Isaiah 18 talks about Ethiopian Jews being a gift presented back to God. In our due diligence, we visited communities in the South like Ibim and Sderot and met with Ethiopian immigrants from different walks of life,” Yuk Lynn said.

“In Ibim, we visited with a young family,” said Roy. “They were very shy and soft-spoken.

We asked the name of one of their children, a handsome young boy age six, as we also have a son of similar age. It turns out that his name in English means ‘Gold.’” The Chens believe people are precious, just like gold.

Yuk Lynn added: “We prayed and came up with an amount based on Psalm 23. It was the biggest single donation we had ever made, but we were just following instructions. I was praying about what number, because the Lord oftentimes talks to us through numbers. We gave the first batch of money to fund the Ethiopian Jews. They came on Operation Wings of Dove on August 28. To us, that’s Romans 8:28, and it means that God is going to work everything out for the good of those He loves. Unfortunately, we couldn’t welcome the Ethiopian Jews ourselves, because we were in California at the time, sending our two oldest children to university.”

Roy added: “We gave the money, and understood that it was a very significant and very historical moment, but there was still no real connection of the heart. Then, one evening last year, my cousin invited us to a dinner and asked us to share our story with a group of Israelis, who included Moodi Sandberg, the world chairman of KH-UJA, and leaders of the Knesset Christian Allies Caucus.

“Earlier this year, they asked for another meeting when they told us that there was one more group of Ethiopian Jews waiting to come back – the family members of those who have made aliya but who normally wouldn’t qualify. On humanitarian grounds, however, the Israeli government has decided to allow them to come.

“So we prayed about it, as we typically do when given a request of this nature, and separately the Lord told us that this time, it’s not so much about the finances. It’s really about the telling of His amazing works amongst his people. My wife received Psalm 22:22, and I received the words “Make my name known amongst my people.” We confirmed this with each other, and started thinking about what to do.

“We thought to make a short video and started to interview production and media people, but we couldn’t find the right people. So we thought maybe we heard wrong and put it aside.”

On October 9, 2016, the Chens met Sandberg, who was attending a conference in Hong Kong, for breakfast. He suggested they should fly to Ethiopia and Israel both to see the situation for themselves and share their story.

“We’d never been to Ethiopia and, to cut a long story short, we thought it would be a good thing to do. We have five children, family and work obligations and a very tight schedule, but we managed to choose a date that worked.”

In a trip arranged by Keren Hayesod and the Jewish Agency, they flew to Ethiopia from November 28-30, together with Sandberg, a board member of their foundation, his wife and a staff member who works with their philanthropic foundation.

Accompanied by Israel’s Ambassador to Ethiopia Belaynesh Zevadia, who had herself made aliya from Gondar, they were given a hero’s welcome by some 250 people in Addis Ababa and more than 2,000 at the makeshift synagogue in Gondar.

“When we went to Gondar, we sat on the stage and looked out at the thousands of faces. All of a sudden, I felt God’s tenderness towards them,” said Roy. “As I was praying and asking God what I was supposed to say, I suddenly felt this incredible love in my heart, even though I didn’t know any of them. And, that day in Gondar, I felt the Lord asking me to tell those present that they are His sons and daughters, that He will never forget them and that He will bring them back – every last one.” The standing

audience wept and applauded as he spoke, as others stood outside the packed hall listening.

“We wondered for a long time why Father God would use two people who hadn’t even known where Ethiopia was, or that there were Jews there at all, or what the Falash Mura was, for this mission,” said Roy. “We believe God is using the Torah to tell them that every word is true, and that He is going to use us, foreigners, which is what he said in Isaiah 60, to bring them back, all of them, not just the Ethiopian Jews but the Falash Mura, as well. He has called them back, like Sheba’s gold.

“Can you imagine the affirmation we gave these people? Whatever man says is not important. It’s what God is saying and He is telling them that ‘I’m going to do what I promised, and you are my children,’ and I’m going to do it through these foreigners, who didn’t even know you existed. We, like them, were crying like crazy.”

From Ethiopia, they flew straight to Israel, where they visited three absorption centers in Kiryat Gat and Beersheba on their first day.

“When we went to one absorption center, we saw exactly what the Bible says, the in-gathering of the exiles from all over the world, including Ethiopia,” said Roy. “One of the ladies I met was crying because she said that she was the only one in Israel. Her daughter and her daughter’s children (her husband had died) are all still in Gondar, waiting to come. We also met a beautiful and brilliant young woman who serves as an officer in the Israel Air Force and has just completed her first degree in Beersheba. But her three older brothers are still stuck in Gondar.

“You could feel the gratitude they carried. A woman from Moscow just hugged me even though we’ve never met. Another woman from Mumbai shared her story of how grateful she was to be in Israel with her husband and children. There were also a couple from Peru and a guy from Yemen. I just thought, ‘Wow!’”