Every morning before sunrise, a throng of men and women make their way to a place not far from the city of Bahir Dar in northern Ethiopia. They are among many from across Ethiopia who have risen early to visit a holy spring in search of healing for their physical, spiritual and mental ailments. A central belief in Ethiopian culture is that the water from this spring can cure a wide range of medical disorders. The list includes musculoskeletal illnesses (such as arthritis), chronic diseases of the respiratory system (e.g., bronchitis and asthma), chronic diseases of the digestive system, metabolic diseases (such as obesity and diabetes), and dermal diseases and allergies (such as atopic eczema and acne). The water is potent stuff and has strong purging effects. Rapid diarrhea or vomiting are considered good because they will cleanse the body of the evil spirits within, or whatever is causing the disease. In the Ethiopian Orthodox church (Tewahedo) exorcism is practiced widely. The priest performs the ceremony by spraying the naked petitioners, men and women separately, with the healing spring water. They pray together and chant incantations. The frenzy builds up and some enter a trance-like state. The priest draws out the evil spirits and shouts angrily at them. It is said that the priests make a plea with the demon of each person to remove itself during the treatment process. Because of the strong belief in the effectiveness of this healing water, a growing number of people living with HIV are relocating to holy water sites. They consider the use of holy water to be an alternative and even the major treatment for HIV.

About the photographer
Eden Degany is a young and enthusiastic photographer. Last year, on completion of her army service she fulfilled her childhood dream to travel and see the world. The religious experience described above, as well as the interaction between the traditional and modern way of life were captivating and caught her photographic eye. Being able to freeze the moment, and observing the change in the essence of things under different light conditions enrich her perspectives on people and their cultures.

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