

KULANU

“all of us”



Helping Lost Jewish Communities

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Historic Visit by Abayudaya Leaders

By Karen Primack

To say that the US visits by two Abayudaya leaders are “historic” is a mild understatement. The summer arrivals of JJ Keki, former chairman of the Abayudaya community of Jews in Uganda, and his brother Gershom Sizomu, spiritual leader of the main Abayudaya synagogue and founder/headmaster of the Abayudaya high school, marked the first time Abayudaya leaders have stepped outside of East Africa.

That would have been enough, but a *halachic* conversion to Judaism of the two on August 16 marked the first time any of the Abayudaya – who have been practicing Judaism since 1919 – have been officially accepted as members of world Jewry.

This too would have been enough, but the brothers’ presence in Lower Manhattan on September 11, and Keki’s actual witnessing of the collapse of the World Trade Center towers, was yet another awe-filled experience.

And the remarkable story continues, as a Beit Din prepares to travel to Uganda to officially convert up to 600 more Abayudaya to Judaism!

Keki’s “Two Skies”

Keki arrived at Dulles Airport, near Washington, DC, on July 30, courtesy of the Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington, which had invited him to be part of its Summer Seminars lecture series. The series was funded by the Peskowitz family. When asked whether anything had been surprising about his first air flight, Keki responded: “I woke up and saw two skies – one above me and one below.”

His first day in America featured many “firsts,” including his first American synagogue (B’nai Israel in Rockville, Maryland), his first kosher market (Katz’s in Rockville), his first bagel, lettuce, broccoli, cauliflower, radish... and his first cello (at an outdoor concert). Since he was a guest in our home for his two months in the US, Aron and I got to witness many other firsts.

Keki’s first official talk, at the JCC on August 6, was titled “The Genesis of the Abayudaya Community.” The text will soon appear on the Kulanu website, www.kulanu.org. This was followed by other talks, lecture-recitals and concerts in Massachusetts, New York, Delaware, Virginia, and Kansas.

Keki appeared at the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY) institute in Great Barrington, Mass. Here’s an eyewitness account by Gary Mazzo:

What a week. I just came back from the NFTY Northeast institute. Richard Sobol, from Lexington, gave a presentation about the Abayudaya community in Uganda. He just came back from a trip and showed slides in a beautiful presentation. Then, at the end of the presentation, he told the kids that members of the community had up until this moment never left their home—but, he continued, JJ, their spiritual leader, was making a journey to the US to meet American Jews and then the lights went on and JJ walked into the room and led the kids in the singing of two of his songs. He then stayed at Institute and answered the kids’ questions about life in Abayudaya – what a powerful experience!

And Richard Sobol, Keki’s sponsor at the institute, reported:
JJ is a smash hit at the institute. The Wednesday night program

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Life-Long Jews Are Converted

August 16, 2001, will no doubt be a memorable date for the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda. On that day two of their members, JJ Keki and Gershom Sizomu, converted to Judaism according to *halacha* (Jewish law). Rabbi Howard Gorin (Conservative) of Congregation Tikvat Israel in Rockville, Maryland, supervised the process. The *hatafat dam brit* was performed by mohel Moshe Meirovich. Members of the Beit Din were Rabbi Howard Gorin, Rabbi Mendel Abrams, and Gilbert Kleiner, executive director of Beth El Congregation (Baltimore). The mikveh at Beth El Congregation was used for the occasion.

At the Beit Din, Keki gave an historical background of the Abayudaya. In response to a question from Rabbi Abrams, Sizomu described their community’s celebration of holidays and observance of *kashrut*, *shchita*, *brit* and *mikveh*. Rabbi Abrams also asked the brothers to de-

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Next Stop: UGANDA!

Following the events of August 16, Keki and Sizomu received congratulations from many friends in America and Uganda, and Gorin received an invitation from Abayudaya chairman Jacob Mwasuko to come to Uganda to convert the rest of the community of more than 600.

Gorin has accepted the invitation and he, in turn, is inviting interested travelers to join him and his Beit Din of at least two other rabbis on a visit to Uganda in February 2002.

Preliminary plans call for a round trip to Uganda on Ethiopian Airlines from February 4 to 18, with a one-day stopover on the return trip at the Addis Ababa compound run by the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry. The cost for airfare and hotel in Mbale, Uganda, would be approximately \$3000.

In addition to witnessing the historic conversion process, members of the group of travelers would play a part in the events by lending logistical support. There will also be opportunities to teach Jewish and general school subjects.

Those interested should contact Aron Primack at Primack@starpower.net or (301) 565-3094 (eve) or (301) 496-4596 (day).

KULANU (“ALL OF US”) is a tax-exempt organization of Jews of varied backgrounds and practices dedicated to finding lost and dispersed remnants of the Jewish people and assisting those who wish to (re)join the Jewish community. Kulanu is undertaking a variety of activities worldwide on behalf of these dispersed groups, including research, contacts, education, conversion when requested, and relocation to Israel if desired.

LETTERS TO KULANU

Rabbi Barbara Aiello in China

Our 13-day Jewish heritage tour to China was wonderful! I led services in Beijing and conducted a Yiskor service at the Holocaust memorial in Shanghai. We had a wonderful tour of the old Jewish quarter where 20,000 Jews lived at one time. Saw the Sephardic synagogue built by Vidal Sasoon's grandfather and met many Jewish families in Shanghai as well as the Lubavitcher rabbi who was most gracious... he even had me light the candles!

In August I was interviewed on a local Jewish radio program "Sunday Simcha" on WMNF in Tampa. I introduced the Abayudaya CD and played several selections.

*Rabbi Barbara Aiello
Bradenton, Florida*

Reactions to Terrorism

We are all saddened by the monstrous attack on the US. We pray that HaShem the true judge will not leave the attackers unpunished and bring them to justice. We express our condolences to all those families who lost their beloved ones in tragedy.

*Aaron Kintu Moses, secretary, Abayudaya Congregation
Mbale, Uganda*

Bryan Schwartz in Manipur

Over the last decade, I have had the great fortune of visiting over 100 Jewish communities in 20 countries on five continents. As an impartial, outside observer, I can honestly say that I have never encountered a more dedicated Jewish community than the Bnei Menashe.

Dozens attend daily Shacharit, Mincha and Ma'ariv services at all of the synagogues and on Shabbat and festivals, the temples overflow with men and women, spirit and Hebrew song. I was especially impressed by the number of young men and women who lend their exquisite voices to daily and Shabbat prayers – at ten synagogues. I did not meet a Chazzan who was over 30 years old. All of their noble community leaders work full time or virtually so to further the community's goals without the slightest compensation. The women create hand-made taleisim and kippot which rival in beauty any I have seen in the world. Hundreds of men and women, boys and girls across Manipur, literate and illiterate alike, attend a challenging annual examination to assess and improve their knowledge and understanding of Torah and Talmud, Jewish doctrine and customs. Unlike many of our Jewish communities around the world, which are losing members to aliyah and assimilation, the Bnei Menashe are gaining new converts by the hundreds, grown men undergoing the painful circumcision process to find spiritual peace in Judaism.

But the Bnei Menashe are a needy community. Many of their homes are bamboo and mud shacks without electricity or running water. Most are subsistence farmers and the new Jewish village of Petakh Tikvah is without any means of drawing an income. The community center/synagogue in Imphal occupies rented space. There are not enough siddurim for all to use, and no one in the community is confident enough with their Hebrew to read directly from the Torah – indeed, the community lacks a single full-sized kosher Torah, using instead miniatures printed on paper.

The Bnei Menashe need teachers, a permanent building in Imphal, more siddurim, a kosher Torah or two and general financial assistance in developing their community. They are eager to support themselves selling their taleisim and kippot, but they need marketers.

The Bnei Menashe recall the words of Abraham Joshua Heschel, glorifying the Ashkenazim of Eastern Europe in his book *The Earth is*

the Lord's: "The stomachs were empty, the homes barren, but the minds were crammed with the riches of Torah." The Bnei Menashe are crammed with the spirit of Judaism, eager to absorb the great riches of Torah, if only someone will teach them. As Heschel says, "The awkward but heartfelt prayer of the simple, untutored man stands higher in value than the pedantic and ceremonious prayers of the man of learning."

*Bryan Schwartz
Easton, Pennsylvania*

Bat Mitzvah Project

My name is Leah Knopf. I am 13 and had my Bat Mitzvah in March. I have decided to donate some of the money I got as gifts at my Bat Mitzvah and some tzedakah I have saved over the year to your organization.

Included is \$125 which I would like you to use for the following two things: \$36 for supporting an Abayudaya child in primary school and \$75 dollars for supporting an Abayudaya youth in secondary school. You may do whatever you would like with the remaining \$14. Thank you very much for running this organization and making it possible for me to donate money to it.

*Leah Knopf
Seattle, Washington*

Abayudaya Gratitude and Needs

I wish to thank Mr. Yaacov Gladstone for his lovely donation of the shofar le kehilano (for our community). It is a great blessing to the Abayudaya. The Abayudaya heard the shofar for the first time in the month of Elul.

I wish to inform all our loved friends that the Abayudaya still face a problem in attaining Jewish calendars. In addition to that we would be very eager to receive some Shabbat and Havdalah *nerot* (candles) that make the Shabbat different from other days of the *shavuah* (week).

Also, I was wondering if there could be schools willing to donate, used sporting material that they no longer use, such as soccer balls, volley balls, uniforms, etc, to our infant and high schools.

*Enosh Keki Mainah, chairman, Abayudaya Youth Association
Mbale, Uganda*

Reaction to Conversions

We appreciate the great work Rabbi Howard Gorin did to allow the two members of this community go through the historic ceremony of conversion. I congratulate them for having been fully accepted as Jews. May HaShem bless them with peace and grant them more understanding of Torah.

We are grateful that Rabbi Gorin has accepted our invitation to visit Uganda. We look forward to his great and significant visit, as it will bring forward a lot of changes to Abayudaya community members spiritually.

*Jacob Mwosuko, chairman, Abayudaya Community
Mbale, Uganda*

Yashar koach and mazal tov! I wish I could have been with you during this milestone in the Abayudaya's history. I look forward to speaking with you and hearing about the emotional impact of the ceremony, not only for Gershom and Joab, but also for you who have worked for and with this community for so long.

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ACTIVITY IN SEFWI WIASWO, GHANA

Economic Development

By Harriet Bograd

I'm delighted with the progress we have made in economic development in Sefwi Wiawso.

We donated \$1,000 for a loan fund, and so far \$500 has been sent to Sefwi Wiawso. I got a report back on Sept. 3 that the funds had been used to pay for a hand spraying machine, seeds, corn for storage, and the start of tie-dye and batik training for two women. The community had been working with the local agricultural extension workers on their agricultural methods (our daughter Margie had helped make that connection). They didn't yet have enough funds to start working with the people from the UN Food and Agricultural Organization project two hours away - for that, they'd need to pay travel and meals for the trainers. I've asked a member of the community to let us know how they plan to use the rest of the money, and what steps they are taking to re-pay their loan fund with the proceeds from their projects so that they can continue to invest in economic development efforts.

Then Ann Louise Perlow and her son visited, and they donated funds to provide electricity to the synagogue building.

In August, the community sent me 18 challah covers, and I paid \$10 each - I sold many of them at \$10 each, and used others as gifts. The first batch were with English lettering and without linings, and they were too small to fully cover a challah. I sent back that feedback, and asked for more challah covers. In mid-September, I received another 40 challah covers, and took them with me to my synagogue. People grabbed them up - I sold them all nearly instantly. The synagogue bought a dozen to use at community Shabbat dinners. I bought ten for gifts. The new batch were larger, had Hebrew lettering, and they were lined. The ones with the ready-made African fabrics I now could easily sell for \$15 each. In addition, they had sent 8 challah covers that were richly embroidered - doing embroidery by machine. I sold a few of the heavily embroidered ones for \$18 each and then changed the price to \$25 each, and could easily have sold more at that price.

The 40 challah covers sold for \$600 altogether - I wired \$575 to Sefwi Wiawso, and paid a \$25 wire transfer fee. I've asked for 50 more challah covers, and received an email today from Kofi Kwateng saying they planned to ship them next week. I've asked for lots more with the rich embroidery, so these should bring in close to \$1000.

In addition, I showed my photo album to Gila Gevirtz, an editor at Behrman House books who is a friend at my synagogue. She asked for permission to use some of the pictures for some of their books. I wrote to Kofi, and he wrote back today saying that the community has decided to grant permission for the pictures to be used.

I also offered to ship my very solid old Elna sewing machine to Sefwi Wiawso, if they pay the shipping costs (about \$80 for the cheapest method). Kofi wrote back today saying that they'd be glad to pay for the shipping - we'll take the payment out of the next batch of challah covers.

Finally, I've asked Kofi to write a short description of how these challah covers are being made - who is working on them, etc. I think the main person is Ben, David Ahenkorah's brother,

who is a skilled tailor. I don't know if he has involved others in helping him in this work. I'd like to have a card of some sort that is attached to each challah cover, that tells about where and how they are made.

(Editor's note: The writer, a model Kulanu activist and a recent visitor to Sefwi Wiawso, has set up an email connection with the community. Kulanu's Sefwi Wiawso support group, including people in Ghana and America interested in helping Ghana's Jewish community, is accessible at: ghanashalom@yahoogroups.com. Messages go to the entire group. To send e-mail to the Sefwi Wiawso Jewish community [mail received in Kumasi by Kofi, Alex, or Davi], write to ghanashalom@yahoo.com).

Religious Practice

By Michael Gershowitz

My 16-year-old son, Nathaniel, and I, spent Yom Kippur with the Jewish community in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana. Many things have changed since my previous visit a year ago, nearly all of them for the better.

- As a result of the Hebrew classes conducted last summer by my son Gabriel and his friend Nate Asher and all the others who have followed, many of the people can read the Siddur with some fluency, and several can read quite fluently.
- The gift of 70 tallitot from my congregation, Tifereth Israel in Des Moines, Iowa, arrived more than a year after they were shipped, and the men are wearing them with pride.
- They received a gift of a computer from Harriet Bograd and are learning to use it. The e-mail account will be established soon; look for it in the next issue. This is a big communication



Sefwi Wiaswo family. Picture by Gabe Gershowitz

- Tifereth Israel also donated six *mahzorim*, which were dedicated on Yom Kippur.
- They are working on electrification of the synagogue, a project that should be completed by the time you read this. This will enable night services to be held without candles.
- They have raised \$400 to date through the sale of embroidered kippot. I brought 20 new ones back with me and will send some to the Kulanu boutique for sale.

One major disappointment: Alex, the young man who hopes to become the community's first ordained rabbi, has twice been denied a visa to travel to Israel.

advance over the never-available phone line. Nathaniel, who is spending the fall term as a high school senior in Kumasi, a nearby city and is a technology guru, will help them get it operational.

Our Communities Can Help Israel's Demographic Crisis

By Michael Freund

(reprinted from *The Jerusalem Post*, 12 Sept. 2001)

As if listening to the latest news bulletins were not depressing enough, Israelis are now being warned once again that the demographic balance between Jews and Arabs in coming decades is looking increasingly bleak. Projections recently presented to the Knesset show that Arabs may outnumber Jews within pre-1967 Israel as soon as the year 2035 (*The Jerusalem Post*, August 6).

Demography is hardly the most reliable of sciences, as it is nearly impossible to foretell future events such as mass human migrations or natural disasters, all of which obviously affect the statistical models involved. But Israeli policy-makers would be ill-advised to overlook such dire warnings about the fate of Israel's Jewish majority. Indeed, it seems fair to say that aside from the danger posed by non-conventional weapons in the hands of Israel's neighbors, the issue of demography might very well be the greatest threat to the future of Israel as a Jewish state.

For as the percentage of Jews continues to decline, it will grow increasingly difficult for Israel, as a democracy, to ignore mounting calls by its Arab minority for cultural autonomy and perhaps even self-rule. And if the day were to come when Arab Israelis could elect more representatives to the Knesset than Jewish Israelis, the Jewish identity of the State would be in grave doubt.

To their credit, leading Israeli public figures are no longer remaining silent about the issue. On his visit last week to Russia, Prime Minister Sharon called upon world Jewry to immigrate to Israel, stressing the vital need for mass aliyah as a way of bolstering the State's Jewish population. Jewish Agency Chairman Salai Meridor has also sounded the alarm, as have various other politicians and academics.

But as the pool of potential immigrants from the former Soviet Union begins to shrink, and with mass aliyah from the West not yet in the offing, it is hard to see how such traditional calls for immigration will have any real or lasting impact on the situation. World Jewry is simply not rushing to move to Israel. While Israel must certainly continue to promote aliyah, both as a means of achieving personal Zionist and Jewish fulfillment and as a national responsibility, it must also begin to think more creatively about how to address the ongoing erosion in the country's Jewish demographic profile.

The fact is that there are plenty of people out there in the big wide world who would like to move to Israel. The problem is that most of them are not Jewish. While many are no doubt motivated by economic reasons, there are countless others who are sincere in their desire to be Jews, and it is incumbent upon Israel to at least explore the possibilities that such populations

present.

In northeastern India, for example, there are 5,000 members of the Shinlung tribe (referred to as Bnei Menashe because of their claim to descend from a lost tribe of Israel) who have been living observant Jewish lives for some two decades and anxiously wish to immigrate to Israel. In recent years, some 600 Bnei Menashe have made aliyah and undergone formal conversion by Israel's Chief Rabbinate. They serve in the army, lead religious Jewish lives and work as productive members of society. Shouldn't those still in India be given a similar opportunity?

Other groups, such as the Lemba tribe of southern Africa and the Abayudaya of Uganda, also assert a desire to tie their fate with that of the people of Israel, as have other far-flung groups in countries as diverse as Peru, Mexico and Japan.

In recent years, untold numbers of Crypto-Jews (descendants of Marrano Jews who were forcibly converted in Spain and Portugal in the late 15th century), have begun returning to Judaism throughout Central and South America and the United States. Receiving little in the way of encouragement or support from the organized Jewish community, these people are heroically trying to rejoin the Jewish people, and more needs to be done to help them.

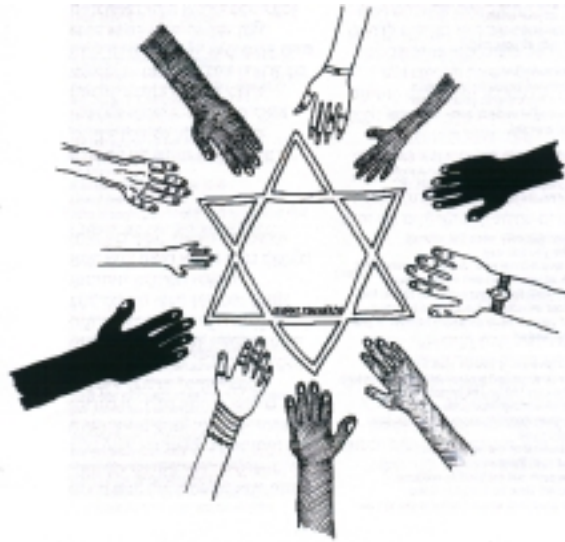
This is not to suggest that Israel should become a missionary state, seeking to convert the entire

world to Judaism, for such an approach is contrary to Jewish tradition. But if there are various groups who have already taken the first step and demonstrated a genuine and heartfelt commitment to Judaism and Israel, then why should they be overlooked or ignored?

Seeking out "lost Jews" and returning them to the fold is obviously no easy task, for it would require a careful screening process to ensure the sincerity of those involved. And fidelity to the principles of *Halacha* is a must, for anything less than a traditional, authentic conversion would only raise additional problems for both Israel and the converts themselves.

But rather than neglecting these people, it is time for Israel to start reaching out to them, assessing their claims to Jewish ancestry and acting to help those worthy of assistance. The various organs of the State, such as the Jewish Agency, the Chief Rabbinate and the Foreign Ministry, need to look more carefully at this issue and give it serious consideration. For a country struggling to find potential new sources of immigration, groups such as the Bnei Menashe and others like them might very well provide the answer.

(Editor's note: Columnist Freund served as Deputy Director of Communications & Policy Planning in the Israeli Prime Minister's Office from 1996 to 1999.)



This drawing by 13 year old Danny Musher appeared in his home-made bar mitzvah siddur

Conference Coming: The History of Jewish Diasporas in China

Scholars, teachers, research fellows, descendants of Jewish communities in China, and other interested parties are invited to attend the May 5-9, 2002, International Symposium on "The History of Jewish Diasporas in China," sponsored by The Center for Jewish Studies at Nanjing University. The Symposium, which will explore the latest discoveries, achievements, and developments in the study of the history of Jewish Diaspora in China, will be organized by and take place at two locales: Nanjing and Kaifeng.

Participants who intend to submit papers should concentrate their subject on one of the following areas:

- *Study of the Kaifeng Jewry
- *Study of the history of Jewish Communities in Harbin, Shanghai, Tienjin, and Hong Kong in modern China
- *Relations between the Chinese and Jewish people.
- *Future perspectives of Jewish Diaspora in 21st Century China

The first three full days of the conference, in Nanjing, are allotted to scholarly papers and discussions. The fourth and fifth days will consist of field trips to original sites of the Kaifeng Jewish community.

Those who intend to submit papers are invited to send an abstract of not more than 400 words to the Symposium Secretariat at the address below by December 31, 2001.

Optional activities before and after the conference, including trips to visit Jewish related sites in Shanghai, Tienjin, and other cities, arranged as part of the program.

To submit abstracts, register, or receive further information contact: Prof. Xu Xin, Center for Jewish Studies, School of Foreign Studies, Nanjing University, Nanjing, 210093, China. Fax: 86-25-8818375 or 86-371-3823769. Email: xuxin49@jlonline.com or am-wyen@public2.zz.ha.cn.

Peru Connections

By Orli Cotel

I was recently traveling with a friend through Peru, and we found ourselves in the city of Cuzco, the former Incan cultural center and Spanish colonial capital. The city is brimming with tourists and backpackers from all countries of the world and has a strange character made up of the juxtaposition of old and new, a motley assortment of Incan, Spanish, and global cultures.

One day I was eating breakfast with my friend Naomi when she pointed out a man sitting at a neighboring table, wearing a *kippah*. We had run into many Jewish travelers, and had seen with our own eyes the *balagan* that is the *gal*, or wave, of Israelis making their way through South America. But this man looked different: he appeared to be Peruvian. Later, as I was glancing through the used books for sale in the cafe, he noticed me eyeing some Hebrew novels. *Slichu*, he asked me, "at midaberet ivrit?" Yes, I responded in Hebrew, but, having noticed his Spanish accent, quickly switched to Spanish.

I asked him where he was from and he told me his name was Yosi, or Jose, and that he and his wife were the only Jewish Peruvians living in Cuzco. He was originally from the community of Jews that Kulanu works with near Trujillo, and he told me a lot about his community, his commitment to Judaism, and his desire to move to Israel.

During the rest of my time in Cuzco, I kept running into Yosi in the city's main plaza, where he would sit and converse with passing Israelis. He had become sort of a fascination to them, since here was this man with a deep desire to make aliyah, while all of them were thrilled to leave Israel and live in South America. With Yosi's help, the Israeli travelers passing through Cuzco organized a big kosher Shabbat dinner, to which all of the Jewish travelers were invited.

I had already planned to leave Cuzco and was unable to make it to the Shabbat dinner, but it made me glad to know that such community and ties could be created between Jews who barely knew each other. *Yasher koach* Kulanu for the work you are doing with struggling Jewish communities all over the world!

A Little Help for the Holidays

By Bryan Schwartz

A little help goes a long way. All the way around the world. This summer, the communities that Kulanu helps in Peru and India asked for help preparing for the holidays, and I am proud to say we answered the call.

With a few phone calls, I enlisted the help of several friends across the Jewish spectrum -- a Chabad rabbi in Spain, David Libersohn, a Reconstructionist rabbinical student in Philadelphia, Steve Gutow, and a synagogue in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Brith Sholom. Every one of us knows a few good rabbis and could do likewise.

Rabbi Libersohn sent Spanish-language instructional cassettes and *machzorim* to the "Inca Jewish" communities in Trujillo and Lima, Peru. Steve Gutow enlisted the support of his Reconstructionist colleagues, who produced 7 1/2 hours of instructional cassettes containing the entire High Holidays liturgy. Without hesitation, Brith Sholom Rabbi Judah donated several *machzorim* to complement the instructional cassettes. The Kulanu organization funded my copying and sending the tapes along with the books to our friends in Peru and Manipur, India.

Visiting Jewish communities around the world over the last decade, and particularly Kulanu's developing Jewish communities, I have found that what these communities want most is knowledge. Our greatest richness as a Jewish people is learning -- an opportunity we often take for granted in North America.

With a little effort, each one of us can make a difference, just by sharing what -- and whom -- we know.

BRINGING ETHIOPIA HOME

By Hilary Platt

I walked out of the airport exhausted after a sleepless 15-hour flight. By that point, all I wanted to do was check into the hotel and go to sleep. I had no idea that I would soon experience a life-changing event.

My parents, both physicians, had been invited to join four other volunteers on a mission to Ethiopia. During the mission, they would visit the Jewish communities of Addis Ababa and Gondar and examine and review the health and nutrition needs of its residents. I was invited to join them and to interact with some of the approximately 26,000 Jews still remaining in Ethiopia. Most people don't realize that there remains a sizable Jewish community in Ethiopia that aspires to one day move to Israel.

I had been minimally briefed as to what to expect when I arrived in this beautiful, yet extremely poor country. However, while driving from the airport through the capital of Addis Ababa, I was

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KULANU BRIEFS

Visit the Lemba!

Rabbi Leo Abrami is planning to visit the Lemba in South Africa January 1-14, 2002. With the full cooperation of the Lemba leadership, he has organized a seminar on Judaism and Lemba culture for January 11-13. Both Western and Lemba speakers will explain their traditions, differences, and similarities. Interested persons are cordially invited to join him and take part in any of the activities connected to this project. Premier Travel & Tours (800) 545-1910, has a special offer from New York (\$749 plus tax). For further information, contact Rabbi Abrami at (520)408-8280.

A Jewish Heritage Tour of India

Stevy Epstein and other experts will lead a tour of Jewish sights in India February 8-24, 2002. The trip is unique in that it will include a visit to the Bnei Menashe in Mizoram and Manipur. The cost is \$4130 per person plus \$725 air supplement within India plus international air fare. Jewish communities and sights in Cochin, Bombay, Calcutta and New Delhi are also featured. For further information, see www.spirit-ofindia.com/group/Jewish/index.html or contact Stevy at 97 King High Avenue, Toronto ON M3H 3B3, Canada or camera@thebigdipper.net.

Jewish Tour to Brazil

A Jewish Heritage tour to Brazil is being planned for December 18, 2001 through January 1, 2002. At a cost of \$2790, the trip is advertised to include Jewish Rio De Janeiro, Shabbat with descendants of Crypto-Jews, "real Jewish Gauchos," and the oldest Synagogue in the Americas. In addition to Rio, the group will travel to Recife and Natal. A portion of the proceeds will go to the Crypto-Jewish community in Natal, Brazil. A similar tour will take place March 7-19, 2002. For information visit www.tropicalzion.com or call 1-866-MORRANO. The web site contains good pictures and commentary about Brazil's Jewish sites.

Romaniote Congregation Celebrates 75th Anniversary

Kehila Kedosha Janina will celebrate its 75th anniversary with a dinner/dance on May 19, 2002. The Romaniote congregation was founded in New York in 1927 by 200 families of Greek Jews descended from Roman Jews. In conjunction with the gala dinner/dance, they will be publishing a testimonial Journal. To purchase an ad for the fund-raising Journal, or for further information about the event, contact Rose Eskononts, 2430 Haring St., Apt. 3-J, Brooklyn, NY 11235 (tel 718-648-7374).

New York Group Meets

Kulanu enthusiasts in New York met at the Bnai Zion House on September 10. The meeting was chaired by Yaacov Gladstone, and guests included JJ Keki and Gershom Sizomu of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda and Harriet Bograd, speaking about her recent visit to the Jews of Ghana.

Kulanu Boutique Accessible on Web

The Kulanu Boutique, with a greater-than-ever selection of Jewish books, recordings, and crafts from around the world can now be accessed directly from Kulanu's web site. Items can be ordered by printing the order form on the Boutique's web page. In coming days, pictures of many of the goods will be accessible with a single click. Be sure to visit soon for Chanukah gifts and order while supplies are available. The Boutique can be accessed from the top of Kulanu's web site, www.kulanu.org.

Lerer Retires

Rabbi Samuel S. Lerer, 86, of San Antonio, Texas, recently retired after 60 years of service in the rabbinical world. His last position, which he held for 32 years, was in Mexico City. During his time in Mexico he volunteered his services at the Venta Prieta Jewish community and was responsible for nearly 3000 conversions to Judaism. He still travels to Mexico regularly. A film is being made of his career.

Kulanu in Tucson Schedules Programs

The Tucson chapter of Kulanu opened 5762 with a Nov. 4 talk by Garry Forger on the visible remnants of Jewish life in Portugal. Future meetings: Dec. 2, a talk by Rabbi Israel Becker on Jewish life before and after the destruction of the Second Temple; Jan. 13, a talk by Patricia Steinberg on Jews, Christians and Muslims living together during the Golden Age in Spain; Feb. 17, a talk by David Graizbord on the Inquisition; sometime in March, a talk by Lola Grabb on Cuba's Jewish community. For further information, contact Barbara Rosenblum at 520-797-4410 or brynah1@mindspring.com.

To add a tribute to the late founder of the Tucson chapter, Israel Rubin (see www.elearn.arizona.edu/oralhistories), contact Rosenblum.

London's Sephardi Synagogue is 300

Bevis Marks Portuguese and Spanish Congregation of London, which dates from 1701, is celebrating its 300th anniversary. Special commemorative events and services have been scheduled for September through December. An exhibit, "The Story of the Portuguese Community In England" is set to open at the Jewish Museum in Camden on November 14. For an event schedule, contact the congregation at 44-207-289-2573 or the museum at 44-020-7284-1997.

Jewish Multiracial Network Events

The annual conference of the Jewish Multiracial Network <www.jmnetwork.org> was held November 11 in New York. The Network is planning its annual Spring Retreat for May 31-June 2, 2002, at the Jewish Retreat Center, Camp Isabella Freedman, in Falls Village, CT. For information contact the Network at 307 Seventh Ave., #900, New York, NY 10001, tel. 212-242-5598, email info@jmnetwork.org.

KULANU BRIEFS

French Conference on Ethiopian Jews

The Museum of Jewish History and Art in Paris presented a conference on the Jews of Ethiopia in October. Presentations were offered by Shalva Weil and other international scholars. An exhibition continues at the museum through December 9, 2001.

"Reggae Torah" World Premiere

A world premiere concert entitled "Reggae Torah: Soul of Our People" was held in Los Angeles on September 30. It was performed by Alan Eder and Friends, an ensemble of over 20 singers, instrumentalists and West African dancers. Like "Reggae Passover" and "Reggae Chanukah" before it, "Reggae Torah" braids together African, Caribbean and Jewish sounds. "Reggae Torah" features songs by the Jewish community in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana, and the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda. For more information, visit www.reggaepassover.com or email ReggaePass@aol.com, or call (661) 297-0374.

Todah Rabah!

To **Karen Phelan**, librarian at the Spuyten Duyvil Library in Riverdale, NY, for arranging the donation to the Abayudaya of a 26-volume set of the Encyclopedia Britannica and the series "Lands and Peoples" (with maps, photos, and text about people and places all over the world). And to **Rose Bromberg** for arranging the mailing to Uganda.

To **David Scheim** for his most generous contribution of a new personal computer, printer and many accessories for the Abayudaya community, in addition to his instructions in computers and music to JJ Keki and Gershom Sizomu.

To **Joe Davidson** for the Compaq laptop computer that he donated to Kulanu and for instructing JJ Keki in its use.

To **Claire Lugo** for her warm support and hospitality toward Gershom Sizomu in New York.

To **Neil Shanberg**, president of the Lawrence Jewish Community Center in Kansas, for arranging the shipping of 100 books for the Abayudaya.

To **Morris Davidson**, who donated two volumes of Tanach, two *mazzorim* and seven *Haggadot* for the Bnei Menashe.

To **Irwin Berg** for his \$500 contribution for the Abayudaya Orphans' Education Fund, to **Kehila Chadasha** for its \$400 contribution for Abayudaya education in honor of Rabbi Gershom and JJ Keki, to **Drs. Karen and Fred Sheckman** for their \$400 contribution for Abayudaya education, **Rhoda Posner Pruce** for her \$225 contribution, and to Julie Earne for a \$200 donation.

To **Stewart Belsham** for his \$150 contribution, and to **Leah Knopf** for her \$125 Bat Mitzvah contribution.

To **Alan and Lorna Eder** for their \$180 contribution for the Abayudaya education fund.

To members of the \$100 club: To **Charlie Leeds** for Abayudaya education, **Dr. Stanley Azen**, **Dr. Yehuda Sherman**, **I. Michael Goodman**, and **Rabbi H. J. Karp** (in honor of Rabbi Cukierkorn)

To the 5th-7th grade class at **Congregation Kol Shalom Sunday School** in Bainbridge Island, Washington, for its donation of \$38.43 for the Abayudaya.

To **Jean Klieger** for her contribution in honor of **Jeanette Okin's** special birthday.

To **Marilyn Fliegler and Roz and Ed Kolodny** for their contribution in memory of **Frances Zeller**.

To **Jack and Diane Zeller** for their contribution in honor of the wedding of **Jen and Brian Primack**.

To **Aron and Karen Primack** for their contribution in honor of the birth of **Yona Gil Zeller**.

Mazel Tov!

To **Larry Epstein** on the publication of his new book, *The Haunted Smile: The Story of Jewish Comedians in America*, by Public Affairs.

To **Miriam and JJ Keki** on the birth of their son **Aron Sheckman**, named for Aron Primack and the Sheckman family, on October 2.

To **Ariella Zeller and Chaim Kram** on the birth of their son **Yona Gil Zeller** on September 30.

To **Jen and Brian Primack** on their marriage in October.

Condolences

Abayudaya **Rabbi Mishael**, 80, died of malaria. He was the father of Hebrew in Uganda and one of the most committed and dedicated religious leaders. The community is deprived of the most important personality at a time of scarcity. He was the first Muyudaya to read Hebrew. He had been acting as one of the rabbis at Moses synagogue until his death. He has left behind a wife, Esther Mishael, 76, who is ill, and a granddaughter, Rebecca, 10.

Frances Reines Zeller, wife of Jack Zeller's father, passed away in August.

Secrets of My Ancestors

© 2001 by Keith A. Chaves

For the past 30 years I have been committed to researching and uncovering the secrets of my family history. I am fortunate to have recovered a very unique and important piece of Jewish history. An overwhelming sense of responsibility lies within me to preserve my family history. Please let me explain why.

I am a descendent of those Sephardic Jews who were directly affected by the Inquisition. My ancestors were forcibly removed from their homes, possessions taken, families divided, and some were forcibly converted to Catholicism, some were tortured, some were burned alive at the stake and eventually any remaining survivors were driven from Spain and eventually from Portugal as well.

My ancestors went to Northern Africa (Algeria and Morocco); London, England; South America (Brazil and Peru); the Caribbean Islands (Barbados, Cuba); the Canary Islands and New Spain (Mexico). They held a belief that sanctuary could be found if they left Iberia (Spain and Portugal). Much to their horror, the Inquisition followed them wherever they settled, even into New Spain. Inquisition Tribunal offices were eventually established in Lima, Cartagena (Central America), Mexico City, and even in New Mexico.

The first Jews ever to set foot on North American soil were Sephardic Jews commissioned to the voyages of Christopher Columbus as sailors, cartographers and navigators. My direct ancestor, Rodrigo Sanchez was one such person on these voyages. Rodrigo Sanchez was cousin to Gabriel Sanchez (treasurer of the crown of Spain), and nephew to Alazar Usuf (a very renowned Jew of his time). Portions of

(Continued on page 15)

Publications of Note

The Washington Jewish Week published two articles about JJ Keki's visit to the US. On August 9 a cover story by Merry Madway Eisenstadt, "Yearning to Be Jewish," featured three photos and discussed the background of the Abayudaya and Keki's goals during his two-month visit. Eisenstadt's August 30 story, "Ugandans Convert to Judaism," reported on the *halachic* conversion of Keki and his brother Gershon Sizomu in Maryland.

"Mbale's Jews," an article by Henry Lubega, appeared on page one of the September 1 edition of *The New Vision*, Uganda's largest daily paper. This is the first known article in the general Uganda press about the Abayudaya community. It can be read on Kulanu's web page, listed under "Abayudaya."

Jewsweek.com reprinted "Pakistan Diary," an article by Rick Hellman that originally appeared in the *Kansas City Jewish Chronicle* of Oct. 12. The article reports on Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn's August trip to Pakistan, Hong Kong, Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia and Japan. A highlight was the crumbling Jewish cemetery in Karachi, Pakistan, which he photographed so that he could document it before it deteriorated further. He also sought assistance for its preservation.

The oversized November 2001 issue of *The Casa Shalom Journal* features a wealth of writings: Converso descendants in New Mexico and southern Colorado by Prof. Seth Ward; a seder in Majorca 2001 by Dr. Gloria Mound; recipes from Jamaica; Converso merchants as cultural border crossers 1580-1700 by Dr. David Graizbord; musical traditions among Crypto-Jews in Portugal by Dr. Judith Cohen; and more. To join Casa Shalom <www.casa-shalom.com> and receive the Journal at no cost, send a check or money order for \$36 or more to Casa Shalom Institute for Marrano-Anusim Studies, PO Box 66, Gan Yavneh, Israel 70800.

BRIDGES Jewish feminist journal announces the publication of a special issue for August 2001: Writing and Art by Jewish Women of Color. Although there are 400,000 Jews of color in the US, this is the first collection of writing and art by Jewish women of color – Jewish women of African, Asian, Latin and Native American descent. This 128-page volume, with 26 contributors, contains essays, poetry, fiction, memoir, and visual art. Single issue price is \$9, and subscriptions (two issues) are \$18. To order, contact Clare Kinberg, *BRIDGES* Managing Editor, ckinberg@pond.net, PO Box 24839, Eugene, OR 97402. Tel. 541-343-7617 or 888-359-9188. See the website at www.pond.net/~ckinberg/bridges for a complete list of back issues.

Popular singer Judy Frankel has a new songbook out, *Sephardic Songs in Judeo-Spanish* – with a CD included. To order call 800-827-2400 or contact orders@jewishmusic.com.

A new who's who in the Sepharadi world is published in French in Montreal by Joseph Levy, Josue Elkouby and Marc Eliany. It consists of brief listings of key players. The dictionary is now available at the cost of \$35 Canadian plus shipping. The authors will be pleased to offer lectures on request. Contact: Marc Eliany at Eliany2603@hotmail.com or Fax: 1-819-428-3560.

Shalva Weil's article "Our Brethren the Taliban?" appeared in *The Jerusalem Report* of Oct. 22. It discusses the impressive evidence pointing to the proposition that the Pathans of Afghanistan are descended from one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel.

Ashkenazi Jews and a Hundred-Year-Old Synagogue in Yuksek-kaldirim, by Erdal Frayman, Mose Grosman, Robert Schild and Tiryaki Yayinlari was published in 2000 by the Galata Ashkenazi Cultural Association of Istanbul. Of the many books published on Turkey's Jewish community, most focus on the Sephardim — the Jews of Spanish origin. Here is a new book, in English, that focuses instead on the Ashkenazi--Turkish Jews of Eastern European origin. To order email pufitrk@superonline.com.

An article by Ben G. Frank, "Spain Reconciles with Its Jewish Past," ran on the Jewish Telegraphic Agency wire during the summer. It details how tourism officials in Spain are putting forth an effort to attract tourists to see the country's Jewish historic sights. Their new slogan: "Sepharad is your home."

The autumn 2001 edition of *The JEWISH Proclaimer*, a newsletter published by the National Center to Encourage Judaism, claims that "There's never, in the 2000 years since Judaism was favored by 10% of the Roman Empire, been such a great prospect for opening the doors, and being the promised light unto the nations." The issue describes the Center's program of subsidizing synagogues' advertisements in secular media of Introduction to Judaism-type programs. For information contact NCEJudaism@aol.com.

"Heartbreak Hotel," a story by Ada Ushpiz in the Oct. 31 *Ha'aretz*, exposes unfortunate attitudes and practices at a new absorption center for Ethiopian Jews in Israel at Kibbutz Ayelet Hashahar.

A new French book entitled *La foi du souvenir* (subtitle, *Labyrinthes marranes*) by Nathan Wachtel has been published by Seuil. Wachtel is an anthropologist who has specialized in Latin America, and his book discusses the lives of the Marranos in the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of the New World in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. He apparently did extensive research into the archives of the Inquisitorial courts that were set up in Lima, Mexico City, Cartagena, and Brazil, and he presents a series of portraits of various accused individuals. *LeMonde* reviewer Nicole Lapiere says that while these are personalized descriptions, they also provide a more generalized picture of life within New World Marrano society. She calls Wachtel's work both knowledgeable and "gripping". The book is available at the usual French on-line sources such as FNAC and *alpage*.

An interesting article has just been added to Kulanu's web site, with the title "There Are Many Different Voices in the World," It is about Ahuvah Gray, a former ordained Pentecostal Christian minister who was active in the African-American community, chose to convert to Orthodox Judaism, and moved to Israel. Gray is the author of the forthcoming book "My Sister the Jew," which describes her spiritual journey. The article can be found at www.kulanu.org under the Section, "Choosing Judaism."

The *Hadassah Magazine* for August/September 2001 features a portrait by Alan M. Tigay of Rabbi Henry Sobel, an American Rabbi who has become the most visible spokesman of Brazilian Jewry. A graduate of Yeshiva University who puts on tefillin every morning but received ordination from Hebrew Union College, the Reform rabbinical school, Sobel is comfortable with both the Orthodox and Liberal congregations in Brazil.

"If we limit Jewish options, people are going to choose non-Jewish options," Sobel has said.

ETHIOPIA NOTES

Bar and Bat Mitzvah Time

By Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum

Forty Ethiopian immigrant boys and girls recently celebrated their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs with a festive ceremony at Jerusalem's Hechal Shlomo Synagogue in the presence of (Ashkenazi) Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau.

The Jewish community in the UK and the Jewish Agency joined forces to provide a "British style" bar mitzvah experience for the youths, who reside in the absorption center in Safed and who all received special suits and dresses for the occasion. The boys were presented with a pair of *tefillin*, the girls with Shabbat candlesticks and *havdalah* sets. The parents received presents as well—an elaborate menorah for the Chanukah festival.

Following the services and ceremony, the bar and bat mitzvah boys and girls and their parents were treated to a festive meal at the Dan Panorama Hotel in Jerusalem, visited the Biblical Zoo, and danced at the Western Wall. A delegation of 15 representatives from the Jewish community in the UK arrived in Israel especially for the event. The boys and girls were also treated to a three-day camp experience at the "Talpiot" Youth Village in Hadera in preparation for the ceremony.

NACOEJ Bar/Bat Mitzvah Twinning

The NACOEJ Bar/Bat Mitzvah Twinning Program is designed to introduce American Jewish youngsters to their Ethiopian Israeli counterparts. When an American bar/bat mitzvah signs up for the Twinning Program, he/she is assigned to an Ethiopian Israeli student also about to have a bar/bat mitzvah. The Ethiopian student sends a letter and picture of him/herself to the American twin, who is encouraged to write back and even visit his/her twin in Israel. When American participants do visit Israel and wish to meet their twins, NACOEJ is happy to make all the arrangements. The Twinning Program can create lifelong friendships among the youngsters participating.

The cost of participating in the program is \$250 and the money is used on the twin in Israel and his/her classmates. Often it is used to help the students pay for school supplies, computer programs, books for a school library, class trips and other items that they would otherwise not be able to afford. Often, the schools make an end-of-year party for all the students who had their bar or bat mitzvah during the course of the year. With the high rate of poverty among Ethiopian Israeli families, many are unable to spend money on bar/bat mitzvah parties for their children, and the children, understandably, feel left out when they see their classmates having parties of their own. This money helps correct that inequality.

Here is a report of Sarah Rodenstein's bat mitzvah at Tifereth Israel Congregation in Washington, DC, as told by her mother, Judith Rodenstein.

"Sarah sent letters to all our invited guests as well as posting her request on the synagogue list-serve. We purchased baskets and enough school supplies to fill them to make centerpieces for the tables at her party. We created hang tags for each basket that read: *These school supplies, and others that you have donated, will be used by Ethiopian children who can't afford school supplies. My "twin", Rachel Sahalu, and her class will be able to be more successful in school because of your support. Thank you!*

"Sarah also made a poster with images from NACOEJ publications and put it on an easel in the lobby, along with an information table with many brochures and fact sheets about NACOEJ projects. We put signs on the wicker hamper in the shul lobby labeling it for the collection of school supplies a few days before the bat mitzvah. (A food drive used the hamper until then, or we could have started ear-

lier.) On the day of her bat mitzvah many people put supplies into the hamper, and some dropped them off later that week either at the shul or at our house.

"Total collected, including what we bought: 486 pencils, 406 colored pencils, 527 pens, 178 markers, 57 erasers, 50 rulers, 47 glue sticks, 27 rolls of tape, 23 pencil sharpeners, 16 protractors, 13 pairs of scissors, 5 compasses, 2 calculators, 2 highlighters, 2 sets of flash-cards, 1 backpack, 1 puzzle. In addition, in response to Sarah's letter six families made \$53 dollar contributions to sponsor lunches for a school child in Ethiopia, and four more made smaller monetary contributions that we combined to sponsor lunches for two more children."

NACOEJ Feeding Program

This program literally saves young Jewish lives. Currently there are about 23,000 Jews in Ethiopia waiting to make aliyah, of whom NACOEJ is assisting approximately 17,000. Among them are 4500 children who attend schools NACOEJ has set up for them on its compounds in Addis Ababa and Gondar Province. The children learn Amharic language skills, math, science, English, Hebrew, Jewish studies and more. They receive one meal a day from NACOEJ, which consists of an egg, a carrot, a potato and roll, a piece of fruit, some beans and a slice of cheese.

The meals keep the kids going throughout school and for the rest of the day since these meals are often the only food the children receive each day. Therefore, these meals prevent these youngsters from actually starving or dying from malnutrition; the meals help to build up the children's already-weak immune systems to fight off many dangerous, and sometimes deadly, diseases.

It now costs NACOEJ an average of 17 cents to feed one child for one day. NACOEJ feeds each of the 4500 children six days a week (the kitchens to the compounds are closed on Shabbat), which for the year comes to \$53 per child. For contributions of this amount, sponsors will receive a picture of one of the children in the feeding program along with some background information on the child.

To donate or for further information, contact North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ), 132 Nassau Street, 4th Floor, New York, NY 10038, tel (212) 233-5200, fax (212) 233-5243; nacoelj@aol.com.



HAPPY CHANUKAH!!!

Remember, you can get all that Chanukah shopping done right from this very newsletter – see page 14 and help the US rebuild the economy!! It is the patriotic thing to do!

Bringing Ethiopia Home (cont.)

(Continued from page 5)

shocked to see the extreme and very visible cases of crushing poverty and malnutrition. Adults and children were walking around barefoot and threadbare; no, wearing merely threads would be more descriptive. Living quarters were horrible and consisted of small thatched huts with walls and floors made up of a mixture of mud and cow dung, where up to 10 family members squeezed into a space four-by-eight feet. There was no clean water or sewer system, no sanitation and no toilets.

Our minivan pulled up to the Jewish Community Center — which consists of a gated area called the “compound.” Its members arrive daily by foot (for some a 10-minute walk, for others a two-hour walk) to pray, work, learn and eat. Immediately upon entering, I was jolted from my state of exhaustion to energy and enthusiasm overcome by the big smiles and hopeful bright eyes.

My parents scurried away to the infirmary to start organizing and preparing. I was assigned to teach intermediate Hebrew, Jewish culture, and philosophy to a class of adults — who were teachers themselves and would later transmit what they learned to their own students.

I was a little scared, to say the least. I had never taught a full class before and all my students were much older than I. Fortunately, I didn't have the luxury to complain or contemplate my situation. There was a full classroom of 40 students patiently waiting in their seats, ready to be taught and I was already five minutes late for my first day of class.

The classroom was a hut. However, it had a tin instead of thatched roof (July and August are the rainy season). It had narrow, uncomfortable benches and a simple blackboard. Everyone was facing forward, eager to begin.

As I taught Hebrew words, grammar, and concepts of Jewish thought it became clear that my students were starving, both physically and intellectually. They jumped at every opportunity to learn something new and asked many questions to make sure they understood everything perfectly. They seemed truly grateful for whatever I could offer them — and I felt that my teaching was somehow sustaining them.

In fact, long after the bell rang, they continued to sit, listen, ask, and participate. My class finally ended when my jet lag and exhaustion took over.

In the ensuing days, I continued to teach at the compound. A little 10-year-old boy named Elimelech kept attending lessons that were intended for individuals in their 20s and 30s. Not only was he there, but he was also an active participant in classroom discussions and question/answer periods. Elimelech's smile and demeanor just knocked my parents and me off our feet. His attraction went beyond appearance. He was extraordinarily bright, perceptive and loving — even though we just met.

His command of Hebrew was wonderful and his knowledge of Jewish custom, ritual, and practice was outstanding. My parents and I knew Elimelech was truly unique and that we had what may have been a once in a lifetime opportunity to make a difference. Therefore we decided to concentrate our efforts on this particular child. We discussed the situation with others in the group, the community elders and then with Elimelech's mother. All whole-heartedly agreed that it would be a fantastic idea to bring him to New York to live with us. In addition to offering him a much better life, his presence in the United States would raise awareness of the situation in Ethiopia.

Everything moved so quickly, I didn't even know how to react. In the beginning of this process, I, like my parents and the rest in the group, was in awe of Elimelech's capabilities and intelligence and his ability to rise above the substandard conditions in which he lived. Yet I never imagined that my parents were actually going to “pull it off.”

And, I could not come up with a valid reason not to bring him home.

Naturally, I had selfish fears; imagine, plopping a third world child in the middle of our family. However, I decided to forget about my own self-interests for it was now time to focus on this child. It was very difficult to obtain a visa to the United States but these issues were delicately resolved and we were set to leave.

I have to admit, at times, the adjustment of having an extra, unfamiliar child in the family was trying. Even simple luxuries that we take for granted such as using a toilet, toothbrush or a bathtub had to be explained. At times, my patience and enthusiasm were running on empty when I had to explain to him some of the elementary concepts of our lives that he had a hard time grasping. Watching my three brothers, one of whom is the same age as Elimelech, restored my energy. Gideon put any feelings of jealousy and competitiveness aside and rose to the challenge. He has become very patient, understanding and thoughtful. The experience of having an Ethiopian boy live with our family, as part of the family, is helping us all develop and grow into more caring, understanding individuals.

Clearly this child, and the Ethiopian Jewish Community as a whole, has very strong desires to emigrate to Israel and join the substantial Ethiopian community there. But that is not happening fast enough for various political reasons. However, we felt that until such occasion arises, Elimelech will most certainly remain in a secure and loving environment, learning fluent English, and bolstering his Hebrew and Judaic studies. When it comes time for him to relocate to Israel, he will be super-prepared to attend an excellent school and mainstream much more quickly and successfully. We will be left with a tremendous sense of gratification for having made such a difference in one little boy's life.

Although I was a teacher in Addis, this was also a learning experience for me. I had always known that there are those in the world who lack basic necessities. The trip turned this knowledge into graphic reality. This realization didn't cause me to feel guilty, rather grateful. It helped me to realize that I am, in fact, privileged to have what I have and to appreciate life on a much higher level.

(Editor's note: Hilary Platt wrote this report while a 16-year-old student at The Frisch School. She currently attends Columbia Univer-

NEWSLETTER BY E-MAIL?

We would like to explore the possibility of sending the newsletter as an attachment to email. Please send me an email at primack@starpower.net if you would like to receive the newsletter via email. It would mean lower cost for printing and mailing, you would receive the newsletter faster and the pictures would be in color. It might also mean we could send more pages with more information!!

Thanks.
Aron Primack

Yachad b'Shalom ~ Together In Peace

By Shira-Davida Goldberg-Rathell

I have noticed recently that the Jewish population I have been a part of my entire life is expanding.

Over the last decade, I have run the gamut from being immersed in doubt, no longer sheltered by the warmth and sustenance of the Jewish community, to a new discovery which is twofold: my foundation of strength, and my new-found position of social crusader.

Overnight, my position of comfort, one that I had taken for granted, was no longer my reality. I was on the outside looking in, feeling shunned and rejected. I wanted to flee, but where would I

My *bashert* was a non-Jewish African American

go? I felt lost, and had nowhere to turn, so I turned inward. At that time, I felt that introspection was essential for me; I had to figure out a lot of things and I had to find a resolve. There were no outlets, no weekly support groups for such a category, or numbers in the Jewish yellow pages, yet my determination to discover myself was the agent for what HaShem had known all along, my new direction, my new purpose.

It is ironic that the events in one's lifetime can evolve into a force more powerful and remarkable than the individual, or is it the other way around?

My epic saga began 13 years ago as an adolescent. The man of my dreams came into my life and he altered my course forever. My *bashert* was a non-Jewish African American. Not the ideal match, at least in my mother's

eyes. My mother and I had to resolve the conflict, the confusion and the intolerance we had brought to the table. We had to evolve, and since we were as close as a mother and daughter could possibly be, that meant we had to accomplish this together. Ultimately, we did.

After my children were born, my new diverse Jewish family did not feel welcome. The faces in the community were familiar, but their stares and whispers were not intelligible. I didn't understand how they could express their views so openly and so often!

Eventually, we did "reintroduce" ourselves. I was no longer one individual, but an integral part of a diverse Jewish family. I still had no resources within the Jewish community. I was interested in finding Jewish things that represented my family. When I was growing up, my house was covered with what I like to refer to as Jewish paraphernalia. Paintings of great rabbis covered our walls; books lined the shelves. As the consummate academic, I tried to conceptualize my position, and to try to solve this enigma.

As much as I loved those heirlooms, they didn't adequately portray my evolved vision of Jewish existence. I began to search for items, posters for my children comprised of Jewish themes, for example. To my continual dismay, there just weren't any. I became quite savvy on the keyboard, surfing the web for something, ANYTHING I could proudly present to those little Jewish faces. There just wasn't anything at first. I felt more and more isolated as my

searches produced nothing but late nights and exhausted days. Feeling alone, I needed some solace, but I couldn't find that either.

As I was *kvetching* (complaining) to my husband about the lack of networking opportunities, it occurred to me that I was capable and motivated enough to create one. It hit me like any good epiphany; it came into my thoughts clear and focused. After all, someone did say, "Necessity is the mother of invention."

Yachad b'Shalom ~ Together in Peace <<http://www.YachadBShalom.com>> became my new truth, a place where diverse Jews and supporters are able to extend and encourage others to follow their hearts within their Jewishness in a way I was accustomed to in a previous life. I continue to embrace that feeling and am thriving as a result. YBS is an online organization, maintained and formulated for all Jews who understand that each of us needs to feel valued.

I receive emails from people all over the globe thanking me for YBS, for helping them find resources. Together we have found our own influences, and on occasion socially motivated members branch out on their own with vitality and strength. All "diverse" Jews have had experiences that have undermined *Ahavas Yisroel*, the love of another Jew. But questions, interrogations and ignorance regarding our Jewish 'status' are no longer a barrier. We are at the pioneering stage, and I cannot wait to see what is to follow.

The disdainful stares have now given way to constant appreciation, which has spiraled into more feverish and enthusiastic activism. The solitude I once felt has been replaced.

The continual expansion of the Jewish community gives all Jews the opportunity to reevaluate their biases and replace them with tolerance and acceptance. It is in our power to find or create resources and friendships, and to leave a lasting impression, and we will continue to do so with optimism and determination.

Now, it is 13 years and three beautiful Jewish boys later, and I am still in the middle of my journey. I have now added to my repertoire, as well as my home and friends' homes those precious heirlooms that I had always imagined. My house exudes the same level of tranquility as the one I grew up in, but with a new



The author and her family with their "diverse" Jewish paintings

We have evolved into the voice of and for the diverse Jewish population

pragmatic point of view. I have created my own Jewish "paraphernalia" -- paintings for my family; diverse Jewish children, paintings of rabbis, women and men that embody the essence of Jewish diversity. As I continue my journey, I am constantly reminded that there are no longer barriers that I cannot overcome.

What began, as a personal quest for emotional sustenance has evolved into the voice of and for the diverse Jewish population. We have somehow found each other, and the benefits are bountiful. The Jewish ideal has been revised to include all of us, from all around the world.

LETTERS

(Continued from page 2)

*Rabbi Jeffrey Summit
Boston, Massachusetts*

I would like to thank you and all others who have contributed to the air flight of two members of our community from Uganda. It is a clear demonstration that our community has been saved from isolation.

I am very happy to learn that J.J Keki and Gershom have been formally accepted as Jews. It is indeed a great landmark to our community.

*Aaron Kintu Moses, secretary, Abayudaya Community
Mbale, Uganda*

What a tremendous occasion! Thank you for letting me be part of it.

*Rabbi Howard Gorin
Rockville, Maryland*

Enterprise of Abayudaya Women

It is my happiness to inform you that the married women who didn't have a chance to join secondary education have joined a tailoring course through your help. We have decided to form a project named B'Tikvah Tailors Centre. As women, we found it necessary to make a combined force to improve our families in various aspects in terms of basic needs. We hope to make uniforms and sell them to schools.

Further, we shall be buying old bales of clothes at \$30 each to change them into fashions to be sold to people and for home use.

However, for this project to take place properly we need three sewing machines which make zig-zag design, which cost \$500 each (we have only two simple ones).

The members of this project include, Miriam J. Keki as treasurer, Rebecca Nantabo as secretary, Dinah Isaac, Rachel Jabingo, Asharia, and Shirah Enosh.

*Zeridah Uri, chairperson
Mbale, Uganda*

Rabbi Mishael

It is with utmost sadness that our Order records the untimely passing of Rabbi Mishael in Uganda. My wife, Anna, and our Lodge brethren join me in this expression of deep sympathy.

May Rabbi Mishael's memory be a source of inspiration and succor to his family, Kulanu, and legions of friends for years to come; and may his sweet soul be bound in everlasting life.

*Prof. Asher J. Matathias, president
LONG ISLAND LODGE No. 1353 B'NAI B'RITH
Woodmere, NY*

From the entire Betel congregation our most solemn condolences at the loss of this most wise person that HaShem blessed us with. Our thoughts and prayers are with you Uganda, and all Kulanuites.

*Betel congregations
Zimbabwe*

We are sorry about the passing of Rabbi Mishael. May he rest in peace eternally.

*Sherman and Camellia Taffel
Columbia, Maryland*

Life-Long Jews Are Converted (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

scribe Shabbat services.

Gorin concluded, "These people are Jewish. They have been practicing Judaism since 1919. Now we are going to make them Jews. They are the first Abayudaya, but they won't be the last."

Commenting on the event, Gorin noted, "The Abayudaya say that the Jewish people has the great gift of the Torah, and they want to join this people." Speaking about their isolation in Uganda, he added, "Idi Amin could have come in and exterminated them and no one would have known that a fragment of our people had been there."



At the historic Beit Din, left to right: Gilbert Kleiner, Rabbi Mendel Abrams, Rabbi Howard Gorin, JJ Keki, and Gershom Sizomu

On the Shabbat following the conversion, Sizomu accepted his first aliyah at the Newton Centre Minyan near Boston. Keki received his first aliyah at Tikvat Israel, Gorin's congregation. In honor of the occasion the cantor, Rochelle Helzner, surprised Keki with an updated English version of a song the Abayudaya have recorded, "Tunafuraha Sana," ("We Are Very Happy"). The words are:

*Tunafuraha Sana
Our congregation welcomes you
As we embrace a fellow Jew.
Tunafuraha Sana
You've kept traditions from the start
Abayudaya have a Jewish heart.
Tunafuraha Sana
Your spirit and geography
Have made a mark in history
Tunafuraha Sana
For this, we raise our voice in praise
May Adonai bless you all your days.
Tunafuraha Sana*

Keki's "Two Skies" (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

was extremely moving and emotional as JJ was showered with hugs and welcomes from the kids. They follow him everywhere now and are sharing music, traditions, and stories together. The program organizers are scrambling to revise their programming as JJ's sessions are drawing ALL of the 126 kids and the other teachers are left standing alone! JJ had his first lake swims and boat experiences while here, smiling the entire time.

Keki traveled to New York to speak at the 92nd Street YMHA. While there, he scheduled sightseeing with a friend at the World Trade Center at 10 am on September 11. He decided to go early to accompany his host, Irwin Berg, to Berg's office near the WTC. As the two men stepped out of the subway they witnessed one WTC tower smoking and another about to be hit.

They ran and walked to Greenwich Village, where Sizomu was studying, and were able to call friends and assure them they were safe. Although Keki's September 12 talk at the 92nd Street YMHA was cancelled, coming on the heels of the terror attack, he and his brother did have a memorable recording session in New York with popular vocalist Laura Wetzler. Their song will be included on her next album.

Karen and Fred Scheckman hosted Keki in Topeka, Kansas, where he had two speaking engagements and spent Rosh Hashanah. Karen Scheckman gave this account:

When JJ Keki told people that he was going to visit the Jewish community in Topeka, he received a rather common response: "You've got to be kidding! There are Jews in Topeka?" Well, yes, there are Jews in Topeka (since the turn of the last century), there is a synagogue (since 1920), and the Jews of Topeka welcomed JJ with open arms and embraced him with midwestern hospitality. JJ returned the welcome and added greatly to our understanding of who Jews are in the world and where Jews live on the planet.

His visit started with a song at Friday night services, "Shalom, Shalom," which he taught the congregation, and was followed by his presentation on Saturday night, a presentation at Washburn University on Monday, and the honor of carrying the Torah scroll at Rosh Hashanah services on Tuesday morning.

JJ's natural warmth, his beautiful smile and his openness to new experiences quickly endeared him to all he met. He is full of plans for the Abayudaya and his enthusiasm was contagious to those who heard him detail these plans. In particular, several children in the congregation were quite impressed by JJ and their interest may become the basis for future contacts between our congregation and the one in Mbale (Uganda).

A lecture-recital at the JCC of Northern Virginia was under-attended because it had been scheduled for September 13, two days after the national emergency, but it was a rich musical experience for those who did attend. Prominent local musician Larry Robinson backed up Keki on the mandolin.

During his stay, Keki gratefully received invitations for meals and sightseeing trips from many friends, including **Rabbi Howard and Pam Gorin, Sherry and Tom Wolf, Yohannes and Ayumi Zeleka, Laurel and Michael Anchors, Matt Meyers, Irwin and Elaine**

Berg, Rhoda and Mort Pruce, David and Dossie Rabin, Stephanie and Jack Ventura, Jack and Diane Zeller, Irene Vogel, and Lucy Goldberg. In addition, he received computer gifts and lessons from **Joe Davidson and David Scheim.** He attended Shabbat and holiday services in all movements of Judaism. And we Primacks hosted Shabbat dinners and musical evenings (both Keki and Sizomu were enthralled at a visitor's hammered dulcimer), and made certain Keki had the opportunity to participate in daily life activities. Keki asked us to take a photo of him loading dirty dishes into our dishwasher so he could prove to his wife that he had done it! He has written that he misses electricity and plumbing now that he is back in Uganda.

Keki gave an emotional farewell talk and performance, along with his brother Gershom Sizomu, at a Kulanu meeting in Bethesda, Maryland, on September 30. Sizomu's remarks can be found on page 16.

Departure Misadventures

Keki's September 30 flight out of Washington on Sabena was cancelled due to a pilot's strike, and they told him to take the September 2 flight instead. On the evening of September 2 we learned that Sabena is no longer flying out of Washington, so that flight was also cancelled, too. Sabena signed over Keki's ticket to United Airlines, which had a flight to Brussels at the right time to meet the Sabena flight from Brussels to Entebbe. But United would not take Sabena's ticket, since Sabena is partially owned by Swissair, which had just filed for bankruptcy protection. So Kulanu had to buy a ticket from United Airlines for the

Washington-Brussels leg at a whopping price that approximated his Uganda-Washington round trip!

The story isn't over. After an hour and a half of flying, the United plane took an emergency landing in NY to check out a mysterious package someone noticed in the kitchen but no one on the plane acknowledged. This delay caused Keki to miss the Sabena flight in Brussels. He was stranded in Brussels for three days, awaiting Sabena's Friday morning flight to Entebbe. The airline paid for his hotel and food in downtown Brussels, but he felt challenged by the language barrier. He finally made it back home to embrace his family, including his four-day-old son.

Sizomu's Challenges

Gershom Sizomu's trip was made possible by Jay Sand of Philadelphia, who brought the Abayudaya spiritual leader to the US to officiate at his wedding in November. Sizomu, who was the first Abayudaya to graduate from college (with Kulanu's help), came early to take advantage of an invitation by the Hebrew Union College in New York to study there for a semester. The idea for such an invitation was initiated by Rabbi Jeffrey Summit of Tufts University Hillel. Sizomu noticed that his classmates' Hebrew is much more fluent than his own, which is self-taught; he later learned that they had all spent the previous year on a learning program in Israel! Nevertheless, Sizomu relishes the challenges of his studies. He will return to Uganda after his final exams in early January.

Sizomu has had his share of lectures as well, and he is scheduled

(Continued on page 15)



Sizomu and Keki in a New York recording studio with singer Laura Wetzler

The Kulanu Boutique

Jews in Places You Never Thought Of, a 305-page hardback which includes descriptions of personal interactions with returning and emerging Jewish groups around the world; over 30 photographs. *Proceeds benefit Kulanu.*

Shalom Everybody Everywhere! the acclaimed recording of the unique sounds of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda. Hear traditional Jewish liturgy and new compositions set to African melodies and rhythms, sung in English, Hebrew, Luganda, and Swahili. *Proceeds benefit the Abayudaya.*

Hand-made Ugandan Kippot available in small, medium and large, some in dark colors, others in bright colors, some in the traditional skullcap shape, some in the pillbox shape. Some knitted, some crocheted. *Proceeds benefit the Abayudaya.*

Hand-Woven Ugandan Tallitot, white with colored stripes, bag included. *Proceeds benefit the Abayudaya.*

Hand-woven Bnei Menashe Tallitot; white with black or blue stripes; bag included. *Proceeds benefit the Bnei Menashe.*

Hand-crocheted Bnei Menashe Kippot (skullcap shape only), muted colors. *Proceeds benefit the Bnei Menashe.*

Religion and Politics in Uganda: A Study of Islam and Judaism by Arye Oded, an Israeli diplomat to Africa. *Proceeds benefit the Abayudaya High School.*

Journey to the Vanished City: The Search for a Lost Tribe of Israel (paperback) by Tudor Parfitt. The fascinating story of the Lemba, recently shown genetically to have distinct close ties to the Jews, especially *cohanim*. *Proceeds benefit Kulanu.*

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	Number	Cost Each	Shipping/handling	Total
<i>Jews in Places You Never Thought Of</i>	_____	\$29.50	\$3 in US & Can. \$4 outside	_____
<i>Shalom Everybody, Everywhere!</i> CD	_____	15.00	\$2 in US, \$3 in Can. \$5 elsewhere	_____
Cassette	_____	10.00	ea. addl. \$1 in US & Can., \$2 elsewhere	_____
<i>Hand-made Kippot of the Abayudaya</i> (pillbox or skullcap shape) _____ Indicate SML, dark or bright color: (<i>sorry, no returns!</i>)		10.00	\$2 (ea. addl. \$1)	_____
<i>Hand-crocheted, multicolored Kippot of the Abayudaya</i> (skullcap only) _____		15.00	\$2 (ea. addl. \$1)	_____
<i>Tallit of the Abayudaya</i> _____	100.00		\$5 in US, \$7 elsewhere	_____
<i>Tallit of the Bnei Menashe</i> _____	100.00		\$5 in US, \$7 elsewhere	_____
<i>Kippah of the Bnei Menashe</i> _____	15.00		\$2 (ea. addl. \$1)	_____
<i>Religion and Politics in Uganda</i> _____	10.00		\$2 (ea. addl. \$1)	_____
<i>Journey to the Vanished City</i> _____	14.00		\$3 (ea. addl. \$2)	_____
			GRAND TOTAL	_____

Please make checks payable to “KULANU” and mail to 1217 Edgevale Road, Silver Spring, MD, 20910-1612.

“Two Skies” (cont.)

(Continued from page 13)

to speak in New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Rabbi Jeff Summit reports on his weekend in Boston:

We had a wonderful Shabbat. On Friday I showed Gershom Tufts and introduced him both to the Provost and the President of the University (both are Jewish). We had a lovely Kabbalat Shabbat at our home with Richard Sobol and his family. Gershom had an aliyah at our minyan, taught the Abayudaya “Adon Olam” and led kiddush. The community sang “Simentov and Mazeltov” to celebrate the occasion of his official conversion. He gave a wonderful talk to a full house after services.

Groups wishing to schedule lectures or recitals of Abayudaya music by Sizomu should contact Ray Kaplan at RAYKAP@worldnet.att.net or 201-886-9138. This newsletter will carry a more complete report of Sizomu’s activities in the next issue.

Ancestors (cont.)

(Continued from page 7)

my family have resided in North America continually since 1492.

Additionally other ancestors included in my family history are Talmudist Rabbi Moses Halevy Duran, Luis Carvajal and Luis Carvajal "El Mozo", the Abendano's, the Chaves family of Chaves, Portugal and others too numerous to mention. Nonetheless, I come from some very famous Jews! My entire maternal and paternal genealogy is 100% Sephardim.

Additionally, in 1995 my eldest son, Aaron became bar mitzvah at the Bais Menachem Chabad Center here in Albuquerque. Rabbi Chaim Schmukler conducted the service. Aron Straser and Lou Lapidis were the principles who instructed Aaron for this joyous and historic event. Aaron is the first male child of our family to have a public, synagogue-oriented bar mitzvah ceremony in over 500 years.

I have a desire to preserve this history in a factual, compassionate and tactful manner that will contribute to Jewish history, and make known a "true" story of the Sephardic Jews of the New World. By preserving this history I will have fulfilled a life-long dream.

I have organized a documentary film production with a very well known director, Felice Phillip Verrecia. My hope is that with our combined talent we can create a very excellent Albuquerque-produced and -directed documentary film on the Crypto-Jewish history of New Mexico and principally my family history. The unofficial film title is "At Great Risk: How the Crypto-Jews came to America."

I am soliciting contributions for the film. A budget proposal has been developed. Since the production company has non-profit status, all contributions are tax-deductible. Interested persons can contact me at prosjr@juno.com or at 220 General Somervell NE, Albuquerque. NM 87123.

Inside Kulanu

By Jack Zeller

This newsletter is similar to most: exciting and full of reference to shoe who have gone to great lengths to make "outreach" a success. There is also a Kulanu outside of the immediate view. That Kulanu will bear the signature of those who have focused their efforts relentlessly. Our newsletter tends to bring you into the celebration and avoids the hard, gritty work that precedes all the accomplishments.

Are you there, and what can you do? Please call our office (301-681-5679) if you want to help. I have never spoken to anyone about Kulanu and failed to find something for them to do!

The Kulanu office is not really an office. It is our home and the homes of others that are partitioned off into office spaces. One of the complaints that we have fielded in our dispersed office is why do we have so many addresses and telephone numbers for this and that? The answer is that Kulanu is made of partitioned lives and spaces all held together by the satisfactions that we celebrate in our newsletter. Reading is our hour of joy!

SUPPORTER APPLICATION

I/WE WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A SUPPORTER OF KULANU (MAIL TO KULANU, C/O HANTMAN, 3520 TARKINGTON LANE, SILVER SPRING, MD 20906)

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Ideas for Uganda

By Gershom Sizomu

(remarks at Kulanu meeting of October 30, 2001)

I would like to thank you all for accepting us to be with you. I have learnt a lot from my stay here. One of the most important things is the cooperation you people have. I have stayed for one week at the Primacks' and we have been invited several days for dinners. Where people are invited for dinner and for lunch, this is very good. I have also learnt that you people value coming together for social meetings like this one, and we don't have such things. You get to learn more about each other when you meet in such meetings. I have also learnt that you warmly welcome visitors. You are more hospitable than we are. We shall multiply our hospitality, so when you come there will be a big competition!

I have also learned that there are many opinions about Judaism and Torah in the US. There are different ways of observing, of viewing, the Torah. But you still are united and you still identify yourselves as Jews, and this is very beautiful. The

different opinions have kept the Jews from assimilation. Those who don't want to follow the Orthodox way can still do it in a Reconstructionist way, and that has kept these people within realm of Judaism. This is very beautiful.

If there is a society that has left women behind, it is the African society -- the people of Uganda, including the Abayudaya. We have made a very big mistake to leave the women behind. Women are not allowed to participate in synagogue services, they are not allowed full participation in public, they are very behind, even in academic circles.

But I have found a powerful women's group here. That is probably why the US is developing very fast, because of the contribution given by women. This is a very big lesson to us. I accept that we shall go back and make a tremendous change to incorporate women in everything. And probably tomorrow you will hear that Africa is developing very fast!

Subscription Info

Please let Kulanu know whenever you have a new address, and please include your new phone numbers and e-mail. Every issue of the newsletter that has to be redirected costs Kulanu a minimum of \$1.50 -- money we would much rather spend for our communities.

And Don't Forget, the date on your label is the date of your LAST donation to Kulanu. After 12 months without a donation, the merciless data base refuses to send you any further newsletters. If the date is not on your label, please let us know by mail or e-mail to jdzeller@umich.edu Attn. Diane. Thanks.

What if you are a snowbird and regularly spend time at another location? The new Kulanu data base can handle that flawlessly providing you tell Kulanu the months you usually spend in each residence.

So, PLEASE, remember us at least once a year, although donations are gladly received as often as you wish!

Deadline for next issue: January 15, 2002

Recycled Paper

Edited by Karen Primack

Kulanu

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