

# KULANU

“all of us”



Helping Lost Jewish Communities

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## Xu Xin Discusses TODAY'S Chinese Jews

By Karen Primack

Many of us know about the Jewish community that flourished in Kaifeng, China, from the 11<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. But not so many of us know that descendants of that community are alive and well and interested in their Jewish roots in China today.

At the Kulanu meeting in Bethesda on March 25, Prof. Xu Xin of Nanjing University reviewed the history of the Kaifeng Jewish community and then addressed issues of Jewish identity in 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century China.

In government surveys of the 1920s and 1950s, some Chinese citizens in Kaifeng identified themselves as Jews. In 1952 on National Day, representatives from different ethnic groups came to Beijing; two were sent as “Jews” from Kaifeng. Xu reports that this was the last time they were mentioned officially and publicly as Jews.

Although the local population recognizes the existence of Jews in China, a government document on Jewish status by top officials refused to recognize Jews as a separate ethnic group because it was felt that they had all assimilated and adopted Chinese culture totally. However, Xu noted, the document found that there should be no discrimination against Jewish descendants, and they did receive special treatment, receiving a ration of beef or lamb instead of pork. When China opened up to the West in 1980 and became interested in tourism, the government addressed the issue of “Jews” as a special group—i.e. people with Jewish ancestors. In 1998, the government gave Jews an identity choice of either Han or Muslim; the benefit of calling oneself a Muslim is that cremation is not required, for instance.

Xu has observed that since 1990 there is more awareness among the younger descendants of Kaifeng Jews about their roots and heritage, and they want to meet Western Jews; they are also more interested in Israel. Xu is anxious to do a survey of the number of Jewish families in Kaifeng.

In 1994 the local government picked one Jew as a representative in a political consultative committee, and he is now a leader and meets with Jewish visitors. He is Moshe Xingwang Zhang, a physical education teacher who coaches wrestling, Wushu and Kungfu. The descendants in Kaifeng meet several times a year, under the leadership of Moshe. Xu attended one such meeting, with about 20 present. Xu periodically contributes funds to Moshe to help cover expenses of these meetings, meetings with tourists, and helping sick families. Xu has sent each family a copy of his Chinese translation of the *Encyclopedia Judaica*. It is a poor community. He wants them to get together and know each other. He encourages them to learn about their heritage.

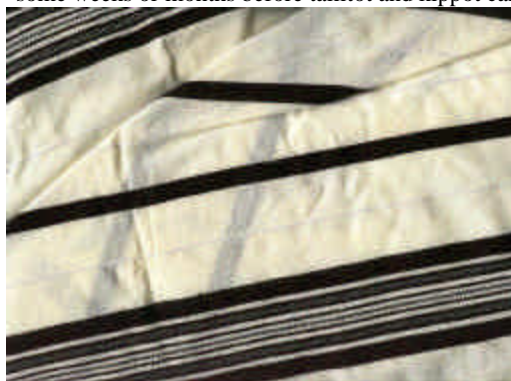
When Xu published his Chinese translation of the *Encyclopedia* (Continued on page 40)

## Bnei Menashe Produce *Tallitot, Kippot*

The Bnei Menashe community in Manipur, India, is making finely woven *tallitot* to raise money for a Jewish center in Imphal. The Bnei Menashe Council plans to purchase a four-story building in a central location to house a synagogue, a community center, classrooms, a hall for community functions, and administrative offices.

The *tallitot* are white with black stripes and measures about 45x70 inches. They are made by handloom by Bnei Menashe women. The *attarah* is hand embroidered in a floral design, and the four corners are also hand embroidered. The introductory price for a *tallit* is \$100 (please see Kulanu Boutique on page 15).

The Bnei Menashe women also produce finely hand-crocheted kippot in muted colors. These will be available for \$15 each. It will be some weeks or months before *tallitot* and kippot can be shipped, but Kulanu is presently taking orders.



Lemuel Haokip, general secretary of the Bnei Menashe Council, has asked Kulanu to help market these products. He explains:

“Our organization is unlike other Jewish organization around the world. Before

Christianity came to India in the last part of 18th century, we were very distinct people having our own tradition and culture, which were very similar to Bible customs. Christian missionaries influenced our forefathers and slowly almost 95 percent of our population was then converted to Christianity thereby neglecting our own tradition and customs. But from 1970s onwards some of our great leaders (most of them have passed away) tried to revive our tradition and culture. We realised our mistakes and then we started observing Shabbath and other Torah customs as far as we know them. Now people are very much aware of our ancestral customs and started embracing Judaism and our population increases day by day. Of late, we felt the need to have a permanent building of our own.”

The group also wishes to remind Sephardic synagogues purchasing new prayer books that the Bnei Menashe are anxious to have used Sephardic prayer books (daily, Shabbat, and holidays).

**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.**

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**For inquiries, contact the above address or call (301) 681-5679, or e-mail <kulanu@ubmail.ubalt.edu>.**

# LETTERS

## Hadassah Infant School Debuts in Uganda

The Hadassah Infant School was founded on 7<sup>th</sup> January 2001 by the Abayudaya congregation. It is privately owned by the congregation to prepare the young for future academic excellence and spiritual life. The congregation decided to open this school privately because the already-established schools which are government aided in the vicinity



do not give adequate academic foundation to the young – and, above all, Judaism is not one of the disciplines taught.

The school is called Hadassah after Esther whose Hebrew name was Hadassah. Esther fought for the survival of the Jewish people during the time of Haman in Shushan, who sought to destroy all Jews including the children. We wish to recognise Esther's contribution by naming our infant school after her, because our hope for survival is all, in these young Jews.

The school has a total of 22 Abayudaya infants, ranging in age from 4 to 8 years, occupying our former guest house (We are building a new guest house in another location.). We supply the young ones with meals, and our learning and recreational activities include singing, reading, writing, story-telling, physical education, games, and arts and crafts.

Having the opportunity to educate our infants in Judaism and provide them with quality education is a fulfillment of the famous obligation of *V'shinantam levanecha* (and you shall teach them diligently to your children).

Your assistance in helping us achieve this goal shall be highly appreciated. We are seeking for a donation of \$320 quarterly to assist us pay salaries to two teachers and two support staff of Hadassah Infant School at a rate of \$80 each. Each term has three months.

*Aaron Kintu Moses, director  
Mbale, Uganda*

## National Exams in Uganda

Good news! All Abayudaya students at Semei Kakungulu High School passed their National Examinations. Topping the list are young women, Rachel Namudosi and Norah Natabo, followed with Itakali Eric and Joash Fuma. Our sincere thanks go to all Kulanu members who are helping us to achieve our academic goals.

*Gershom Sizomu, headmaster  
Mbale, Uganda*

*(Continued on page 8)*

## A CYBER SUPPORT GROUP

# The Woes of Potential Converts in Europe

By Esther Blackman

Potential Jews by Choice in Europe and elsewhere are unable to attend a synagogue, find a teacher, or learn from a rabbi. Their seders are spent alone and their prayers are alone. They download their sidurs from the Internet, buy what ritual objects they can, often eat just fish or vegetarian. One person I know travels four hours by train to buy kosher cheese.

Here are some of the reasons:

- (1) Rabbis are working their rabbinical job and another job to make ends meet.
- (2) Since the wall came down there has been a huge influx of people re-learning their Jewish roots.
- (3) There is prejudice, both real and imagined, in Europe.
- (4) In some areas the synagogues are more heavily guarded. In Turkey no one can convert, and the one person I know will have to leave to convert.

In one country, I hesitate to say where, one person is pursuing Judaism literally at the risk of his life. In fact I have become so concerned that I am going to start needing advice on how to go further with these situations.

Many of these potential converts are like you or me. Some may have some money, but many don't. So they can't just take off to the United States and stay here for two years (to get out of the European rabbi's jurisdiction) and get a conversion as a person in the community here. Some already have families. Every situation is unique, but one thing I have found to be consistent is the dedication.

Because of one tragic situation that some of us on an Internet listserve witnessed and tried to solve, I have been inspired to do what little is possible and start a mail list/minyan in cyberspace. This might not fit the description in the Talmud of a community, but it is the closest thing possible when everyone is so far away from each other. So far we have members from many countries -- Turkey, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Holland, Lithuania, Germany, Philippines, Venezuela, Japan, the United States, Canada and some countries I will leave out for protection.

The immediate goal now is to find all the people who are practicing and studying Judaism alone and often privately in other countries and get them networked with each other as a community. This goal is important. So far the situation has been able to go unnoticed, because everyone thinks he or she is the only one in this situation. But they are everywhere, practicing.

We have a rabbi who will teach a seminar in August in Spain, which is a start. We have a long way to go. Hopefully something like this can be done in every country.

Those interested in becoming involved in our group can find our web site at [www.egroups.com/group/ChoosersJudaismEurope](http://www.egroups.com/group/ChoosersJudaismEurope). I can be reached at <speppera@EMAIL.MSN.COM>.

**For Next Meeting  
information, see  
page 6**

## A TOUR TO SOUTH AFRICA

We are pleased to announce that Rabbi Leo Abrami is in the process of organizing a tour to South Africa which will include a visit to the Lemba of the Northern Province and possibly Zimbabwe, Kruger Park, one of the largest wild life parks in the world, Pretoria, Johannesburg and Sun City (a kind of African Las Vegas). We will depart on December 25 (Christmas day) and return on January 7. The cost will be \$2350 from New York. A deposit of \$100 will be required. The full amount must be paid 30 days before departure.

As we intend to organize several seminars, we need volunteer-teachers and lecturers on various Jewish topics which might be relevant to the Lemba, such as the basic principles of the Jewish faith, the Sabbath and the holidays, and an initiation to Hebrew and Jewish songs (since the Lemba sing beautifully.)

If you wish to volunteer or need more information, you may write to Rabbi Leo Abrami at [leoarie@aol.com](mailto:leoarie@aol.com) or 541 E. Lawton St., Tucson, AZ 85704.

### FROM THE PRESIDENT:

## Falash Muras Are Not Christians!

By Jack Zeller

Many Western Jews allege that the Falash Mura are former Ethiopian Jews who have converted to Christianity. The truth is that virtually no real conversions took place. Here are some points to consider:

- 1) Coptic Ethiopians would never accept a "Falasha" or Ethiopian Jewish convert since they are considered the Buda, the evil devils who cast an evil eye. In other words, the Falasha are a stigmatized social class.
- 2) Jews had to show a token interest in the Church in order to have a burial site or access to schools; but this is not the same as conversion. It is the equivalent of you or me being called a Christian if we take off on Christmas. It is just one of the things you have to do.
- 3) The name Falash Mura was non-existent prior to its use by the Western Jews; it was a word made up to Christianize the Falashas so they could not come to Israel.
- 4) The Kes (Jewish religious leader) never recognized anyone who left the fold as a Christian. The Kes was very strict, but clever. If a Jew had lived with Christians and had partaken a meal with them, the returnee had to repent for a week under the direct supervision of a Kes. He repented, not for having become a Christian, but something just as bad -- socializing with Christians. I go into this detail since we try to explain the behavior of another cultural system in terms we understand.

# *What Have We Learned from Suriname's Cemeteries?*

By Irwin Berg

(The author, an attorney and historian, volunteered in Suriname's Jewish cemeteries.)

## Part IV

### Prisms at Cassipora

The cemetery at Cassipora may well be the oldest identifiable Jewish cemetery in the Western Hemisphere. It has a gravestone that dates from 1667. It was "discovered" about five years ago by Arthur P. Strellick, an American diplomat stationed in Paramaribo, working with a compass and a 1937 land survey map. Actually, the Dutch military had visited the cemetery in 1967 as had members of the Beth Hatefusoth Museum of Tel Aviv in 1980. But by 1995, the Cassipora cemetery was so overgrown that it could not be located without a strenuous effort. When Strellick searched for the cemetery, he had to "hack his way in" from the river, a distance of about one-half mile. Today, there is a footpath leading from the river through the jungle to the site.

After discovering the site, Strellick and his wife Adeherd, with the help of a local scholar, Dr. John deBye, spent over three months clearing it, uncovering about 180 gravestones. About 250 gravestones have now been discovered, two of which were found by our party. It is about half the size of the graveyard at Jodensavanne. There may still be stones yet undiscovered that lie beneath the foliage.

Working there was pleasant in that we were shaded from the sun, but it also had drawbacks when some bees sought revenge for our having disturbed their tranquility.

Unlike Jodensavanne which has a dock, stairs and a dirt road, Cassipora has only a cove made dark from thick overhanging vegetation, and thus could be missed were it not for our boatmen who knew its location. From there it was a short walk on an overgrown footpath through the jungle to the cemetery. I visited the Cassipora cemetery twice. On my first visit I had the rare pleasure of seeing leaf-cutter ants, each ant carrying a piece of leaf on its head in single file down a tree, across our path and into the jungle on the other side of the path.

The appearance and inscriptions of the tombstones at Cassipora are similar to those at the Beth Haim at Jodensavanne, but there are some differences. A few of the stones have a "skull and crossbones" engraved on them. This emblem is better known as the sign used by 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century pirates on their battle flags. To the Portuguese Jews of Cassipora, it signified time and death reflecting the words of Genesis 3:19: "Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shall return."

The other difference is the presence of two tombstones in the shape of elongated prisms. One of them rests on a base about 10 feet by 1 ½ feet with an apex about 2 feet off the ground. This stone records the death of Abigail de Meza. The second prism, somewhat shorter than the first but otherwise of similar size and appearance, is that of her husband, David de Meza. Each stone records the death on one side in Hebrew and on the other in Portuguese. David died on January 14, 1739, age 69. His wife predeceased him -- she died on August 26, 1732, or the 4<sup>th</sup> day of Elul 5492. When Abigail died, David purchased for her this magnificent stone prism with a poem in Hebrew as an epitaph.

The two prisms are startling because they alone, among 250 in Cassipora and 456 in Jodensavanne, have this shape. There are several more such stones in the old Portuguese Jewish cemetery in Ouderkerk aan de Amstel, Holland. The use of prism-shaped stones was common among Jewish communities in the Mediterranean during the Middle Ages. Several prism-shaped stones dating to the 12<sup>th</sup> century may be seen today in the Jewish cemetery in Pisa, Italy. An 1825 engraving shows that more than half of the tombstones of the Cemetery of the Jewish Community of Livorno were prisms similar to those of the de Mezas. It would be interesting to investigate whether the de Mezas in Cassipora and the others with prism tombstones in Ouderkerk resided

for any period of time in Livorno.

### A Creole Cemetery

The third cemetery in the Jodensavanne area is the Creole cemetery. It is about 300 yards east of the Beth Chaim. In Suriname, Creole means a descendant of a slave - not a person of mixed race. Slaves were emancipated in Suriname by law in 1863. By this time, Jodensavanne had been largely abandoned. Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, grave markers in the Creole cemetery were in wood, and such information as was engraved on the old wooden grave markers has been lost forever. The wooden grave markers that remain date from the mid 1800's. Beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there are some stone and cement ones.

The cemetery gives the appearance of once having been cleared but long neglected. I am unaware of any study that has been made of the markers and stones that can be read. It is difficult to determine the size of the cemetery because some markers are situated in areas of heavy brush and cannot easily be seen. But the area within which Creoles were buried appears to be even larger than the Beth Haim of Jodensavanne.

Two names caught my eye as I made my way through the cemetery: Annatie La Parra and Abraham Garcia Weingarten. It would appear that Annatie and Abraham had a Jewish father or paternal ancestor or took their names from someone who had a Jewish father or ancestor. Annatie died in 1860, her date of birth not appearing. Abraham Garcia was born in 1823 and died in 1915. All of them could have been slaves in their youth.

Reading tombstones that have a mean age of about 270 years - with some over 300 years - is not a simple task. Weather and jungle have made them nearly indecipherable. One has first to clear the stones of foliage, vines and dirt with a hand-held soft brush. If the letters on the stone are engraved, fine powdery flour would be brushed onto the stone and then hand-rubbed into whatever crevices remain where once there were letters. Like magic, letters appear. If the letters were raised or embossed on the stone, the stone was sprinkled with water. By catching sunlight being reflected from the raised wet letters, they could sometimes be read. For about 8 hours a day for 12 days, we repeated these steps, in hot, humid, tropical weather amid chiggers, flies, bees and bugs of every kind and description, until we read and recorded the epitaphs of the 456 tombstones at the Beth Haim of Jodensavanne.

Still, despite the flour and the water, some words could not be read and others required an educated guess. Since most tombstones are written in two languages, an indication in one language makes it possible to reconstruct what would otherwise have been unreadable in the other language. Dates of death, according to the Hebrew calendar, are often given again in Portuguese according to the Christian calendar, and these can be compared.

There are clichés in titles, names, and general phraseology which help in deciphering passages. Children who died young were "anjinho" ("little angel"). An unmarried young woman was a Donzella or Almah. An older man was a "Hayyashish"; a married younger man was a "Hagaver;" an unmarried younger man was a "Bachur." An older woman was a "Hazeke nah."

### Lessons from Inscriptions

After making the effort to read the stones what can we say that we learned about these inhabitants of Jodensavanne? The inscriptions reflect an ardent faith in God, in the immortality of the soul, and in divine reward and punishment after death.

We documented that many women died in childbirth. Among them was Ribca, wife of Benjamin Henriques da Costa in 1772. Her stone reads, "She had more sorrow than song." A large proportion of the stones reflect the death of young children - the age of some being

(Continued on page 12)

## PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE

*Troubled Souls: Conversos, Crypto-Jews, and Confused Intellectuals from the 14<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> Century*, edited by Charles Meyers and Norman Simms, is a book of 13 essays by scholars from Europe, Latin America, the US and New Zealand. To order send a check for \$35 to Outrigger Publishers, PO Box 1198, Hamilton, New Zealand.

Alan M. Tigay's wonderful article "Recife" appears in the May issue of *Hadassah Magazine*. It discusses this Brazilian city's important Jewish past and growing Jewish present.

David Hirsch's Latin American Jewish bibliography and a bibliography of Latin American Jewish fiction can be accessed by going to <http://www.library.ucla.edu/libraries/url/colls/judaica/index.html> and clicking on the option labeled "About the Jewish Studies Collection."

"Jewish Cousins" by Yossi Melman, an article in the March 30 *Ha'aretz*, discusses African descendants of Marranos in Angola.

The January 3 *New York Times* published "Not Museum Pieces, Yemeni Jews Do Their Best to Survive," by John F. Burns. The article highlights the hardships faced by Yemen's remaining 300 Jews in a potentially hostile environment.

The *Washington Jewish Week* of March 1 published Aaron Leibel's "Secret Jews of the Spanish Islands," concerning Gloria Mound's talks in Washington about her research on the Balearic Islands.

The *New York Jewish Week's* travel writer, Gabe Levenson, wrote "China: The 'Lost' Community," in the Feb. 2 edition. The article features an interview with Xu Xin, who will lead a tour to Jewish sights in Kaifeng in July ([www.jewisheyeyes.com](http://www.jewisheyeyes.com)).

Marjorie Agosin has edited a new tri-lingual book *Miriam's Daughters: Jewish Latin American Women Poets*. Look for a review in the next newsletter.

"Preserving an Ancient Jewish Culture in Modern Amber," by Franco J. Ordonez, is a March 11 *New York Times* article about the Bukharian Jewish community of Queens, New York.

"Cuba's Aging Community of Jews Still Hanging On," by Laurie Goring, was published March 6 in the *Chicago Tribune*. It reviews this community's difficulties in the face of heavy emigration, cultural isolation, aging, and Marxist rule. The 1500 Jews remaining in Cuba today must wait for visiting foreign rabbis to perform marriages, circumcisions and conversions.

An intriguing article published by *The Jewish Week* on March 18 has just been added to Kulanu's web site. Walter Ruby's "Rescuing A Corner Of The Past" tells of the discovery of a synagogue document from a long-lost Jewish community in Tarazona, Spain. It appears on the web page under the heading "Spain."

A brief article published by Arutz Sheva News Service in February (now on the Kulanu web site) reported the discovery of a Jewish cemetery dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries near Yerevan, Armenia. A local Armenian bishop alerted a Hebrew University professor about the discovery and cooperated in excavating it.

Vol. 51 of the *Journal of Comparative Human Biology* carries an article by Avshalom Zoossman-Diskin entitled "Are Today's Jewish Priests Descended from the Old Ones?" In it the author concludes that previous DNA studies suggesting that Cohanim share a common origin are faulty. His finding would cast doubt on the assertion that the Lemba of South Africa share a common heritage with Cohanim since they share a rare genetic haplotype with Cohanim. For several responses to this study, see LETTERS TO KULANU on page 14.

## 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. Kulanu apologizes that the date for your last donation was not printed on two of the last three issues of the newsletter. We are confident that our new printer will be more attentive. However, if the date is not on your label, please let us know by mail or e-mail to [jdzeller@umich.edu](mailto: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!

## Romaniote Happenings

The historic Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum (KKJ) in New York's Lower East Side has been home to Greek-speaking Romaniote Jews since 1927. It has become quite a busy place lately.

KKJ has received \$50,000 in matching funds for repairs from the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. It has received \$10,000 as part of the match up from the New York Landmarks Conservancy and is actively fundraising for the remaining \$40,000. After the much-needed repairs, the congregation will start work on a *cafenio* (Greek café) in the building's basement.

The congregation also dedicates funds for the Jewish Cemetery of Janina, Greece, for the erection of a protective wall and restoration.

Last summer KKJ arranged its second trip to Israel and Greece to find members' Romaniote roots. Over 50 travelers visited Janina, the Greek town from which their ancestors emigrated. The synagogue there celebrated its first bar mitzvah in 40 years, as well as a baby naming, thanks to the visitors' celebrations. At the municipal archives, some found ancestors in records dating to the 1840s and learned that some of the group were related to each other. In a suburb of Athens, seven Moral Courage Awards were given to Greeks who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust, an emotional occasion as survivors were reunited with their saviors. In Israel, the group came in contact with more Romaniotes. KKJ plans to continue to sponsor trips every two years.

One of KKJ's members, Isaac Dostis, is working on a documentary film, *Farewell My Island*, about the deportation of the Jewish community of Corfu, which affected his family.

KKJ has an excellent new web site [www.kehila-kedosha-janina.org](http://www.kehila-kedosha-janina.org) and can be contacted at [kkj@mymailstation.com](mailto:kkj@mymailstation.com) or at Cooper Station, PO Box 72, New York, NY 10276.

# KULANU BRIEFS

## Next Meeting

Mark your calendar now for the next Kulanu meeting which will take place at the Ratner Museum carriage house on July 1 at 10 am. The speaker will be Sam Taddesse and his topic will be "Beta Israel remaining in Ethiopia: Who and Why? Report on recent findings."

The address is 10001 Old Georgetown Road, Bethesda, MD. Directions: From 495, north on Old Georgetown Road to the second right turn, Lone Oak Drive. The carriage house is behind the main museum building. For information call (301) 681-5679.

## New Titles for Officers

**Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausebaum** is Kulanu's new Vice President for Lemba Outreach.

**Diane Zeller** has been named Vice President for Operations. While she is also Acting Treasurer, she would welcome handing over this responsibility to a qualified and dedicated Kulanuite!

**David Turetsky** has been named Vice President and Director of Communications.

**Ray Kaplan** has been named vice president for Kaifeng Jewry and Coordinator of the speakers bureau.

**Jay Sand** is the new vice president for outreach.

## New Links on Kulanu Web Site

With the assistance of Barbara Taverna and her colleague, Dr Sigmund Mittler, the Kulanu web site has added several extraordinary links of extensive material about the Jewish Experience in Latin America, and in the United States. The Latin American bibliographical information is under a new section by that name. A link to the American Jewish Archives can be found under the "Studies" section. The references are quite extensive, almost staggering in their breadth, and include works by several Kulanu members. The web site is located at [www.kulanu.org](http://www.kulanu.org).

## Kulanu Web Site Soars

Are you one of the 22,000 who have visited Kulanu's wonderful web site, <http://kulanu.ubalt.edu>? The site got an impressive plug in the NY Jewish Week. The headline read, "Lost Jews: Kulanu site takes you to the corners of the earth," and James Besser's article read as follows: "Jews live in the darnedest places. If you don't believe it, check out the way-cool Kulanu home page - a vast repository of information about Jews in forgotten corners of the world." The credit goes to David Turetsky.

## Ghana Journal Available

Last summer, with Kulanu sponsorship, two high school students, Gabriel Gershowitz of Des Moines and Nate Asher of Kansas City, spent six weeks in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana, teaching the Jewish community Hebrew language, Jewish history, and Jewish customs. Nate filmed videotape and is making a documentary. Gabriel kept a journal, excerpts from which were published in our Autumn 2000 newsletter. Gabe's entire journal, along with photographs, is available from the Gershowitz family, for \$10. All proceeds will be sent to the Jews of Sefwi Wiawso. Make your check payable to Kulanu and send it to Dr. Michael Gershowitz, 3850 Merle Hay Road, Suite 505, Des Moines, IA 50310.

## Speakers

**Rabbi Leo Abrami** (tel 520-408-8280) has spoken about his recent visit to the Lemba of South Africa in Arizona and will be lecturing on the East Coast in May and June.

In addition to speaking at the Kulanu meeting in Bethesda, Maryland on March 25, Prof. **Xu Xin** has been maintaining a breathless

speaking schedule before overflow audiences in New York, New Jersey, Kansas, Philadelphia and Boston.

**Richard Sobel** spoke and presented photographs about the Abayudaya recently at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts.

Ethnomusicologist **Judith Cohen**, who concretized this spring in Albuquerque, Boston and Philadelphia, will give a concert in Tarragona, Spain in July. Paying homage to the centuries-long Moslem-Jewish musical collaboration, she will be accompanied by Sudanese Wafir Sheikh on oud and violin. By the way, Cohen's "A Short Bibliography of Sephardic Music" can be found at [www.klezmershack.com/articles/9903.cohen\\_j.sephardic.html](http://www.klezmershack.com/articles/9903.cohen_j.sephardic.html). In addition, her "Brief Introduction to Sephardic Music" is located at [www.sephardichouse.org/cohen.html](http://www.sephardichouse.org/cohen.html). Dr. Cohen's web page is located at <http://www.yorku.ca/judithc/>.

Dr. **Pan Guang**, dean of the Center of Jewish Studies in Shanghai, China, spoke recently at the University of Missouri at Kansas City on "Jews in China - Legends, History and Perspectives."

## Call for Papers

The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies is soliciting papers for presentation at its 11th Annual Conference on a variety of topics dealing with Crypto-Jewish history and culture. Participants need not be published scholars, and the Society actively solicits presentations from members of the *anousim* community who have experiences that they would like to share with the group. The Conference will be held in Pueblo, Colorado, August 19-21, 2001. Those interested in participating are invited to send a one-page abstract of their proposed presentation by June 1 to: Dr. Stanley Hordes, 1375 Santa Rosa Drive, Santa Fe, NM 87505 or [Smhordes@aol.com](mailto:Smhordes@aol.com).

## ORT Activists Sought

Kulanu president Jack Zeller is looking for persons active in ORT or who know someone who is active who might want to help Kulanu lobby with ORT. Contact Zeller at [jdzeller@umich.edu](mailto:jdzeller@umich.edu) or 301-681-5679.

## Conversion Stories Sought

Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn is finishing a book on conversion to Judaism. Those who have converted to Judaism and wish to share their stories for publication may contact him at [rabi94@hotmail.com](mailto:rabi94@hotmail.com) or tel. 913 485 7809. Cukierkorn is also putting the finishing touches on a practical guide to Jewish practice in Spanish.

## Ethiopian-Israeli Dies in Roadside Bomb

Capt. Gad Marasha immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia with his family 20 years ago. Recruited to the army in 1990, he volunteered to join the trackers unit and served as leader of the IDF's Southern Command, the only Jewish member of a unit composed of Bedouins. Marasha, 30, died while assisting Yonatan Vermeulen when a roadside bomb detonated.

## Florida Kulanu Meets

Kulanu's South Florida chapter, under the enthusiastic leadership of Yaakov Gladstone, had a festive gathering at Deerfield Beach's Century Village on January 28. Part of the celebration featured a cake decorated with Kulanu's name in English and Hebrew. A March meeting featured Roslyn Bresnick-Perry, a nationally known Jewish storyteller, highlighting stories about the Chinese Jewish experience. One of the Florida activists, Susan Sankel, recently celebrated her bat mitzvah. Mazel tov!

# KULANU BRIEFS

## More Bnei Menashe Arrive in Israel

On March 1, at 3:30 am, a group of 47 Bnei Menashe arrived safely in Israel on a flight from India. They were greeted at the airport by Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail and a large contingent of relatives and friends. There were several families who were reunited after long periods of separation, and the arrival hall was filled with tears of joy and spontaneous song. These arrivals were part of the "quota" of 100 immigrants for calendar year 2000.

## The Anusim List

A Kulanu subgroup, led by Ana Kurland, operates an Anusim List for descendants of Spanish and Portuguese Jews (or any Jews worldwide) who were forced to convert in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, before, or since. Contributions are welcome in English, Spanish and Portuguese. Researchers on this subject are also welcome as long as they are respectful of those desiring anonymity. Returning to Judaism will be discussed. To join this list or for further information see <http://members.tripod.com/~anak/anusim.htm>

## Sephardic Genealogy Web Site

JewishGen is pleased to announce its newest web site. This new site is SephardicSIG: Sephardic Genealogy at JewishGen, <http://www.jewishgen.org/sephardicsig>. It is hosted by Jeffrey S. Malka. Sefard Forum: E-mail Discussion Group For Researchers Of Sephardic Genealogy, the SIG's companion mail list, will continue to be coordinated by Bernard Kouchel. If you are not already a subscriber, see details at <http://www.jewishgen.org/inf/files/SefardForum.htm>.

## A Choice of Tallitot

How wonderful that the Kulanu Boutique can now offer finely hand-woven *tallitot* from two of our communities — the Abayudaya of Uganda and the Bnei Menashe of India. The Ugandan *tallit* has a homespun look and features stripes of various colors. The *tallit* from the Bnei Menashe is made of a closer weave and features four black stripes. Collect them both for different occasions!

These are worth waiting for, and the wait is about 3 months. See page 15 to order.

## Sephardic Prayer Books Find a New Home

As we were going to press, Kulanu was informed of a very special donation of more than 200 Sephardic prayer books. Rabbi **Jacques Cukierkorn**, a Kulanu rabbinic advisor, met a Sephardic Jew, **Buddy Rouso**, from Montgomery, AL, whose synagogue was merging with another Sephardic congregation. When Rabbi Jacques learned that this merger would yield a surplus of Sephardic prayer books, Cukierkorn put Rouso in touch with Kulanu. Rouso has agreed to facilitate the mailing of these Sephardic treasures to Kulanu communities throughout the world. Our gratitude to Buddy Rouso — Kulanu's newest supporter — and to Rabbi Jacques knows no bounds.

## Todah Rabah

To **Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum** for sending Pass-over matzot and wine to the Northern Province of South Africa for the Lemba.

To **Myer Samra**, who collected over 1000 Jewish books in Australia and shipped them to the Bnei Menashe in India.

To **Rabbi Marvin Bash** and vice president **Eric Okin** of the Arlington Fairfax Jewish Congregation in Virginia, who collected a large number of Hebrew-English prayer books and children's Judaica books for the Abayudaya; they were mailed by **Jeanette Okin**.

To **Jack Zeller**, who sent three boxes by M Bag to Sefwi Wiaowo, Ghana

To **Joe and Bea Hantman**, who sent tallitot, kippot, and tefillin to the Bnei Menashe.

To **Cindy and Mike Weisfield**, who sent a collection of kippot to Kulanu for distribution.

To **Rachel Stein** for a package of haggadahs for isolated communities.

To the **Schermer Foundation** for its \$1666 grant.

To these wonderful \$500 donors: **Judy Neri** (in memory of her aunt, **Lucy Nussbaum**, a Holocaust survivor; the money is designated for the Hadassah School for Infants in Uganda); **Morris Feder**; and the **Morris & Devora Smith Charitable Fund**.

To **Marcia Kaplan** for her generous \$300 donation; to **Richard Gold** for his generous \$250 donation for the Jews of Timbuktu; to **Audrey R. Weitz** for her generous \$225 donation; to **Terrence Kalley** for his \$200 contribution; to **Robert Fenichel** for his \$200 donation; and to the **National Center to Encourage Judaism** for its \$150 grant

To these generous members of the \$100 club: **the Fabrangens**



*Jewish Books collected by the Epsteins await shipping to India.*

**Cheder; Sharon Nathan and Stephen Udem; Chaim Engelberg; Hannah B. Friedman; Joseph & Barbara Psotka; I. Michael Goodman; Herman Storick; Leo and Rita Laufer; and Robert Wiener**

To **James Sugarman** for his contribution to Kulanu in honor of **Lucy and Bernd Steinitz-Kiekebusch** and to **Rebecca Cook** for her donation in memory of **Gayle Selman**.

To **Alison and Stevy Epstein**, who sent five bags of high-quality Jewish books to the Bnei Menashe in India, with cataloging help from their son David Zvi. The books were donated by the Epsteins, an anonymous donor, and Aleph Bet Bookstore.

## Refuah Shleyma

Kulanu supporter **Herman Storick** in Larchmont NY, is recovering from heart surgery. Herman is in the travel business and was costing out expenses *pro bono* for consolidator prices for a prospective Kulanu trip to Ghana when he was taken ill. We look for a report from him.

# LETTERS TO KULANU (cont.)

## Remarkable African World Beat

When she returned from a semester in Uganda, my daughter's friend Corrine brought me back the CD "Shalom Everybody Everywhere!" I was apprehensive about the CD. Black Jews from Uganda singing liturgical chant? How good could it be? I avoided listening to it for weeks.

But once I finally played it, I began playing it for everyone I knew in both my circle of knowledgeable Jews and my musical friends who worshiped world beat music more than traditional religion. Everyone was equally floored. Traditional Jewish liturgy set to African world beat. This was remarkable!

*Andrew M. Fischer  
Boston, MA*

## CD Too Wonderful for Words

For those of you who were wondering (and there must be thousands, if not millions), African Shabbat at U of Minnesota Hillel with Jay Sand was a major success. The place was completely packed, more congregants than for Rosh Hashanah.

More important though, I want to recommend a CD that was being sold (not on Shabbes) by our visiting scholar, Jay Sand. It's 'Shalom Everybody Everywhere, Introducing the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda,' featuring the Kohavim Tikvah Choir. It's too wonderful for words, and the words are in Luganda, Swahili, Hebrew, and English. My understanding is that all the proceeds go to the Abayudaya.

*Alex Lubet, Ph. D.  
Morse Alumni Distinguished Teaching Professor of Music  
Adjunct Professor of American and Jewish Studies,  
University of Minnesota*

## Bienvenidos a Lista de Kulanu Mexico

The reason a Mexico List was established was to facilitate communication between Kulanu members who have on-going activities in Mexico. Be forewarned: This is a working list. It is not a list to merely express opinions or to wax philosophic. The members are people who are committed to aiding emerging Anousim communities within Mexico.

We know that the most active areas for Jewish groups are Mexico City and Monterrey, Nuevo Leon. However, many smaller groups are emerging or have emerged in other areas. Older communities that have won their status through many difficult and sometimes humiliating rebuffs from the mainstream Mexican communities, and other newer communities who are seeking answers to their many questions regarding Judaism.

There are also immediate needs to be addressed. There are material needs and there are political needs. A major hurdle to overcome is to work with the mainstream Jewish community in Mexico to reach out to the Anousim communities. We endeavor to assist each other in resolving those needs. First step for all of the invitees to this list is a consolidation of our contacts in Mexico. At Dr. Zeller's suggestion, we need a comprehensive, accurate list of all of our contacts inside of Mexico.

If you currently have on-going activities that share the Kulanu philosophy of finding and helping lost Jewish communities, please post your contacts and your projects to this list so that Kulanu can develop a resource list of people both in Mexico and those interacting with Mexican Jewish communities. In this way we can have a contact list for our members to further our efforts on their visits to Mexico. To subscribe send a message to [Kulanu\\_Mexico-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:Kulanu_Mexico-subscribe@yahoo.com) or contact me at [guillermo@lazobrothers.com](mailto:guillermo@lazobrothers.com).

*Guillermo Lazo  
Littleton, CO*

## Lemba Blessings

The Lemba Cultural Association wishes to thank you and those who love the scattered communities of the Jews all over the world. We would like to put it on record that we have received all the gifts you sent to us via Leon Abrami. He spent the Sabbath with us. We thank you and Dr. S. Wapnick for all that you sent to us.

May HaShem give you more days to collect all the Jews all over the world and let them be one in spirit and that they cooperate with the needy.

Let the light that is revealed in you people spread to all corners of the world so that we be one.

*Prof. M.E.R. Mathivha, president LCA  
Shayandima, South Africa*

## Jewish Sights in Lisbon, Spain and Athens

On a longer trip, we took the opportunity to take a short holiday in Spain and Lisbon. With Kulanu's help, we knew about the Lisbon Synagogue, "Shaare Tikvah" - and as we arrived in time to attend Friday night service, we quickly took a taxi there. It took us about 15 minutes to gain entry to the compound behind the unobtrusive iron gates in the facade of the huge building fronting the street. The young volunteer security man and girl gave us the 'third degree' which would have done the Mossad proud! By the time they were satisfied that we 2 oldies from Australia posed no threat, although we had just arrived from Israel, the service was almost over! Anyway, the shul is charming in the Sephardic style and reasonably well-attended for an ordinary Friday night. Quite a few younger men were there, but very few women. (It's not much different here in most of our shuls!)

Next day I made contact with Laura Cessna, the Jewish artist and author of the *Jewish Vestiges of Portugal*. We had the pleasure to visit her in her studio where we bought a copy of her book and learned a little about the Portuguese community. There are only about 100 Jewish families in Lisbon today, according to her. We were offered a private tour of Jewish Lisbon on the Sunday, but there was no time.

We unfortunately also ran out of time to go to shul in Madrid, where we were invited for Purim, but we were impressed

*(Continued on page 11)*



# FINDING A GRAVE FOR MARIA

By Max Amichai Heppner

As soon as I became aware that there are small congregations of Marranos that are resurfacing as practicing Jews, I knew I wanted to be involved in welcoming them to the Jewish community. I am touched that despite centuries of leading hidden lives, these nominal Christians maintained their Jewish traditions and now want to practice these again openly. However, these returned Jews aren't exactly easy to find. After half a century of living a life apart, living openly doesn't come naturally. I'm a member of Kulanu, set up to reach out to "lost Jewish communities," as our brochure states. When I started to make inquiries in June of 1999, I came across rumors of such a congregation existing in Mexico City, relatively easy to reach from the United States. Kulanu's records indicated that a certain Mr. Laureano was involved in this community. However, there was no listing of his whereabouts and my listing of Jewish congregations in Mexico City made no reference to this group.

I did have a good lead, however, to Beth Israel, an English-language congregation in Mexico City affiliated with the Conservative movement. Its recently retired rabbi, Samuel Lerer, has a history of going out of his way to reach out to returned Marranos, and although he had moved to Texas, someone in his old congregation was bound to be interested in my quest. After I arrived in Mexico City, I called the Beth Israel office. It was Friday, August 16, 1999, and the office had already closed for the Sabbath. So I decided to just go to Friday night services to see if I could find further leads for my quest.

Fortunately, a congregant who cordially greeted me at the door was willing to get me started. "I know just the man who can help you," he said. "Look for Peter Koenigsberger, the president of our congregation. I am expecting him here tonight, and I'll introduce you."

The man seated himself near me. After services started and Peter hadn't arrived yet, the cordial man caught my eye from time to time and shook his head. None of the latecomers was Peter. Quite late, however, my friend smiled and gently pointed: Peter was here.

After services, he introduced me, and while Peter shook hands with many of his congregants, he promised to help me. We picked a secluded table at the Oneg Shabbat, and he explained why he had been so late in arriving. He was in the midst of a gripping political problem for the congregation, and the center of the problem appeared to be the very person I had been looking for. He was Dr. Benjamin Laureano Luna, a journalist and human rights activist, who is the leader of the ex-Marranos in Mexico City. (Benjamin's group is formally called Congregacion Israelita Mexicana del Kahal Kadosh Bene Elohim, or The Mexican-Israelite Congregation of the Holy Community of Children of God.)

Dr. Laureano's serious problem was finding a place to bury his wife, Maria, who had died on Friday morning. To Benjamin's consternation, the Jewish community had refused him a plot, alleging there was no proof Maria was Jewish. When he couldn't get the decision overruled, he contacted Beth Israel for help, and he was referred to Peter. Peter explained to me that there are only three cemeteries used by the approximately 38,000 Jews of Mexico City. Beth Israel has burial rights in the Conservative Ashkenazic cemetery, but when Peter tried to contact the people in charge, they all proved to be out of town on business or vacation. Those whom Peter could contact all felt they had no authority to resolve such a touchy issue as Benjamin's problem, even though they understood the need was acute. Peter gave me some background as he drove me back to my hotel after services. The Jewish community in Mexico City is fragmented. One group, the so-called Arabs (a real misnomer, I commented), are descendants of refugees from Arab countries, mainly Syria, who came here first. A second major group is descended from Ashkenazim, mainly refugees from Eastern Europe and from Hitler's Germany of the 1930's. A third group are Sefardim, from all over the world of their dispersion.

The returning Marranos have a practice derived from Sefardic rites, and their closest logical affinity is with the "official" Sefardic

community, which controls one of the three cemeteries. At that point, it wasn't clear why they had refused burial rights to Benjamin.

Since Benjamin and his congregation seemed to be the very people I had planned to contact, I looked up eagerly when Peter said he planned to visit Benjamin the next afternoon. I really wanted to come along. Peter said, okay, but just listen, don't get actively involved. I agreed. Peter picked me up at my hotel the next day for the 40-minute trip across town to the Portales neighborhood where Benjamin lives. Peter's wife, Tony, came along to show her support.

Once we arrived in Portales neighborhood, we had to negotiate several poorly marked streets. The house turned out to be the most prominent on the block, at the corner of Sevilla and Emperadores streets. The place looked rather old but adequately maintained. We were let in and found Benjamin in the living room amid a large group of well-wishers. He didn't want to delay having a serious talk with us and had a young boy bring chairs for us to sit in Benjamin's office. The office looked like it once had been a hallway, long and narrow, with computer and communications equipment stretched on long tables along one wall. A live computer screen full of names stared at us during our three-hour conversation.

Benjamin was 75 years old. Unshaven and haggard from his ordeal, he nonetheless looked at least 10 years younger. He is round of face and stocky of build, typically Mexican in appearance with an unmistakably European heritage behind it. The people who kept streaming in and out of the house through the entrance door at the far end of the office all seemed from the same background.

He told us his family history to establish his *bona-fides*. Here is what he said.

*My ancestors came from Spain around 1500 to escape the Inquisition. Most of the people in their group were typical Marranos, crypto-Jews passing as Catholics, but my family never accepted Christianity. We escaped execution only by hiding amid the nominal Christians. On arriving in Mexico, the group heard that in the "North Country," there was a settlement tolerant of Jews. The office of the Inquisition hadn't come there, although it already was widespread in Mexico at the time.*

*We settled in among the Indians, and my direct ancestor was fanatic about bringing people back to Judaism. He set up a house of worship, appointed himself as rabbi, and set out to garner himself a congregation. I can assure you, he was not putting on airs. By all accounts, he was familiar with the Sefardic rite prayers and an avid Talmudist.*

*My distant grandfather was a proselytizer, anxious to preserve Judaism in the face of the Inquisition and the general effort to push Jewish culture into oblivion. Unfortunately, the Inquisition eventually did set up an office in the community, by then called Venta Prieta, and my ancestor's Jewish movement had to go underground. For 300 years, my ancestors resisted the Inquisition and actively struggled to keep Judaism alive and available. I remember stories of circumcisions performed by the fingernails of mohels deprived of their surgical knives.*

*My father was a rabbi, greatly beloved by the congregation, which in his lifetime had already come above ground. But I want to emphasize that not one of my ancestors ever accepted Christianity. We remained the true token Jews of the community, the preservers of tradition, lovingly sheltered by those who had to keep up the illusion of a Christian community. Through it all, we survived mainly because the Christians around us, the Indians converted by the Church, were the most tolerant in Mexico.*

*We were true Jewish pioneers in Mexico. And our people weren't just slaves on Spanish plantations, although many of us were just that. Some of us were revolutionaries who fought (Oswald Nechajew page 10)*

## Xu Xin Discusses TODAY'S Chinese Jews (cont.)

*(Continued from page 1)*

*Judaica* a few years ago, Arab diplomats protested through the Saudi Embassy and the Chinese Muslim Society. They called the publication an insult to Islam since it claimed that Islam derived from Judaism (this had been cited by a respected Chinese scholar in the preface). The publication received a national award in 1995 as the best reference book since 1949.

The local government wants to attract tourism and investment in Kaifeng. It has established as part of its Qingming Shanghe theme park (portraying old-world China) a 3-room exhibit of the Jewish community, including a model of the synagogue and a historical survey of the community prepared by the Sino-Judaic Institute. With investment, Xu feels that some Jews could be hired and the community made more important.

The government now recognizes Jewish origin, but sending a rabbi is difficult, since that would interfere with Chinese sovereignty (no missionaries are allowed). When Xu teaches, he mentions heritage and culture, not religion. The government allows study of culture, although not religion. Shabbat dinner with Jewish tourists is OK, but seders and religious services are not. There is a Jews-for-Jesus presence in Kaifeng, according to Xu.

In 1997, with the assistance of Kulanu, money was donated for Xu's academic work at Nanjing University. In addition, Rabbi Marvin Tokayer of New York sought to raise money for Kaifeng Jews to study abroad. One student from a descendant's family may soon be doing graduate work at Bar Ilan University in Israel.

Xu runs workshops to encourage college teachers to include Judaism in history curriculum. Since 1997, 20-30 history professors have attended his three-week seminars. This year he will include up to 10 Kaifeng students to audit the course. This will cost about \$300 per student for transportation and living expenses, and he is collecting donations for this purpose (tax-deductible contributions to Kulanu can be earmarked for Kaifeng student costs).

Xu established the Center for Judaic Studies at Nanjing University in 1992. He had argued that in these times when China wants to attract tourism and investment, and more Chinese are doing business abroad, China should be aware of the Jewish contributions to Western society. His Judaic Students Center serves over 200 students annually, but without any physical facility. Now the China Judaic Studies Association, with assistance from Johns Hopkins University, is creating the James Friend Center for Judaic Studies at Nanjing University to provide classrooms, offices, exhibit space, and library space. Xu is trying to help raise the \$150,000 needed. Tax-deductible donations for the new Center may be made out to the Sino-Judaic Institute and sent to 232 Lexington Drive, Menlo Park, CA 94025. (Write "Friend-Nanjing Center" in the memo part of the check.)

Xu Xin's assessment is that if Kaifeng Jews are to have a future, they need educated leaders. Kulanu president Jack Zeller accepted this challenge. Zeller concludes:

"There is a renaissance of interest and observance among the younger generation of Kaifeng Jews and it is important to find more opportunity and invitations for study both in the US and Israel. This imposes upon Kulanu the task of both fund raising and also finding universities with *Judaica* departments that would help fund scholars and undergraduates."

See new additions to the Kulanu  
Boutique on page 15!

## GRAVE FOR MARIA (cont.)

*(Continued from page 9)*

*ianly for the independence of Mexico. I researched the little-known exploits of Jewish freedom fighters for 15 years. I then wrote an article about it published by the news magazine Epoca in 1975. I still have a copy of that issue.*

Benjamin paused there. He opened a drawer in his desk and out came a jumbled file. He fingered a 15-page story with maps, drawings, and photos, of which he obviously was very proud. He particularly pointed to the reproduction of a document from 1540 issued by the Office of the Inquisition. It accuses a certain Mr. Baeza of being the leader of a group of Indians who were protecting a congregation of Sefardic Jews. "That's us," Benjamin said, looking up from his files, straight into our eyes. "What more proof do you need to show we're for real?"

Maria's sister came into the study and was introduced. She added how hard she had worked, going from office to office to get documentation or exceptions for Maria. Most Jewish agencies wouldn't even talk to her. "Some kids in our community are up in arms about this," the pretty petite woman said. "They're going to picket some of these Jewish agencies tomorrow. Maybe that'll get their attention."

Benjamin's two daughters came out of the living room to also greet us. We hugged all of them and said how very sorry we were. Maria had died so young; she was only 55. And now they all had to miss her love and care and deal on top of that with a derailed funeral.

"Look," said Peter, speaking to Benjamin. "We don't question that you are Jewish. We admire the courage of your ancestors. It's your wife whose background raises questions."

"I know, Benjamin answered. "But why? From the day we met she was a member, first of my father's congregation, then of mine here in Mexico City. Here! Look! I can prove it to you."

Again he reached into his file drawer and produced a folder bulging with photos taken of his congregation. He picked one or two at random and identified his wife among the congregants. The services pictured obviously were Jewish, a Sukkah in one of them clearly identified even the holiday being celebrated.

"Now tell me," Benjamin said insistently but without a trace of belligerence. "Now tell me Maria wasn't Jewish. Go inside the room where we're receiving condolence calls and ask anyone. Maria was fervently Jewish. Look, see this photo, here she is at our daughter's Bat Mitzvah. Now she's dead, and suddenly, she's not Jewish?"

We asked who specifically had made that ruling. It turned out to be an official of the Sefardic burial society. We asked why the returned Marranos, with their Sefardic practice, hadn't joined with the mainstream Sefaradim, if only to get a share in their cemetery.

Again Benjamin looked up from his files with a fervent gleam in his eyes. "We maintained Sefardic practice in this society for 300 years. We are the true original Jews of Mexico. Why should we join them? They should join us!" There followed a moment of silence, and an idea popped into my head. I decided to say something despite my promise not to get directly involved.

"Where is your wife's mother buried?" I asked in my accented Spanish.

He didn't understand, but as my words were repeated, his eyes filled with tears.

"My mother-in-law had the same problem. The Jews wouldn't let her body into a Jewish cemetery. She's buried with the Christians. I won't let the same indignity happen to Maria."

We asked Benjamin whether Maria could be buried with her kin in Venta Prieta. "I had a falling out with those folks," Benjamin said sadly, referring to the Venta Prieta leadership. "Right now, we're all

# LETTERS (cont.)

(Continued from page 8)

with the stress put on the historical Jewish sites by all the guides who took us around during our bus tour of Seville, Granada, Valencia and Barcelona. Many streets are called the 'Jewish Street', or 'Mont Juc' (Jewish Mountain), the hilly district above Barcelona. Since we last visited Spain 27 years ago, we were impressed by the way the country has prospered and improved! Madrid has maintained its monuments and old buildings magnificently. Given the state of our Australian dollars, we were also quite pleasantly surprised at the reasonableness of the cost of most things. The same cannot be said of Israel, unfortunately!

Terrorism seems to have no borders today. Bombs were exploding all over Spain just as in Israel! (Basque separatists are busy there, but the news media only seem to concentrate on Israel!)

To connect with our flight home, we had to spend a day in Athens. We were greeted there by armed police and riot troops at every corner of the city. We still have no idea what it was all about, but we did witness a peaceful demonstration by thousands of young people! I guess the authorities take no chances these days anywhere. Athens has a very interesting, small Jewish Museum. The current temporary exhibition depicts Greece's record of its treatment of the Jews during the Nazi occupation. Apart from Thessaloniki, where the local German-born rabbi naively colluded with the Nazis and so 80% of the largest Jewish community were exterminated (he was tried in Israel in the '50's, but freed because of "naïveté, not malice"), the rest of the Jewish population by and large were hidden and protected by the Greeks on orders from the Orthodox Church hierarchies!

Returning to relatively peaceful Australia, we are relieved to be home once again, safe and sound.

*Malvina & Ernie Malinek.  
Melbourne, Australia*

## Fan Mail

First, I want to say how much I enjoy being on the Kulanu listserve. Like just about everyone these days, I get far too many e-mails, but I wouldn't give up the Kulanu messages for anything. I want to make sure I am on all the subgroup lists that involve Anousim--Brazil, Mexico, American Southwest, Spain, Portugal and any others.

*Alan Tigay, editor of Hadassah Magazine  
New York, NY*

David Turetsky's pages of Kulanu are just magnificent. In long time I didn't see so exciting pages full of deep knowledge and so important for the Jewish people and the State of Israel. Many thanks to you and Barbara Taverna for adding me to your group [www.kulanu.org](http://www.kulanu.org). With all my best wishes to you and Kulanu Group.

*Sigmund Mittler, M.D.  
Venezuela*

# GRAVE FOR MARIA (cont.)

(Continued from page 10)

talking to one another." Peter recognized then that it was up to him to help Benjamin out of his predicament.

"I promise you, Benjamin," he said. "I'll do everything I can. I'm just appalled at the demeaning way you've been treated." Tony and I chimed in with our own indignation.

Peter explained how he'd already been on the phone to look for help.

Benjamin said he knew all about phone calls that lead nowhere. "I must have placed or taken 100 calls today and yesterday. And this is Shabbat and I have a house full of company I'm ignoring." He shook his head. Peter said as tactfully as he could that Benjamin had missed an opportunity to look for a cemetery plot while Maria was still alive. Benjamin didn't protest. "I know," he said "but Maria has been sick with lung cancer and complications for close to two years. We did go around looking at cemeteries, but somehow we never got around to making arrangements. I guess, with Maria being so sick, we didn't want to undermine her will to live."

We said we understood and then said our goodbyes. We were exhausted. We had come for a half-hour afternoon condolence call. Now it was 7:30 p.m. Night was falling.

Peter promised he'd spend all Sunday, if necessary, to help push for a resolution. I promised support from Kulanu, not for the short run, but for the future. Tony repeated her condolences.

At that point, nothing further could be done. On the way back to center city, Peter said that he would start to work again first thing the next morning, Sunday.

I reached Peter again between phone calls about 10 a.m. on Sunday. Peter couldn't talk long but quickly brought me up to date. "All night long," he said, "many Jewish friends of Benjamin and his children fanned out across the community with a testimonial they had drawn up, affirming Maria's participation in Jewish communal and religious life. At 6 o'clock this morning, I heard there were a good 18 highly regarded signatures on that document. However, even that didn't turn the tide. "Amichai," Peter said, "it is getting obvious that Jewish burial just isn't in the cards for Maria. However, one of the rabbis I consulted this morning came up with a Solomonic solution. You may know that several Jewish communities both in Israel and the Diaspora have set aside one section of their cemetery for supportive non-Jews. Most are especially beautiful, set off with flower beds and adorned with a commemorative work of art. Burial there is a sign of honor and deep respect on the part of the Jewish community. "It seemed to me that Maria fully fits that mold," Peter continued. "She was dearly beloved by many she helped or befriended, both Jews and Christians. The rabbi I talked to suggested that Maria be buried immediately in a nonsectarian civil cemetery and be moved once the new section is readied." By the end of the morning, Benjamin realized that he had to consider this solution. His back was against the wall. His wife's body was languishing in a casket. The community was getting despondent. Reluctantly, he went along with the plan.

Quickly the proper city officials were contacted and a plot was provided at the Memorial Gardens (*Jardines del Recuerdo*) in the northern suburbs of Mexico City.

The response of the community was remarkable. Everyone jumped into action with taut muscles and anxious nerves suddenly set free. By 3 p.m., the casket rolled up to its temporary resting

(Continued on page 14)

# *Learning from Suriname's Cemeteries*

*(Continued from page 4)*

numbered in days. Isaac de Joseph Pinto Fonseca was born in Suriname in 1765. At 25 he married 23 year old Rahel de Isaac de Meza. Their marriage lasted eight years producing 6 children. All of her children, but the last, died between the ages of 2 and 3, and the last died at age 13. Rahel did not survive the birth of her last child. Isaac remarried and had three more children, two of whom died before the age of 3 and the third died at age 19. Isaac died at age 57 after having buried two wives and all nine children.

In accordance with Sephardic tradition, children were named after a grandparent whether living or dead. This differs from the Ashkenazic tradition where a child is named after the closest dead relative. Among the Sephardim of Jodensavanne, if a child died young, the next child might be given his or her name. Three of Isaac Fonseca's nine children were named Abigail and two were named Sara. The purpose was to continue the family name and to remember the dead child. Because of this practice, it is possible to establish the genealogy of certain families if there was a predominant forename in the family.

Forenames were taken directly from the Bible without any alteration. The inhabitants of Jodensavanne were known as Avraham, Issak (Ishack), Yaacob (Yahacob) Yoseph, Mosseh, Mordechay, Semuel, Sara, Ribca, Rachel, Ester, Abigail. In using these names, without making them more acceptable to the ears of their Dutch neighbors, these men and women were either exceedingly proud of being Jewish or well isolated from the outside world.

Jewish surnames are of two kinds: (i) names of Jewish origin, i.e. Aboab, Baruch, Cohen, Gabay, Jessurun, Messiah and Nassy; and (ii) names of Hispano - Portuguese origin: i.e. de Aguilar, de Barreas, Brandao, Cardoso, Carrilho, Casseres, Correa, da Costa, Dias, Delmonte, Duarte, Farro, de Fonseca, Garsia, Henriquez, Lopes, de Meza, La Parra, Perrera, Pinto,

Tauro (Touro) and Vaz Farro. Some names are feminized for women: Toura for Touro, Baruha for Baruch and Cahanet for Cohen.

Some of the Hispano-Portuguese names were used by Jews before their conversion. Others were taken when they were baptized. The oddity of a Jewish forename with an Iberian Catholic family name was noted by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in his poem "The Jewish Cemetery at Newport." Portuguese Marranos, upon arriving at Amsterdam or other places where they could "come out of the closet," often adopted multiple names so that they could continue to do business in Spain and Portugal and their colonies without revealing that they had returned to Judaism.. This practice was authorized by the Rabbis of Salonika. However, the practice creates great confusion for historians and genealogists when members of the same family became known by different names.

Some tombstones have engraved figures despite the biblical prohibition against graven images (Ex 20:2-5). We previously mentioned the "skull and cross-bones". A woman who died in childbirth might be shown lying prostrate. A mohel (circumciser) might be shown performing the rite on a baby. More often the tombstones employ symbols rather than figures. A mohel is more commonly indicated by surgical utensils or the box in which those utensils were kept. A sign that someone died in a plague is an angel or a hand brandishing a flaming sword. Other signs of an early death are a hand from a cloud felling a tree or a broken or fallen tree. A Kohen might have the hands of a priest raised to bless the congregation; a Levite a ewer or basin reflecting the duty to wash the Kohen's hands before the benediction.

*(The final part of this series, in which the author ponders the phenomenon of Jewish slave owners, will appear in the next newsletter.)*



## Another Visitor to Ghana

There is no travel like Jewish travel. And perhaps no more exciting and secret place of wonder than Sefwi Wiawso in Ghana. It is not an easy trip; this is not a suburb of Accra, the capital city. But so much about Ghana is either wonderful or more wonderful. The phones are so-so. But Kulanu has a way of getting guests to the community without mishap using a combination of neighbors' phones and short wave radio and fax and fax-relayed mail within Ghana. Also old-fashioned mail works well but is slow.

Kulanu is fortunate and proud to have **Margie Klein**, a well versed Jewish activist and day school graduate, going to Sefwi Wiawso this summer to teach, make friends, and help do some Israeli agricultural networking. Marge is a student of sustainable development at Yale University. She follows in the footsteps of **Nate Asher** and **Gabi Gershowitz** who visited last summer. Doctor **Davi d Borenstein** spent two weeks there in January, which included medical visits to the local hospital and training shortwave radio users.

# GRAVE FOR MARIA (cont.)

(Continued from page 11)

place amid a crowd of mourners estimated at about 250 souls.

People whose lives had been touched by Maria and her family dropped everything that Sunday afternoon and ran to pay their respects. By all accounts, it was a moving ceremony. I was sorry not to be able to attend. I heard about it too late.

Peter turned pensive in telling me of this outcome. “Amichai,” he said. “The response to Benjamin’s dilemma was fantastic. Respected intellectuals in the Jewish community who are his friends stood by him and exerted their influence to resolve the dilemma Judaically. They couldn’t solve it the way Benjamin wanted, but their unified effort may be the step forward we need to achieve a more united Jewish community in Mexico.”

It now is more than a year after Maria was buried at *Jardines del*

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## Plans were actively being discussed to create a section in a Jewish cemetery for people with questionable Jewish ancestry

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*Recuerdo*, and I went back to Mexico City last summer to visit the resurfaced Marranos and to see how far the Jewish community had progressed in bringing them into the fold. Maria’s grave had not been moved, but the community’s position had. Plans were actively being discussed to create a section in a Jewish cemetery for people with questionable Jewish ancestry and unquestioned affinity with the Jewish people.

Schulamith Halevy, an authority from Israel on Jewish law (*halachah*) and the history and sociology of Marranos, was visiting at the same time, and we compared notes. “The traditional Jewish view on who is a Jew,” she said, “is different when it comes to burial than the more sensitive issue of marriage. For burial, to put it simply, the rule is, if they say she is Jewish, accept her. So it isn’t a legal issue, it’s a social one.”

Peter, Beth Israel’s president still, believed the social issue is being addressed, and to prove it, he arranged a meeting for me with Alfredo and Mirele Bistre, a highly respected couple from the established Sefardic community of Mexico City. They said they were fully aware of common ties with the resurfacing Marranos and that they would take the lead in finding ways to integrate them into the established Jewish community. I also sought the view of Mauricio Lulka, who, as head of the Mexico Jewish council, has a good overview of the sense of the community. He also believes that opinions are changing, albeit slowly. “There must be a place for the returnees to the Jewish fold,” he said. “And a good place to start would be to provide a burial spot for those who did not have the chance to have their Jewish lineage officially verified.”

## BOOK COMMENT

# *Fragile Branches* By James R. Ross

Reviewed by Karen Primack

James R. Ross’s new book, *Fragile Branches*, is a must for Kulanu’s readers. Subtitled *Travels Through the Jewish Diaspora*, it is in a highly readable, almost story-telling style. Its six chapters cover widely dispersed communities – the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda; Peruvian Christians who embraced Judaism; the Bnei Menashe of northeastern India; descendants of Moroccan Jews in Brazilian Amazonia; *anousim* in Recife, Brazil; and Karaites in Israel. Ross generally focuses on one or two leaders in each community, freely introducing his own observations and adventures.

The narrative about each community is interspersed with clearly demarcated sections with historical background. Such an arrangement works nicely to help the reader keep the separate but related threads in place.

The subject matter begs comparison with a book with which we are intimately familiar, *Jews in Places You Never Thought Of*, published by Kulanu jointly with KTAV in 1998. The earlier book, which I had the privilege of editing, details the stories of a greater number of communities, but Ross’s book covers three groups not mentioned in the Kulanu book. Also, Ross brings some of the stories in the earlier book up to date and introduces new information. Another difference is that Ross has visited and written about each of his six communities, whereas the articles in the Kulanu book are written by 45 different authors about 15 communities.

One of Ross’s greatest contributions is his placement in historical perspective the phenomenon of the attraction of these groups to Judaism – and their influence on Judaism. Ross notes, “The emergence of new Jewish sects – groups that separated from the predominant forms of Judaism yet remained Jews – has contributed to the ongoing reinvention of Judaism throughout the ages...” (p. 4) and gives historical examples. He also reminds us, “The diaspora has spawned many Jewish customs and languages” (p. 6.) with more examples. In alluding to the fact that only Orthodox rabbis can perform legal marriages, divorces, and conversions in Israel today, he notes, “Like members of dozens of other sects and movements throughout Jewish history, the Orthodox rabbis have fought any changes that would diminish their authority.” (p. 7)

Ross asks the same questions that we at Kulanu are always posing: “What could motivate people to declare themselves Jews in places that seem so hostile and foreign to Jewish life? Why would Africans, Asians, and Latin Americans identify with a religion that often seems to reject outsiders?” (pp. 8-9)

Ross’s treatment of each community is respectful and sympathetic. Strict traditionalists will not agree with him, but Ross’s conclusions are very much in line with Kulanu’s philosophy: “The stories I discovered made me proud to be part of such a diverse and enduring people...should Jews welcome the diversity that has been central to Jewish life throughout its history?” (pp. 12-13)

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## Teaching Christians About Judaism

Yaffah Batya daCosta is the hostess of the “Shalom Y’all Radio Broadcast” on KSKY Radio in Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas. The new live program airs on Sunday afternoons from 4 to 5 pm. It presents special guests and live call-ins from listeners. A former Christian, daCosta has been involved for many years in educational outreach to Christians inclined to want to have more Jewish influence in their lives.

The particular program features 20 minutes for the Torah reading of the week and New Testament parallels, 20 minutes for a special guest or to expand on the scripture readings, and 20 minutes for questions and comments from the listening audience. Much of the focus is on Jewish-Christian relations and interfaith dialogue. No doubt some of her listeners in Texas are descendants of Iberian Crypto-Jews!

# LETTERS TO KULANU (cont.)

*(Continued from page 11)*

I love being included in your work. I'm happy to support you in any way I can. Just ask. Do I officially join? Also, I met with some of your incredible leadership a while back and gave them some homework. How did it go? (It was to discover Jewish organizations that work toward the inclusion of all kinds of Jews and Jewish families into our movement.) Thanks again for including me.

*Rabbi Susan Lippe*

## Does DNA Matter?

*(Responses to the article by Avshalom Zoosmann-Diskin described under PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE on page 5)*

As one of the authors of the articles in *Nature* and the *AJHA* as well as someone who had spent long years studying the Lemba I should say the following. The DNA business was practically irrelevant to the question of whether the Lemba are Jews or not. What the studies showed, along with the previous studies of Trefor Jenkins and others, was that the Lemba came from outside Africa, and specifically from the Semitic world. In my own anthropological work the DNA work helped me to provide a reasonable hypothesis as to where the Lemba might have come from.

The Cohen Modal Haplotype which was found among the Lemba certainly seemed to indicate some Jewish connection in the past. However as the studies went to some trouble to point out, it was not possible to indicate when this haplotype entered the tribe. Even if the Cohen Modal Haplotype is not as rare as we thought it was several years ago (there was always the possibility/probability that it would be located elsewhere) it is not, to my knowledge, characteristic of Bantu populations and its presence supports the view that the Lemba came from outside Africa. In my own published work I have noted that even if the Cohen haplotype was absolutely exclusive to Cohanim its presence among the Lemba could not address the issue of their religion: obviously their ancestors who carried the haplotype could have converted to Islam, for instance, as many Jews are known to have done after the rise of Islam.

As to the question: does DNA matter? Well it does, doesn't it - simply because for so many people it is considered hard science - an irrefutable sort of proof. Thus the effect on a popular discourse of DNA studies is likely to be very considerable - as we have seen in the case of the Lemba.

*Tudor Parfitt  
London, England*

Hopefully more and more will eventually get that Judaism is a practice and a religion, about God and not a strand of DNA.

*Esther Blackman  
Stow, MA*

From my point of view, it matters little if the only question was a desire to convert to Judaism. Kulanu, which means "all of us," does not go through all that nonsense of "who is a Jew?" But the Lemba claim Jewish ancestry and the studies help authenticate that claim. That is interesting and useful anthropologically and scientifically.

*Aron Primack, MD  
Silver Spring, Maryland*

For me, DNA has no role in excluding those who would be part of the Jewish people, but it does seem to have value in documenting the dimensions of the Diaspora. I appreciate the work Tudor Parfitt and Kulanu have done, and I'm happy that I became aware of their work. What I have learned has been fascinating, and fascinating it remains.

*Richard Solomon  
Plano, Texas*

Scientists, the so-called hard scientists, fight like hell among each other since even hard science depends upon what is examined and how it is examined, and sampling is yet another issue. Also scientists live like the rest of us mortals with limited resources, so who they sample and how they get the money to do all this work is also limited.

To be fair to those who might be accused of fitting the facts, I can tell you that is "not so" among the people we know as scientists. DNA fragment examinations have not stopped to solidify the facts. Indeed, scientists challenge their own assumptions all the time.

Kulanu is much less about the scientific method than an attempt to create an infrastructure for communities that want to fit into the Jewish system of ideas, practices, and beliefs. Beating up on or exalting the DNA maze "unfoldings" is truly a side show!

*Jack Zeller, MD  
Silver Spring, Maryland*

DNA is helping to bring Black and White members of Thomas Jefferson's family together. It can be useful, however it is not the only key to entry in the Jewish Community. A sincere wish to join should be THE criterion. DNA testing simply debunks some of the exclusionary practices of those with a myopic view of Judaism.

*Barbara Shair  
New City, NY*

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# 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-Knit Ugandan Kippot** available in small, medium and large, some in dark colors, others in bright colors, some in the traditional skull-cap shape, some in the pillbox or Bukhara shape. *Proceeds benefit the Abayudaya.*

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

**Religion and Politics in Uganda: A Study of Islam and Judaism** by Arye Oded, an Israeli Ambassador 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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# Two Worthy Students

Kulanu has had to say "no" to two requests — one each from Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana, and Kaifeng, China — to study in Israel. There are two major reasons:

One:

Israel is a very expensive place to live and for someone coming from China or Ghana, their shekel related resources are virtually zero.

Two:

Israel is a very difficult place for a Third World Jew. The major ministries need endless persuasion that the person they are admitting is authentic and not somehow threatening to overwhelm the state with millions of compatriots. To go to Israel as a "foreign worker" with other intents is not wise or honest. It takes an enormous networking effort to be sure that the recipient institution will be willing and able to speak up to the Ministry of Interior and others will be close behind. Also a foreigner in a country needs a support group.

Kulanu can't even begin to address reason #2 until #1 is taken care of. It is not an impossible dream. A few years ago a Kulanu supporter wanted to help her father celebrate his 80th birthday. There was nothing to give him but only some thing to share: the mitzvah of sending a student to a university (not in Israel). You can also help celebrate a simcha in ways that demonstrate that Jews all over the world are from one family and share common concerns.

For more information about the student in Sefwi Wiawso program, call Dr Michael Gershowitz at (515) 255 1988; for more about the student in Kaifeng program, please call Ray Kaplan at (201) 886-9138.

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## SUPPORTER APPLICATION

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