



Next Meeting — JJ Keki from Uganda — see Page 10

Teaching and Learning in Sefwi Wiawso

By Margie Klein

I stood in a clay hut with blank walls, the heat dense on my skin, the scent of red peppers and farm animals sifting through my nostrils. In front of me sat 10 Ghanaian farmers lined up on wooden benches too low to the ground for their size, looking up at me for guidance and inspiration. It was my second day in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana, where I had been sent for a month as a Kulanu volunteer to help the community think about agricultural development and foster Jewish learning. Needless to say, the task of incorporating the twin goals of agriculture and Jewish education into a lasting and unified Jewish understanding was daunting, but on this day, my first worry was getting through an hour and a half of class without running out of material.



Margie Klein teaching in Ghana.
Photo by David Ahenkoreh

After teaching the group some songs, I extracted from my out-of-place New York bag what would be my primary learning aid, a book called *Let the Earth Teach You Torah*, Teva's teaching guide about Judaism and the environment. With the help of community member Kofi Kwateng as translator, I read the group a quote from Abraham Joshua Heschel about *brachot* (blessings). The passage asserts that we repeat *brachot* all the time to remind ourselves of the holiness in the world, that everyday things that we do should be appreciated as miracles. As Kofi translated the quotation to the engrossed group, I considered Heschel's position. "That sounds nice," I thought,

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A NEW JEWISH STUDIES CENTER IN CHINA

The January 1992 establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Israel stimulated mutual interest in each other's history and culture. To meet the growing demand for Judaic studies in China and to promote the study of Jewish subjects among Chinese college students, the Center for Judaic Studies at Nanjing University was established in May 1992.

Every year over 200 students take courses there under the direction of Professor Xu Xin. Currently, the center is housed in an office of about 120 square feet. The Center lacks sufficient space to house even its most prized possession: the largest, most complete library of Judaica in China -- which now contains over 3,000 volumes (with a most welcome gift of another 3,000 books expected this year). In addition to a new library, the Center needs classrooms, offices, conference rooms and exhibit space.

To provide this, the Sino-Judaic Institute will join Nanjing University and Johns Hopkins University to create a new, larger, more

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Roberto's Story

By Schulamith C. Halevy

(This article first appeared in the *Jewish Historical Seminars Bulletin*)

In 1948, Raphael Patai went to Mexico to investigate recent reports by English-speaking visitors to Mexico of encounters with so-called "Indian Jews." Although he did not *a priori* rule out a possible connection to descendants of *anousim* (crypto-Jewish descendants of the forced converts of Spain and Portugal), Patai was left unconvinced. He based his conclusions on interviews he conducted with members of a group from Venta Prieta and Pachuca, and with some members of the Iglesia de Dios Israelita (a philo-semitic, Sabbath observing, biblical church related to a branch of Seventh-Day Adventists) in Mexico City and in Puebla.

When I first read Patai's two papers reporting on these groups, I was troubled by the author's unawareness of the culture of crypto-Judaism as reflected in records of the Inquisition and other sources. In his analysis, Patai relied entirely on his own ability to corroborate and

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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

Planning an Historic Rosh Hashana In Xalapa, Mexico

Xalapa's Rosh Hashana 5760 service was an historic one. The main leaders of the main religions all over Mexico came to pray with us together at Kehilat Benei Abraham. We named the event The Rosh Hashana of the Brotherhood.

This Rosh Hashana (5762) will concentrate on Peace in the Middle East. Moslem leaders from many Mexican cities will come with us to pray for world peace in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico. We need your support for this ambitious undertaking. Donations will be very appreciated.

Mijael García

Banco Inverlat, SA

Plaza 56, Sucursal Revolución

Xalapa, Veracruz, Méxic.

(Tax-exempt donations to Kulanu can be earmarked for Xalapa's Rosh Hashana.)

A Poignant Passover Presentation

Madelyn Farr and I attended a dynamic and creative Passover weekend retreat at Elat Chayyim, the Jewish Retreat Center in the Catskill Mountains of New York.

Elat Chayyim is an integral component of the Jewish Renewal movement, and the Passover retreat featured Mordechai Gafni, an American born Kabbalistic rabbi based in Jerusalem, currently on a national tour with his new book, *Soul Prints*, published by Simon & Schuster.

At the Second Night Seder, Sunday, April 8, 2001, Madelyn and I presented the oral tradition of the Bnei Menashe, printed in the Winter 2000-2001 issue of the Kulanu newsletter, before a communal Seder crowd of about 70. The Passover guests included a broad cross-section of the Jewish people: Israelis, Latin Americans, and Europeans, in addition to North Americans. Participants of all ages spanned the entire spectrum of Jewish religious practice, from traditional Orthodox to "new age" Renewal types.

As a poet and writer myself, I recited the Bnei Menashe prayer-poem, which describes in symbolic terms the Exodus from Egypt. I also informed the audience about Kulanu and the historical background of the Bnei Menashe.

Meanwhile, Madelyn, who is a dancer, choreographer, and Dance-Movement Therapist, did an interpretive dance capturing the soulful essence of this poem of redemption. I then repeated the poem, and this time the entire audience was on its feet joining with Madelyn's movements.

It was a visibly poignant moment, and a number of people approached me after the seder to find out more about Kulanu and the Bnei Menashe.

Jonathan Goldin

Amherst, MA

A Word from Tudor Parfitt on DNA And the Lemba

Just a short word. The new research paper by Avshalom Zoosmann-Diskin (see the previous newsletter) with its conclusions has been written by someone who is not known as a geneticist. The various individuals who were responsible for the Cohen/Lemba work and who occupy university positions in genetics in some of the world's great universities in the USA, UK and Israel are internationally known. Ongoing work in this area will in time elicit a response from

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these scholars.

However as a non-geneticist but as a co-author I should say this: The Lemba have been shown via genetics to be from outside Africa. This fact has always been questioned -- sometimes flatly denied -- by others. The Lemba have also been shown to have a haplotype which is common among Jews and particularly common among Cohanim, but which has not been found among Bantu groups. None of us said that the presence of this haplotype constituted proof of a Jewish identity. A Jewish identity is something which is constructed in a wide variety of ways, none of which are genetic. However it did suggest the strong possibility of a Jewish input at some time in the past and it did prove the Middle East origin of the tribe. These together seemed and still seem to support the oral tradition of the Lemba people.

Tudor Parfitt

London, England

Xu Xin's Semester at Montclair and Beyond

The teaching is delightful and a challenge at Montclair State University, New Jersey, where I was invited as an international specialist and taught two courses: China and the Jewish Diaspora and Introduction to Chinese Civilization. I am extremely happy to teach the Diaspora course, a topic about which I have done much research and plan to do more.

In addition to teaching, I have worked on a very ambitious plan to raise funds to build a physical entity for the Center for Judaic Studies at Nanjing University. (See article on page 1)

As with many of my previous US trips, I have been overwhelmed with invitations to talk to different institutions, organizations and congregations and am delighted with this wonderful opportunity to meet friends and inform a wider audience about our work. It is impossible to name all the places I visited, but here are some highlights:

At Gratz College, we discussed having one of our young faculty in China come here to be trained in Jewish history.

Cleveland College of Jewish Studies is donating about 3,000 volumes of books on Jewish subjects to the library of the Center for Jewish Studies at Nanjing University. It will make our library the biggest on Jewish studies in China, increasing the need for our own Center.

I really enjoyed participating in the Friends family seder in Chicago during this year's Pesach. This Chicago visit also led to a meeting with many friends who have been supporting my research and the cause of Jewish studies in China.

I was guest speaker at two conferences: The Third World View of the Holocaust: International Symposium, organized by Northeastern University in Boston, and Global Ethics, held at New Jersey City University.

I have worked with my publisher and am pleased to announce that my second book on Kaifeng Jewry, *The Kaifeng Jews of China: History, Culture and Religion*, is expected to be out in summer 2001. Nothing would make me happier than seeing the research I did at Hebrew Union College and Harvard University bear fruit. I had to hasten back to China, to join Rabbi John Levi from Melbourne in leading a delegation of 26 Australians on a tour of Judaic sites in China. While I hope to return to the U.S., I am extending an invitation to all of you to come to China and see our work here. Join us for the next International Conference, May 2002, or for the dedication of the new James Friend Center for Judaic Studies, which your donations are making possible. You have my personal invitation.

Xu Xin.

Nanjing, China

Sephardi Roots in Costa Rica

The overwhelming majority of the Costa Ricans have names of the original Sephardim. According to the notable historian Samuel Stone,

LETTERS TO KULANU

in his book *The Dynasty of the Conquistadors*, it is very likely that the majority of the colonizing population were *conversos*. Even more intriguing is that 80 percent of the population is white complexioned. Also, he comments about the possibility that the colonizing *conversos* chose Costa Rica in order to establish for themselves insulation with respect to the rest of South America and thus flee from the Implacable Inquisition. Samuel Stone comments that in the 18th century the bishop of Nicaragua excommunicated all the inhabitants of Costa Rica, noting that they distanced themselves from the villages in which there was a church.

The large majority of the family names here are of Sephardic origin. The proof is in the telephone directory. Also, the first flag of Costa Rica had the star with six points.

*Juan Carlos Perez Savaria
Costa Rica*

Is Jewishness in the Blood?

Adolph Hitler said that Jewishness was “in the blood,” and that one inherited it from one’s parents, and that conversion to Christianity was of no significance.

Now that we have seen the sham of Hitler’s pseudo-science, and have developed the very high-tech science of molecular genetics, some want to say that Jewishness can be found in DNA.

The basic idea is the same, and it is WRONG. Jewishness exists in the mind, not in the body. Jewishness exists on a psychological level, or, better yet, it exists on a spiritual level.

*Yehuda Sherman, MD
Lafayette, CA*

Ethiopia Survey Reveals Suffering

Last winter’s medical survey of 4000 of the 8000 members of the Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jewish) community in Addis Ababa revealed that 55 percent of the community’s children under the age of five are abnormally short for their age. Sixteen percent are “wasted” or abnormally underweight. Both conditions indicate malnutrition. The level of wasting is 74 percent higher than in the general Ethiopian population, and severe wasting is six times higher than in other Addis Ababa children.

The survey was commissioned by the Association of Beta Israel in Addis Ababa (a governmentally-recognized organization) and was funded by the new York-based humanitarian organization, Struggle to Save Ethiopian Jewry (SSEJ), whose honorary chairman is Elie Wiesel.

The survey was conducted by a team of nationally recognized and highly experienced Ethiopian professionals, strongly recommended by UN and US agency personnel.

The survey also showed an unusually high rate of illness among children under five years old. Sixty percent of the children in the group had been ill in the two week period preceding the survey.

According to the survey team, living conditions of the Beta Israel are extremely bad, even as compared to poverty stricken Ethiopians. Doctors have called for “urgent attention through supplementary feeding and better access to a good standard of health care.” SSEJ and the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry have repeatedly pleaded with major Jewish organizations for additional funds for food and improved medical care.

Educational Needs of the Abayudaya

By Gershom Sizomu

(Editor’s note: Sizomu, the high school’s founder and headmaster, will take off the autumn semester to study at New York’s Hebrew Union College, where he has received a scholarship.)

I am happy to report that Semei Kakungulu High School, the only Jewish parochial school in Uganda, is finally registered, thanks in large part to Kulanu donors. We need the following to be able to become a National Examination Centre:

1. Good, plastered, shut and lockable classrooms.
2. A good, plastered, and equipped laboratory.
3. At least 50 single desks for examination purposes.

At present we have four unplastered, unshut and unclockable classrooms. We have no laboratory, and we do not have single desks. The costs for correcting these deficiencies are prohibitive for us. The cost of plastering the four classrooms is approximately \$920. Shutting is approximately \$600. Constructing and equipping the laboratory costs approximately \$6000. For now we can buy some equipment and chemicals and keep them in any one classroom because it is so expensive to construct a laboratory. This costs approximately \$750. Each single desk costs the equivalent of approximately \$15.

If we are able to secure about 10 computers, that would be a good start for our computer studies.

In addition, these are the recent expenditures for scholarships from the Lorna Margolis Abayudaya Orphans Education Fund, run by Kulanu: Senior students incurred about \$1000 in tuition fees, and examination fees for senior candidates were about \$300. Vocational students incurred \$600 in tuition expenses, and the new Hadassah Infant School about \$200. Tuition fees for primary school students were about \$150. We are grateful that the Margolis Fund met these expenses and made education possible for so many.

Since our educational needs are continuous, any assistance would be appreciated beyond measure.

(Tax-deductible donations to Kulanu may be earmarked for the Semei Kakungulu High School or the Lorna Margolis Fund.)

Teaching and Learning in Sefwi Wiawso (cont.)

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"but what New Yorker is going to see the holiness of boarding the subway, or buying apples from the infinite fruit supply at Stop 'n Shop? It is hard enough to get anyone to think about this stuff once a week in synagogue."

Interrupting my thoughts, Joseph Armah raised his hand to comment. "What the rabbi says is true," Joseph said. "You must always thank God. God makes all things possible."

"Yes," added Samuel Mintah, "God must be on your mind all the time. You must always thank Him, and ask Him to help keep your faith strong. Praise God!"

"Hallelujah!" answered the rest of the room.

"He makes the corn grow. Praise God!"

"Hallelujah!"

"He gives us children. Praise God!"

"Hallelujah!"

As other members of the class joined in enthusiastically affirming that God was central and blessing God was obvious, I came to a realization that would grow throughout my trip and shape my experience in ways I never anticipated: These people have a whole lot more to teach me about Judaism than I have to give them.

True, I know Hebrew and Jewish ritual; I know how to fix a good bagel brunch and Shabbas dinner party. True too, perhaps more important, I know to try to treat people with respect and dignity, and to fight for the causes I believe in. Yet often I don't know how to pray. Often I don't feel a connection to nature, or understand the powerful role that that connection played in the lives of Jews who came before me. Often I don't remember to give thanks or to step back in awe. The Jews of Sefwi Wiawso do.

After this first lesson, I came to see my role in the community as a transmitter of Jewish teachings that can inform the decisions we make about agricultural development. I could find the texts, but I trusted the community to use the power of its faith in the direct relevance of the Torah and Talmud to interpret the texts into action. So when we read the Talmudic lesson of *ba'al tashlich*, which instructs that even in war one must not cut down a fruit tree, and by extension in times of peace one should not destroy anything useful in nature, the community committed itself to principles of sustainable agriculture, and agreed to explore ways to learn about organic farming. With my help, the community was able to secure a yearlong training program in sustainable agriculture run by the UN Food and Agriculture program, and hopes to use their new knowledge to make their community farm successful. Throughout their process of deciding how to attain help and how to divide up the community land, the community always came back to the text, and considered how Jewish teachings could guide their decisions.

Coming home, I am about to start a career as an environmental organizer, working to make corporations and governments more accountable to regular citizens, to live out the Jewish values in which I've come to believe. In my work, I will remember the texts I studied in Ghana, the ease with which the community took them in. I will remember that it is possible to be both reverent and practical, to embrace Jewish tradition and progressive vision. In Sefwi Wiawso, they prove this possibility every day.

A NEW JEWISH STUDIES CENTER IN CHINA (CONT.)

(Continued from page 1)

modern facility. The James Friend Center for Judaic Studies will be part of a larger Nanjing University-Johns Hopkins University Institute for International Research.

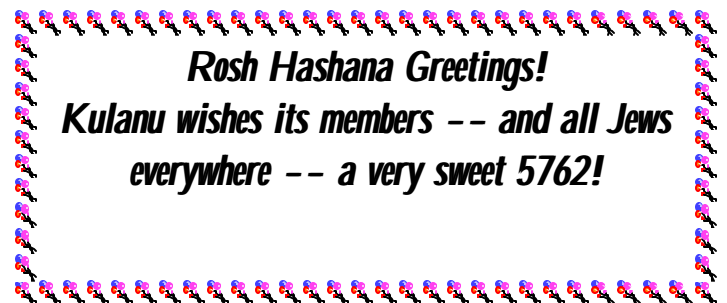
Why the name? When Jim Friend (1932-1987) arrived at Nanjing to teach English in 1985, the first colleague he met was a Chinese professor teaching a course in Jewish American authors. Xu Xin was teaching about Jewish writers, but he had never met a Jew! Meeting Jim was a turning point in Xu's life. The two developed a fast friendship, and Xu was finally able to explore the Judaism which had so interested and intrigued him. In 1986, Xu traveled to the U.S. to teach at Jim's school, Chicago State University, for two years. During his first year in the U.S. Xu lived in Jim's home; his interest and knowledge of Judaism growing deeper as he celebrated Jewish holidays with Jim's family.

Today, after returning to the US for Harvard Symposiums, attending classes at Hebrew Union College, and furthering his education in Israel, Xu has become the leading scholar of Judaica in China, and founder of the China Judaic Studies Association. Through his work at Nanjing and through his translation of the *Encyclopedia Judaica* into Chinese, Chinese students are learning about Judaism for the first time.

While Jim did not live to see Xu's accomplishments, he would be awed to know that the flame which sparked Xu's intense desire to study Judaism was ignited by their friendship. Xu has truly made a difference, both in the U.S. and in China, where interest in Judaic Studies continues to grow. And Jim, who passed away more than 13 years ago, lives on in his work and in his deeds. We are still benefiting from the inspired friendship between these two men. The Center is a tribute to them both.

Xu Xin has been working diligently to spread the news and reach people and foundations to meet the estimated cost of \$100,000. During his most recent US stay, Xu discussed plans with many scholars and foundation heads, including Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, president of the Museum of Jewish Heritage, Rabbi Arthur Schneier, president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, and Rabbi Richard Marker, executive president of the Samuel Bronfman Foundation. All have been supportive of his Jewish projects in China and expressed continued interest. So far, more than half of the needed funds have been raised.

The Association now requests additional help. Donors will be honored in the building: major donors with the naming of rooms, others with plaques naming them as sponsors (\$100), benefactors (\$500) and patrons (\$1,000), but any amount is most welcome. Tax-deductible donations may be made out to The Sino-Judaic Institute and mailed to 232 Lexington Drive, Menlo Park, CA 94025. Write "Friend-Nanjing Center" in the memo part of the check. For further information or for information regarding stock transfers, query Al Dien at the Sino-Judaic Institute.



Rosh Hashana Greetings!
Kulanu wishes its members -- and all Jews
everywhere -- a very sweet 5762!

The Ugly Duckling: A Conversion Story

By Charles Ferris

I was born in the Delta country of North Mississippi, grandson of Lebanese immigrants who had arrived in the US in the Great Wave of Immigration which also brought many Jews from Eastern Europe at the end of the 19th century. My ancestors were Syrian Orthodox Christians. However, my father's people, settling in the rural Mississippi River Valley, found no Orthodox Church to attend. Some eschewed religious affiliation altogether, while others divided among the local Baptist, Methodist, and Roman Catholic congregations. To make a living they were merchants, mainly dealing in grocery and food service.

My mother's family, on the other hand, settled in the large industrial city of Birmingham, Alabama. Her father was the son of a Muslim woman who had defied her family in Lebanon by marrying an Orthodox Christian. I later learned that my maternal grandfather secretly read and chanted from the Koran; I still have his Koran, in which he wrote that his devotional life would remain secret, as "no one would understand." He drifted into several denominations, including Presbyterian, Maronite, and finally Byzantine Catholic, while sending his younger children, including my mother, to Roman Catholic elementary school. It was there my mother became an ardent Catholic, a tradition in which my father, who was not religious, allowed her to raise my brother and me.

The Catholic Church and parochial school in Clarksdale, Mississippi, a county seat town, were run by Irish immigrant priests and the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth, Kentucky. They were very strict in the pre-Vatican II atmosphere, in which all faiths other than Catholic were
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A New Spanish Guide to Judaism

Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn's new Spanish-language book, *HaMadrich - The Guide to Modern Jewish Practice and Belief*, is being published in Madrid in November by the European Association of Judaic Studies.

This will be the first non-Orthodox guide to Judaism in Spanish. It has step-by-step instructions on how to practice many Jewish rituals as well as transliterated Hebrew prayers in Spanish.

The cost of the book is \$22.00 plus S/H (\$5.00 in the US, \$10.00 outside). Cukierkorn will donate \$5 to Kulanu for every copy sold through Kulanu. Advance orders can be sent to Kulanu Book Offer, c/o Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, 7100 Main Street, Kansas City, MO 64114.

For further information contact Cukierkorn at Rabbi94@hotmail.com.

Roberto (cont.)

authenticate oral testimony. For example, one informant, "Roberto," told Patai that he was a Jew, as were both his parents, and that he believed that Jesus was a good philosopher and a prophet, but that he was neither son of God nor Messiah. Patai did not recognize that every part of the reported statement is standard crypto-Jewish creed: The approach to Jesus as prophet or sage is commonly found in the trials of victims of the Inquisition in Mexico and elsewhere. Saying that one's parents or grandparents are Jews, asserting descent from Jews -- as opposed to a spiritual connection such as perceived by fundamentalist Christian groups -- is also a standard feature of crypto-Jewish transmission. It seemed to me that this "Roberto," who had expected to be understood but found no resonance, despaired and retreated from communication with the scholar from Jerusalem. I wish I had met the poor man, I thought to myself, and could tell him that I understood.

I never dreamed this wish would be granted me.

This is the story of one tortured soul, a man who tried his best to



Roberto

be recognized by other Jews for what he was. But there was no context for the modern Jews and scholars he was in touch with to interpret his message, which was couched in a language and culture that stem from a legacy of secrecy and have been adapted to life in the shadow of the Inquisition. Indeed, it has taken more than half a century, as well as boundless effort on the part of his children, for this man to die in hope and peace.

I first met his son and daughter one year ago. They were both in various stages of conversion to Judaism, having had reason to suspect for many years that they were descended from the

anousim. They sought my help in trying to identify traces of Jewish heritage that they might not have recognized as such themselves. I found relatively little, largely because they were raised in a branch of the Iglesia de Dios Israelita founded by their father, a church that observes many biblical practices. In my experience with *anousim* who join such churches, the adoption of such pro-Israel, pro-Jewish Christianity obliterates virtually all traces of specifically Jewish customs in the space of only one generation. But there were some oddities that left me thinking there was more here than met my eye, so I kept in touch.

When I returned to Mexico this past summer, I offered to spend a Shabbat with the family. The daughter picked me up from the airport and on the way to town told me that her father has been lying on his deathbed for 13 years already, unable to talk, though alert. His doctors could not understand what was keeping him alive. She felt that her father awaited some closure, which she hoped I could help bring.

I came to the family home in a neighborhood that has earned itself a reputation as one of the most dangerous in the enormous city. We were in a rush to set up, get everything ready and then welcome the Shabbat. We lit the candles; the mother and daughter had been doing this together for a very long time. I was praying from my siddur and the family -- mother, daughter and grandson -- were praying from a transliteration they shared. Then we recited kiddush and over dinner

Overly Ambitious?

By Jack Zeller

Is Kulanu remiss for being overly ambitious, understaffed and passionately concerned about every person who wants to participate in Jewish life? Perhaps.

Understaffed is not totally correct. Kulanu has no paid staff since we take all of our resources and allocate them around the world to communities who want to be more meaningfully Jewish. Kulanu work is exhausting and our needs are enormous. Mistakes are made. We get about 40 newsletters returned for each mailing due to a change of address. Some of the address changes are unexplained and we don't know why the delivery was unsuccessful. Please hang in there with us and, even better, offer your help.

If you want to start a Kulanu chapter in your area, do logistical office work, provide Kulanu with data base accounting services, visit others around the world, find and send books and Judaica to every continent, teach and learn from others who do not deserve isolation and neglect, let me know!

How did Kulanu get so over-extended? We underestimated numbers. In addition, some of us thought that one of the major Jewish organizations would take over our cause much the way virtually all Jewish organizations are now Zionist and involved with Soviet Jewry. Will that yet occur? What Jewish civilization would abandon thousands of Jewish descent from the Iberian Peninsula, India and Africa? Thousands who want to be Jewish for an authentic reason?

Despite our limited resources, Kulanu has made a difference! We have grown in numbers, but we have not grown fast enough. I appeal to you: Step up your own level of involvement. Bring in others. Kulanu regularly sends out complimentary copies of our newsletter when requested. Make use of a very large number of impressive Kulanu speakers, not least of whom is JJ Keki, the past chairman of Uganda's Abayudaya community, who arrived in the US on August 6th.

I started this note by referring to our passionate concern. I would like to offer you a sentiment from one of our recent e-mails:

"I am very interested in pursuing my faith and life in Judaism and wonder if you can help. I am halachically not Jewish but am fairly sure that I have Jewish ancestry on my father's side, and possibly on my mother's but many generations back. Even if neither side has an actual genetic descendancy, I still feel and believe as a Jew, and wish to live and die as one."

Kulanu has introduced our new supporters to others in the Kulanu network who can make fulfillment possible, delightful, and radically brilliant in both life and on our deathbeds. Our collective understaffed, volunteer-rich, ambitious and not infallible efforts make this all possible.

Roberto (cont.)

(Continued from page 5)

discussed various family customs the mother remembered from her childhood in rural Zacatecas. I mentioned Patai's articles where his interview with her father is reported. They had never seen it, so I took it out and read to them. At the first words the daughter froze; a mix of excitement and rage washed over her. Here she had been asking her father for all these years whether they were Jews, sensing that he was hiding things from her, but he had never answered. Instead he would distract her, stare her in the eye and not respond, ignore her, but he never said yes or no. Yet to that stranger he had said that he was a Jew so simply and so fully, long before she was born. She did not know how to react. I tried to explain that her father's silence was a confirmation of sorts, that being too clear would commit her to seek a goal which he himself had failed to attain, and that, in general, *anousim* mostly speak in hints and hidden messages.

We went back to exploring family customs. I remembered that both son and daughter had said to me they did not recall eating milk and meat in the same meal, but also did not remember being told not to. So I asked the mother about the typical diet in her childhood home in the state of Zacatecas, where she had been raised Catholic, and when we got to milk or *cafe-aux-lait* at the end of lunch, which was the only meal containing meat, she explained it was not included because "milk is for breakfast and supper, not for lunch," while meat was only eaten at the main (midday) meal. This is one of the two most common reasons given to me by *anousim* who separate dairy and meat products in their diet.

We talked about the killing and preparation of animals, and I learned that many Jewish practices survived in the mother's family. We were told about her uncle and brothers who were heckled by neighbors and called Judios, and much more that never came up in any conversation in the past, simply because the questions never came up. Moreover, these matters were either ones that involved bad memories not easily repeated or were so natural to the informant and not deemed of interest; they just lay as dormant memories. When I asked about death and burial the mother first talked about the white sheet with which the dead was to be covered, then began to cry, saying that her husband had asked of her that he be buried in a specific direction but she could not remember which it was, and could I please help her. The daughter did not understand that the mother was thus acknowledging her awareness of the Jewish identity of her husband.

We went to visit the father, who was staying in a nearby apartment cared for by a nurse. I introduced myself and explained why I had come. When I mentioned Patai he winced. I said we needed to know the truth at last, that his daughter needed to know. I asked him, "Is it true, what you said to Patai, that you, your mother and your father are Jews?" He looked at me with eyes I will never forget and nodded his head clearly in the affirmative. His daughter burst into tears and, for the first time since he had fallen ill, years ago, her father squeezed her hand back. Asked if

(Continued on page 12)

Close Up and Personal

Kulanu's South Florida Chapter

By Yaakov Gladstone

Why is the Florida chapter different than all other Kulanu chapters? One reason: because most of our members are not Floridians. They are "snow birds." They fly away from the cold, windy North to spend five months under the sunny blue skies of Florida. Although most are residents of Century Village in Deerfield Beach, others come from 10 other communities in South Florida.

Our chapter is unique also in that the nucleus first bonded when members were in their teens and were members of the Canadian and American Zionist youth movements and in Yiddish and Hebrew schools. Our ties grew as we took an active part in the struggle to bring Soviet and Ethiopian Jews to Israel. It was only natural that as adults we became involved with Kulanu – the term means "all of us."

This chapter was founded in 1997 at the home of Giza Falik of Hollywood, Florida. She was a partisan in the Russian and Polish undergrounds during World War II and a lecturer on the Holocaust, and so she understood well the meaning of Kulanu. About 20 people attended the first meeting – small when compared with our present membership.

Our first lecturer was Dr. Abraham Lavender, a descendant of a Spanish family that fled the Inquisition to France, and currently a sociology professor at Florida International University and an author.

Since those early days, we have found that our most suc-

cessful meetings are those we hold in private homes. This past winter, there was a series of such gatherings. The most memorable for me was the affixing of a mezuzah at my new home in Century Village with 42 friends helping at this Kulanu gathering.

In February, Kulanu members performed in a dramatic reading describing the Assyrian conquest and exile of the Ten Tribes of Israel in 722 BCE. The work was written and directed by Sylvia Stipelman, an oral historian from Montreal. The reading was performed at the Century Village Naamat chapter – a women's Zionist organization.

In March, the chapter, in cooperation with the Sino-Judaic Institute and the China-Judea Connection, presented a program on the Jewish experience in China. Thirty minutes before the event, the crowd was so big that it had to be moved to the largest room in Century Village Clubhouse to accommodate the 300 people! The main speaker was Dr. Abraham Gittleson, a Jewish History educator from Miami Beach. Also participating were Dr. Beverly Friend, co-author of *The Legends of the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng*; Rosalyn Bresnick Perry, story teller; and Jocelyn and Jerry Cooper, Yiddish and Hebrew folk-singers. Regretfully, Dr. Lavender was unable to attend and all of his friends wish him a speedy recovery.

Kulanu Florida begins and closes its gatherings with Yiddish and Hebrew folk songs. The group singing helps to unite us in the spirit of Kulanu.



Florida chapter meetings feature food and fellowship in addition to fascinating information

The Ugly Duckling (cont.)

(Continued from page 5)

said to be insufficient to admit anyone into heaven.

I was a serious child by nature and took to heart the many warnings we children were given about sin and the consequences of eternal damnation to hell. We were urged constantly to pray and make sacrifices so that Jesus, who made the Great Sacrifice at Calvary for the sins of the world, would be pleased and admit us eventually into heaven. All earthly life was supposed to be preparation for that.

I grew up a lonely, struggling child. I would spend long hours in prayer to the Virgin Mary and the saints, but never to Christ. I was too afraid of the Great Judge of the Universe who expected perfection just as he had delivered to his Divine Father while he was on earth. Every Lenten season I would give up something, usually chocolate, which was my favorite treat. Once I ate meat on a Friday, which we were never supposed to do. I had a hamburger. I was tormented I would die and go to hell before I could confess my sin to the priest and be rid of it. However, confession was also an ordeal. I was constantly in fear I had forgotten to tell the priest something, and then I would be condemned.

Things got worse when I reached puberty. The Catholic Church stressed celibacy and my mother wanted me to become a priest. However, I was very interested in girls, though I was also very shy. The more I thought of romance, the more ashamed I became and the more I struggled, feeling I was surely damned.

I did not understand why religion was supposed to be a comfort, yet to me it was a burden. I felt I did not fit in, that I was like the ugly duckling, never accepted. I had no Catholic friends as I grew up. I felt alienated. I begged my parents not to force me to continue to go to Catholic school. I really did not want to go to the Church either, but I knew I could not escape that. The Catholic school only went through eighth grade, so I got to attend public high school, which was much better for me. By the time I was a senior in high school, I was sitting in the balcony while attending mass, so that I could be indifferent to what was going on in the church and no one would notice.

My mother, who by this time was a widow, sent me to live with her sister and brother in Birmingham, where I attended a Baptist col-
(Continued on page 13)

FINDING THEIR VOICES: A Review

By Clara Castelar

The publication of the first anthology of poems by Latin American Jewish women is long overdue—half a millennium, to be precise. According to Chilean-born writer Marjorie Agosin, these are some of the contributing factors to the silence that preceded her decision to edit *Miriam's Daughters*, the bilingual, four-part anthology that fills a regrettable lacuna in the literary history of Ibero-American literature: “Jews make up only one percent of the population of Latin America, and they have always been strangers and diasporic beings.” Agosin might have added that for centuries, Latin mores constrained women to avoid all but traditional roles. It could be argued, then, that to be a woman, and diasporic stranger, in a part of the world where diversity was often seen as a de-stabilizing force, can only have led to profound marginalization.

Agosin writes that since the 1970s, the trend toward multiculturalism eroded the basis for literary pre-determinism. She cites “...the existence of minority groups side by side,...the increased awareness of nationalities and the desire to return to one's roots...” as the factors that gave rise to new ways of putting experience into words. Latin Jewish women from countries as remote from each other as Brazil and Mexico begin to reclaim their voices. This book, she writes, reflects the multicultural movement.

But it would be a mistake to see *Miriam's Daughters* only as a mirror image of the *Zeitgeist*. It encompasses the timeless themes of identity, belonging, memory, the nature of evil, faith and hope. And what it loses in parochialism, it gains in a broadening of horizons.

In “Genealogies,” for example, Costa Rican Rosita Kalina acknowledges as much: “I am of the tribe of Yehudah...I am universal.” In her poignantly beautiful “Second Portrait,” Argentinean Manuela Fingueret echoes Walt Whitman's “I contain many multitudes”: “I am a pirate of many boardings...I am the survivor of prayers and exterminations...I am an arrow in the universe...” For the late Aida Gelbrunk, of Uruguay, containing multitudes was at once a blessing and a burden: “Sometimes it frightens me /to be a daughter of so illus-

trious a genealogy....Sometimes I fear / the vacillating sacred objects/ the dead who threaten with their ashen aura/the day dripping empty airs, things, tenderness. ”

Brazilian Leonor Scliar-Cabral, whose “Sephivot” is included in “Illuminations,” the second section of *Miriam's Daughters*, writes with a spare, brilliant eloquence of hope and despair: “In a lost sphere a paradise waits for me I don't know when/and I go on climbing in circles the branches dry of fruits.” Later, in “The Texture of Memory,” she opens “Deceiving Words” with the defiant song of a small child left alone in the dark: “It is so good to be by myself to go to the orchard /to grab a ripe fruit/ in the improvised lunch/at a table, without guests.” Little by little, she lets defiance drain from the song until it ends with: “By myself for eternity/In parks where couples embrace, the false persuasion/curly upon itself/and the soliloquy is flooded by tears.”

The fourth and final part of *Miriam's Daughters* sings of Jerusalem, as in Manuela Fingueret's eponymous poem: “Oh town of the hundred doors/through which we return in so many mistaken dreams.” Brazilian Sarah Rivka Erlich writes: “Oh spirit of Jerusalem...In you alone can we celebrate /The great universal festival...” These are songs of homecoming, in a collection of works whose muted leitmotif is the urge to transform “the personal into the historical.”

Will the songs resonate through the ages? Can every work in this collection be classified as poetry? Emily Dickinson once said: “If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know it is poetry.” Somehow, hers does not seem to be the best approach to reading *Miriam's Daughters*. A few of the voices in it are tentative, as voices tend to be when they are being tested for the first time. Collectively, however, this is a sonorous effort. The reader would do well to listen to these new voices with the heart, for it is the heart, rather than the head, for which most of the singers aim. In most cases, they find their mark.

Ethiopian Jewry in Israel

150 Youth Leaders from South America Volunteer At Summer Camps For Ethiopian Olim in Israel

Some 150 youth leaders from South America who are in Israel on a year-long Jewish Agency *hachsharah* program volunteered for a week at a summer camp for Ethiopian youngsters. Some 1250 Ethiopian children, with ages ranging from 5 to 15, are attending the camps, being held at Jewish Agency absorption centers all over Israel.

The youth leaders, aged 18-20, are now in their fifth month in Israel, participating in a professional training program at the Jewish Agency Jewish Zionist Education Department's Institute for Youth Leaders from Abroad (Machon LeMadrichei Hutz La' Aretz). During the year, the youth leaders volunteer for several weeks of practical community work in preparation for their future role in their own communities.

The community involvement in the summer camps began last year on an experimental basis, with 35 leaders working at the Givat Hamatos absorption site. This year, due to the success of the project, the program has been expanded and includes five different absorption centers: Givat Hamatos, Mevasseret Zion, BeerSheva, Ashkelon and Kiryat Gat. Several dozen Israeli youth leaders are working alongside those from South America.

During their stay in Israel, the leaders improve their Hebrew, take courses at the youth leadership training seminar and participate in vol-

untary activity on kibbutzim and moshavim around the country, according to the ideology of the different youth movements. When their year ends, the leaders return to their countries of origin where they coordinate activity in their youth movements.

Jaimie Fox-Bar, director of the Leadership Institute, has said: “The fact that the leaders have come to Israel at this time is particularly commendable. They were not put off by the situation and came to realize their desire to strengthen Jewish education worldwide and in Israel.”

Improving Absorption Of Ethiopian Olim On Knesset Agenda

This summer, the Aliyah and Klitah Committee of the Knesset held a special session on the subject of absorption of Ethiopian *olim*. The discussion was initiated by committee chairman Zvi Hendel and MK Eliezer Zandberg. Deputy minister of absorption Yuli Edelstein addressed the committee, as well as Jewish Agency director general Aaron Abramovich, senior representatives of the absorption and education ministries, and representatives of the Ethiopian *olim*.

Deputy Minister Edelstein announced that the ministry had begun to organize the transfer of Ethiopian *olim* from temporary absorption sites in hotels and guest houses to new, permanent absorption centers,

(Continued on page 12)

Soul-Searching About Slavery in Suriname

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Part V

During my visit to Suriname as a volunteer last summer, I had hoped to gain an insight on how Jews -- among the most oppressed people in the world -- and how former Marranos -- among the most oppressed of the world's Jews -- could have built a civilization based on slavery. It was not to be. I was left with as many questions and doubts as when I came. "Slavery" in Suriname was not simply an economic system; that is, a system whereby a master owns and may freely dispose of the time and labor of a slave. A slave was also a "chattel." He or she could be sold from one master to another even if the sale separated a husband from a wife or a parent from a child, and the status of "slave" devolved upon the offspring of the slave.

It has been noted by all who have written about slavery that, until modern times, every civilization, every people, every religion and every ethical and political philosophy permitted the institution of slavery. No notice was taken that the system depended upon repression for its maintenance. Finally, the justification for slavery -- that slaves were morally and intellectually inferior -- further poisoned the atmosphere between master and slave. No less an intellect than Aristotle subscribed to this justification.

If biblical law differed from other systems of slavery in the ancient world, it is in the requirement that slaves be treated humanely. A slave had to be released if sexually abused or if grievous bodily harm was done to her or him (Deut 11:14; Ex 21:26-27). A master who caused a slave's death committed a criminal offense (Ex 21:20). Slaves were to be treated as members of their owner's household. Among other things, they were entitled to rest on the Sabbath (Ex 20:10, Deut 5:14, 15), and on all holidays (Deut 16:11, 14).

On the dark side, the Bible made a distinction between Hebrew slaves and Canaanite, or alien, slaves. The Hebrew slave could serve no more than six years against his will and had to be freed in the Jubilee year occurring every 50 years even if he had served less than six years. (Ex 21:2, Lev 25: 1-4, Deut 15:12-18). The Canaanite slave could serve in perpetuity (Lev 25:46). The status of slaves devolved on their offspring (Ex 23:12, Gen 17:13). For a Hebrew slave, that rule is not so chilling because neither the slave nor the offspring could be kept against his/her will for more than six years. But for the Canaanite slaves, "forever" meant "forever."

Despite the language in Leviticus and Deuteronomy (which contains the laws given to Moses after the revelation on Mt. Sinai), there is a thread in the Bible to the contrary. Abraham, in obeying God's instructions, required all the slaves in his household -- "whether born in his house or purchased from foreigners" -- to be circumcised. (Gen: 17:12-13, 26-27). Circumcision is the key to becoming a proselyte (Ex 12:48), and a proselyte counts "as a native of the land" (Ex 12:43-44, 48). It was always assumed that, once a foreigner became a proselyte, he became entitled to all the privileges of the Jewish people -- including the privilege of being freed in the seventh year. During the period of the expansion of the Maccabean Kingdom (165 BCE - 65 BCE), when the inhabitants of Edom and Ituria were required to convert, the Rabbis insisted that all alien slaves be circumcised and ritually immersed, leading to their eventual freedom. There was a need at this time to integrate foreigners within the expanded boundaries into the religious life of the Jewish community.

After the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 CE, Jews were dispersed throughout the Roman Empire and gradually became a minority even in their own homeland. At the same time, there arose a hesitancy to allow the unrestricted entry into the Jewish community of manumitted foreign slaves whose dedication to religious observances was suspect. Thus, manumission of foreign slaves became subscribed by Jewish law. At the same time, Talmudic tradition

held that bondage of Hebrew slaves was no longer possible because the Jubilee year could no longer be determined. In the fourth century, slavery began to disappear among Jews within the boundaries of the Roman Empire. The process began with the ban by Emperor Constantine on the purchase by Jews of Christian slaves. This was later expanded to include pagan slaves. Slavery continued in Sassanid Persia and Babylonia and later within the domain of Islam under the laws promulgated in the Talmud. These laws treated the slave as outside the congregation of Israel and also made manumission a religious and not a private affair. Maimonides, while upholding these laws, chose to emphasize the practical and religious requirement to treat a slave with mercy, compassion and forbearance, and not to begrudge a slave his portion of the master's good fortune.

The discovery of the New World by Columbus in 1492 expanded the value of slaves. Very early, the Portuguese and Spanish, followed by the Dutch, English and French, found that they could more quickly populate the vast areas under their control through the introduction of a plantation economy based upon slave labor. It was this recognition that led the British to invite Jews who had experience with growing sugar on plantations into Suriname and to convince the Dutch to continue the British practice. Although Portuguese and Spanish Jews owned plantations worked by African slaves in all British and Dutch colonies in the New World, only in Suriname did such slavery become so widespread that it was the mainstay of the economy. Elsewhere, Jews were primarily engaged in trading, retailing and manufacturing, where there was much less need for slaves than on plantations.

Suriname had a reputation for harsh treatment of slaves. Whether there was a difference in their treatment between Christians and Jews is unlikely. The oral tradition of the Maroons recalls cruel Jewish owners, and the Dutch historian, H.J. Koenen, also comments upon this. Other sources, however, report a saying common among blacks that "Who enters a Jewish home is blessed by God," showing that blacks preferred Jewish owners. What we do know is that Jews who owned slaves purchased and sold them, and after death bequeathed them to their next-of-kin. The governing Jewish council at Jodensavanne, the Mahamad, operated several plantations with slaves sold to it in lieu of taxes. Few slaves were manumitted. Blacks who converted or were raised as Jews were often concubines and their children; they and their descendants were not well received by the congregation.

Outside of Rabbinic authorities in Amsterdam and the Ottoman Empire, there was no interest in issues relating to slavery. Spanish and Portuguese Jews in the New World looked to Amsterdam to resolve religious questions, and the authorities in Amsterdam recognized those in Safed, Istanbul and Salonica as their superiors. Given the myriad of challenges and dilemmas slavery should have brought to those seeking to establish a Jewish life in a New World, one would have expected that numerous questions would have been posed by Jews in places where African slavery was practiced to the Rabbinic authorities in Amsterdam and that the Amsterdam authorities would have conferred with those in the Ottoman Empire. There was, however, little rabbinic commentary or discussion on slavery in general, and still less on the kind of slavery that was practiced in Jodensavanne. There was some division of opinion as to whether Biblical and Talmudic law "to work them (the Canaanite slave) forever" (Lev 26:46) still applied. Those who argued against it adopted the legal fiction that the commandment applied only to the ancient Canaanites but not to slaves in their time. But most medieval and early modern legal authorities either held that the laws concerning Canaanite slaves were still operative or noted without disapproval that they were still practiced. There is also a biblical prohibition against kidnapping. (Ex 20:16). It should have been a logical extension to forbid the purchase of African slaves.

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JJ at Next Meeting

The next meeting of Kulanu will be especially exciting. It is planned for September 30, 2001, as a dairy potluck breakfast party for JJ Keki. JJ is an Abayudaya Jew from Uganda who is spending two months touring the US, singing and talking about Uganda's Jews. He will do the same for us from 10 am to 1 pm and then will go to the airport to return home, with lots of stories about the US. Please come out in force to hear him and give him a warm send-off!! The location is the Ratner Museum at 10001 Old Georgetown Road in Bethesda, MD. Directions: From 495, take the exit marked Old Georgetown Rd., and go North. After two blocks, turn right on Lone Oak Drive. The meeting is at the carriage house behind the main museum building. For information call 301-681-5679.

Avichail Leads Seminar for Bnei Menashe

Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail has put together a 3-month summer seminar program in Kfar Etzion, Israel. Some 20 to 25 Bnei Menashe students will undergo rigorous Hebrew and Judaic studies to prepare them to assume teaching roles among fellow members of their community. This is a crucial project that will significantly raise the level of Judaic and Hebrew knowledge among the Bnei Menashe, equipping them with the tools they need to better integrate into Israeli society. The total cost of the program is nearly \$100,000, which includes use of the facility, room and board for the students, salaries for the teachers, and purchase of books and supplies. Rabbi Avichail would very much appreciate any financial assistance that friends of the Bnei Menashe would be able to provide. Tax-deductible donations to Kulanu can be earmarked for this seminar program.

Abayudaya Preschool on the Internet

We recently received this note from Aaron Kintu Moses in Uganda: "This serves to inform you that I am on the Internet. My e-mail address is hadassahkintu@yahoo.co.uk. I would like to communicate to you more regularly than before. I shall be honored by a reply from you." Kintu Moses is the founder and headmaster of the new Hadassah Infant School that gives Abayudaya young folks a preschool taste of singing, reading, writing, story-telling, physical education, games, and arts and crafts in a Jewish setting. He would welcome hearing from Jewish preschool programs around the world.

Sephardic House and SCJS To Collaborate

Sephardic House has announced that it will be collaborating with The Society for Crypto Judaic Studies (SCJS), the Los Angeles-based research organization specializing in fostering research and networking of information and ideas regarding Crypto-Jews of Iberian origins. According to Art Benveniste, editor of "Halapid," the newsletter of the Society, "research into the archives of the Inquisition and of the Spanish colonial government has revealed that the first Spanish settlers in New Mexico were Jews fleeing the Inquisition. Today's Crypto-Jews of the Southwest are descendants of those settlers." Every year these issues are discussed, and ideas are presented at the Society's annual conference, which draws both scholars and the general public from across the globe.

Sephardic House (www.sephardichouse.org), located in New York, was founded at the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, home of Congregation Shearith Israel, the very first Jewish congregation in North America, founded in 1654. The organization's goals are

to research and promote Sephardic history and culture.

Together, Sephardic House and the SCJS will be collaborating to help those who consider themselves descendants of *anousim* families (also known as *Converso* descendants or Crypto-Jews) learn more about Jewish heritage. They will be developing a resource archive, as well as comprehensive frequently-asked-question lists (FAQs) in English, Spanish, and Portuguese for those interested in learning more.

An Ibero-Israel Conference

The Root & Branch Association held an "Ibero-Israel" conference on July 30 in Jerusalem. The conference chair was Schulamith C. Halevy, and the director of the sponsoring group was Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum. The one-day program began with Rabbi Dov Avraham Ben-Shorr's address on "Building Jewish Unity Between Sephardim, Mizrahim and Ashkenazim." Yitzchak Kerem spoke on "The Sephardic Diaspora Since 1492," and Dr. Claude Stuczynski on the hidden Jews of Belmonte, Portugal. Schulamith C. Halevy spoke on the Crypto-Jews in the Americas. The keynote address was delivered by Hon. Rodrigo X. Carreras Jimenez, ambassador of Costa Rica to Israel and Turkey.

Romaniote Family Trees Sought

Isaac Dostis, director of the museum of Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue in New York City, is on a mission to record as many Romaniote family trees as possible, since the Romaniote community is a dying branch of Judaism. (This community of Greek-speaking Jews from the Roman Byzantine Empire was featured in the last newsletter.) Dostis has traveled to Greece and Israel and various parts of America. He plans to be in Los Angeles in September looking for family trees and photos. He would like to hear from all Greek-speaking Jews. He can be reached at 973-316-1357 or c/o Kehila Kedosha Janina, Cooper Station, PO Box 72, New York, NY 10276. View the Romaniote web site at www.kehila-kedosha-janina.org

Summer Seminars Feature Kulanu Speakers

The Summer Symposium 2001 at the JCC of Greater Washington devoted a lecture series to "Jewish Communities Around the World." Its speakers read like a Kulanu Who's Who! Featured were Rabbi Tokayer on the Jewish experience in Japan and China, Stephen M. Berk on Polish Jewish communities, Kenneth X. Robbins on Jews in India, Clara Castelar on crypto-Jews of Brazil, Asher Naim on Ethiopian Jews, and Joab Keki on the Abayudaya of Uganda. The outstanding series was coordinated by Kandy Hutman.

"Shalom Y'all" Is Simulcast on The Internet

Yaffah Batya daCosta's "Shalom Y'all Radio Broadcast," which is heard on KSKY Radio in Dallas/Fort Worth, Texas, is now simulcast on the Internet at <http://www.ksky.com>. Just get on-line a few minutes before 4 pm (Central time) any Sunday afternoon.

Video on Lost Tribes Available

The video of Simcha Jacobovici's documentary film Quest for the Lost Tribes, is available for purchase. The video, which runs 1 hour 40 minutes, was broadcast last year by A&E cable channel. The

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cost is \$19.95 plus shipping and sales tax. To order, call A&E Video at 800-538-5856 or write to A&E Video, PO Box 2284, South Burlington, VT 05407, USA.

Web Site on Brazil's Jews

Brazilian *anous* Helio Daniel Cordeiro has a web site in Portuguese on Brazil's Jews. See www.judaica.com.br.

Cukierkorn Speaks in Iowa

Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, an authority on Brazil's crypto-Jews and the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda, spoke before a Dav-
enport, Iowa, congregation and its religious school, and was also the scholar-in-residence for their annual clergy meeting. He also delivered a lecture in Iowa City.

Kulanu's Web Page Thrives

In our last issue we reported that 22,000 lucky folks had visited Kulanu's highly praised web page at www.kulanu.org. Webmaster David Turetsky now reports that we are now approaching 50,000 visitors to the page!

Publications

Trefor Jenkins' "The Lemba People Solving a Genetic Puzzle" appeared in the March issue of *Arena*, an alumni magazine of the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. Thanks to Dr. Pauline Rabin, an alumna, for sending the article to us.

"The Secret Jews of New Mexico" by Seth Kunmin appears in the *Reform Judaism* Magazine of Summer 2001. Thanks to Judy Neri for pointing this out to us.

Mazel Tov

To **Wendy and Michael Sachs** on the birth of **Jonah Adam** in New York

"Ketzels Piano Piece" composed by **Moshe Cotel** and his cat, is

included on the recently-released Centaur label CD #CRC2511: *Purrfectly Classical*, which is devoted to cats and classical music.

To **Yaakov and Alex Gladstone** on the birth of their great-niece **Channah** in Toronto.

Todah Rabah!

To **Dr. Irving Moskowitz** for his \$5000 donation to Kulanu.

To **Harriet Bograd and Kenneth Klein** for their \$1000 contribution for the Ghana Jewish community.

To **Lois K. Levy** for her \$600 donation earmarked for the Kulanu treasury as well as Abayudaya education, the Lemba, the Bnei Menashe, and the Xalapa, Mexico community.

To **Irwin and Elaine Berg** for their \$500 donation to the Lorna Margolis Fund for Abayudaya Orphans Education Fund; Irwin also donated a \$100 honorarium he received for a talk at Congregation Beth Am in Teaneck, NJ.

To **Morris Feder** and to **Harold Alderman** for their \$500 donations.

To **Drs. Roz and Ed Kolodny**, who donated \$100 in honor of the 40th wedding anniversary of **Drs. Diane and Jack Zeller**.

To **Howard and Joann Girsh, Chaim Engelberg, and Todd Schubert**, members of the \$100 club.

To **Alan Moskowitz** for his \$150 donation for the Xalapa community, and for purchasing four years of newsletter subscriptions in advance!

To **Rabbi Henry Jay Karp** for his \$100 donation in honor of Rabbi Cukierkorn.

Refuah Shleimah

Our best wishes for a speedy and complete recovery to **Sam Daniel** and to **Abe Lavender**.

Condolences

To **Chaim Strauss** on the passing of his 100-year-old mother.

To **Irwin Berg** on the passing of his mother, **Blanche Berg**, (Braina bat Baruch Avraham v'Sarah).

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 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!

Soul Searching (cont.)

(Continued from page 9)

who had been kidnapped from their villages and homes, sold to white traders on the African coast and resold to plantation owners in the New World. The cruelty visited upon these Africans on slave ships had to violate the law to treat slaves humanely. Buying a slave who had been kidnapped and then transported on a slave ship should have raised issues of religious law.

The question posed at the outset -- namely, why did it befall these Portuguese Jews, former Marranos, to establish the only Jewish, slave-based, plantation economy in the Western World? -- has no satisfying answer. They were simply in the place and at the time when economic opportunities based upon slave labor arose, and they took advantage of them. They were sustained by their view that Jewish religious laws supported slavery without concern that the slavery they were practicing might not have been the slavery permitted by Jewish law. They chose not to test those views with rabbinic authorities, and the rabbinic authorities chose not to explore slave-related issues, which they were not forced to resolve. Moreover, no religious or moral authority in the world yet spoke out against slavery. It was not until world opinion changed that Rabbis spoke out against slavery -- and then only from a moral point of view, without extensive reference to Jewish law.

There is a Jewish saying that, from Moses (the lawgiver) to Moses the son of Maimon (the law codifier), no Moses arose in Israel to compare with the first Moses. Had the second Moses, Moses Mä-

No religious or moral authority in the world yet spoke out against slavery

monides, been living in the 17th or 18th centuries, he might have continued to seek to reform slavery by emphasizing the laws that required slaves to be treated humanely. However, what was needed was not a law codifier, but another Hillel, or another Gershon Me'or Ha-Golah, legal innovators who would recognize that chattel slavery was inherently harmful to the soul of both slave and master and therefore irredeemable, and who would have invoked every impediment to make its continuation impractical. It was not anyone's finest hour.

Ethiopian Jewry in Israel (cont.)

(Continued from page 8)

due to open shortly in several cities around Israel, including Beer-sheva, Safed, Ashdod, Jerusalem, and Haifa. The absorption centers will open in special residential buildings which have been rented and refurbished by the ministry of absorption, and they will be run by professional Jewish Agency teams.

Edelstein also said that he is working to settle the issue of mortgages for the Ethiopian *olim*, which will enable them to purchase apartments not only in development towns but also in established areas, which will significantly improve the absorption process.

Zandberg said that despite all the projections that aliyah from Ethiopia is coming to an end, the aliyah continues and the govern-

Roberto's Story (concluded)

(Continued from page 6)

his wife was also a Jew, he responded with the same affirmative. I said I was sorry for all the years of solitude and held his hand as he wept.

It is not possible for me to share with the world the intimacy of discovery and confirmation and its impact on the family. There are no words either for the expression and gestures of this man who lost his voice, but never his hope. They are forever embedded in my soul.

It is not possible for me to share
with the world the
intimacy of discovery

Meanwhile, his wife and daughter prepared a burial shroud for him, and my husband brought earth from Jerusalem. His wife became driven to uncover everything. She wanted me to ask more questions, asked what else I wanted to know, desperate to drag the memories out now. It turns out that her husband had discussed conversion to Judaism with her, and that he had done so with his son as well. He had visited synagogues, and tried to send his children to a Jewish school. Indeed his daughter from his first marriage attended a Jewish school for a while.

I visited Roberto as often as I could while I was in Mexico. Now that everything was in the open, and he knew that his family was united in its true identity, he stopped eating and began getting weaker. The last time I saw him, he was in the hospital again, and we both knew it was the end. I said goodbye, and made a few promises to him. Outside, his wife asked that I also bring some earth from Jerusalem for her next time I came. Two days afterwards he left us.

ment must prepare a long-term plan for absorbing the *olim*. Zandberg suggested initiating preparatory activity before the *olim* arrive, while they wait for confirmation of their entitlement in the temporary compounds in Addis Ababa and Gondar.

Abramovich reported that not all the local municipalities in which the Jewish Agency wishes to establish absorption centers have responded favorably or showed an understanding of the issue, and he expressed the hope that this situation would change in the near future. According to Abramovich, expanding the number of units in the absorption centers would continue until the number of new *olim* arriving in Israel each week balances with the number of veteran *olim* who are leaving the absorption centers and purchasing apartments.

Group To Visit Lost Tribe

By Stephen Epstein

Next February, when many people are thinking of skiing holidays or warm Florida vacations, a small adventurous group of people will be setting out to visit one of the Ten Lost Tribes on the only Jewish India tour that goes to the Bnei Menashe.

Tucked away in the Indian provinces of Manipur and Mizoram between Burma and Bangladesh is a group of people who have returned to Judaism after thousands of years.

The Bnei Menashe began to reconnect with Judaism in 1976 after leaders started looking at the early roots of Christianity. They soon realized that the reason their ancestors knew the Bible stories that missionaries told them before missionaries ever arrived in their area was because they carried the oral history with them from Israel. A careful study of their customs shows a history of performing *Brit Milah* on the eighth day after birth and numerous other Jewish customs.

Evidence shows that after the exile of the northern kingdom of Israel in 721 BCE, many Israelites made their way across the silk route, ending up in China. The Shinlung tribe, as they were also called in China, eventually migrated to Burma and northeast India, losing many of their Jewish customs along the way. Although their "leather scrolls" were destroyed, the Bnei Menashe still held on to their oral history and the poems describing their ancestors crossing the Red Sea and being led by a pillar of fire and a pillar of smoke. Since the areas are far off the beaten track of most tourists visiting India, and Manipur restricts foreign visitors, few Westerners have actually been able to visit the Bnei Menashe or their 30 synagogues.

Spirit of India, a California-based company started by Barbara Sansone, organizes tours to India and the Himalayas. "Spirit of India is a culmination of all that I have done before," states Barbara, who is also a former educator and magazine photographer. "I am able to use all my skills, resources and experiences to offer unique and exceptional journeys that are educational, cultural, spiritual and creative." Sansone has put together a unique tour to specifically visit the different Jewish communities of India.

Besides the Bnei Menashe, the group will visit Jewish sites in Bombay, Cochin, Calcutta and Alibag. Other highlights of the trip include a visit to a large rock that according to legend, has etched into its surface imprints from the chariot of Elijah the prophet as he ascended to heaven. Another stop will be the community of oil-pressers who are descended from the original Bene Israel ancestors that were shipwrecked off the coast of India at the time of the first Temple.

The tour group is limited to 18-20 people and was designed to avoid traveling on Shabbat. For additional information call 888-367-6147 or see the Bnei Menashe site at <http://www.bneimenashe.com>. For the trip itinerary, see <http://www.spirit-of-india.com>.

The Ugly Duckling (cont.)

(Continued from page 7)

lege. I had begun to explore other denominations, and at age 21 joined the Baptist Church, because it seemed different from the Roman and Byzantine Catholic churches of my youth. I decided to minor in religion simply to try to understand the Christian faith. I still had not had any real experience in my heart with Jesus, but I decided if I tried to become a minister, instead of a priest, he might be pleased and reveal himself, so I turned down a scholarship to law school and headed for a Baptist seminary in Louisville. After a year there, I was ordained by the Baptists to serve as a summer pastor at a small, rural church in southern Indiana, while the permanent pastor was leading youth camps out West. I still had not "met Jesus," as one was supposed to do, but I knew a lot about him, and I could always answer the questions posed to me theologically. I hoped I would eventually get to know Jesus, so I continued on trying to minister. However, no one was very much interested in me, and I could not find a church to take me as pastor. I decided to return to study law, and I got admitted at the University of Louisville Night Law School. Days I worked in the local courthouse as a secretary and later law clerk. I also sold real estate and worked selling costume jewelry part-time at flea markets with a partner. Having a minister's license, but without a pastorate, I made some fees by occasionally marrying people. All the while I studied religion assiduously. The Trinity and the Atonement as doctrines bothered me, but I could not find the answers that would satisfy me.

In 1977 I met the woman who would become my first wife. She was choir director in the Baptist Church I was attending. We married the next year, and she encouraged me to attempt to get back into ministry after I failed to pass the bar exam. I was unsuccessful with the Baptists but with her advice, I tried the Methodists, and they assigned me as assistant pastor in the Grande Valley of Texas, to which we moved. From that point I served 15 years as a Methodist minister. All the while I was still searching theologically.

By the mid-1980s I got transferred to Tennessee to allow my wife to work on a degree in sacred music. It was while doing continuing education at Vanderbilt University that I met Rabbi Randall Falk, senior rabbi at the Reform congregation in Nashville. He and I became friends after I attended a class he taught with a Methodist professor comparing Christianity and Judaism. I had already read some books on Judaism while learning to teach Old Testament in the Lutheran-developed Bethel Bible Series. Particularly helpful was Abba Hillel Silver's *Where Judaism Differed*, allowing me to understand the basis of Jewish as opposed to Christian thought. From that point, I was "hooked." I read everything I could about Judaism. I began to practice Judaism in my home. I bought a *tallit* and *yarmulke*. I bought the *Tanakh*. I celebrated the Jewish holidays. I bought a menorah. I joined a Jewish book club. It was too much for my Protestant wife, who objected. We long had marital difficulties, so she left me in 1991, taking our 9-year-old son with her and filing for divorce.

Alone, I continued Jewish study and practice. I was still pastoring, but my congregations were losing patience. I was teaching and preaching too much from the Old Testament. I married again in 1993, but my new wife was even more opposed than my first wife to my pursuing Judaism. She was very upset when I attended conversion classes at Temple Israel in Memphis after leaving the ministry to pursue a graduate degree in history in 1996. After consulting with Rabbi Micah Greenstein, I withdrew myself and tried to patch things up with my wife. It did not work, and we were divorced in 1998.

There followed a serious illness the next year, in which I almost lost my life. Saved by a doctor who was a (convert to Judaism) 16

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.*

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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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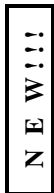
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Exciting Activity in Ghana

By Jack Zeller

Thanks to the work of several visitors to Ghana, and the ongoing efforts of Drs. Mike Gershowitz and David Borenstein, the Sefwi Wiawso Jewish community is taking shape so that our ability to interact with them is much improved. The Klein/Bograd family has just returned from a visit and helped set up a bank account, brought over a computer with Davka software, collected a list of the community leadership for different functions, set up a development fund, and lots more. Both Dr. Gershowitz and the Klein/Bograd family are actively working with the community so that the magnificent fabric designs of Ghana will be seen in tallitot, challah covers, kippot and many other Judaic articles. As has Dr. Gershowitz, the Klein/Bograd family is actively bringing in the support of their local congregation. Good will brought by our visitors has made more land available for agriculture. Liaisons are being made by many parties to find out how to take wild but rich land and make it productive so that the community can obtain self-sustainable Judaic development.

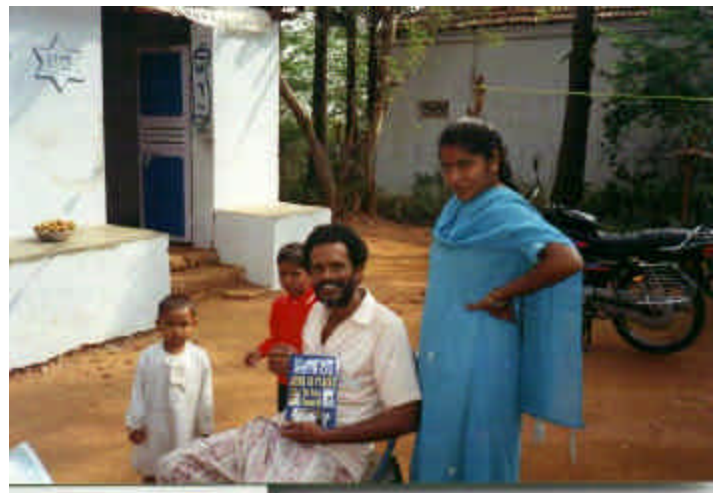
Everyone who visits tells me the same thing: what a radically amazing and joyful community. Nate Asher and Gabi Gershowitz spent the summer at Sefwi last year and are excellent sources of information. Margie Klein was there recently (see her article on page 1). Robin Pollens has also visited and we look forward to her account. We are also told that there have been other visitors but we are just not aware who they are. We welcome all.

Dr David Borenstein brought over short wave radio equipment in January and instruction manuals but did not have enough time to give sufficient hands-on lessons due to the need for better reception. As a result the equipment is underutilized. A better antenna is on the way this summer. We expect that problem will be short-lived because sooner rather than later we will have a Kulanu guest (maybe that is you) who will go over and give the "ham" radio lessons Dr. Borenstein did not get to finish!

For those who wish to communicate directly with the leadership of Sefwi Wiawso, the email address is ghanashalom@yahoo.com. There is no ISP access by phone from Sefwi Wiawso; many thanks to the Klein/Bograd family for trying and finding out that it is not possible. But members of the Sefwi community go to Kumasi, a city

nearby, about once a week for business and now know how to use the computer to receive and send mail. This is very exciting for everyone involved. Also, Harriet Bograd has started a list serve for Sefwi with a similar address called ghana-shalom@yahoo.com. This list is intended as a working group to help solve problems and facilitate communication and visits. It is not intended as a broad-based discussion group. If anything of wider interest comes on this small list, it will be posted to the larger Kulanu list by David Turetsky, our web master. To learn more about the Ghana-shalom group, please visit the new web site at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ghana-shalom>.

“The Book” in India



When British anthropologist Tudor Parfitt visited the Telugu-speaking Jews of Andhra Pradesh, India, he showed them an article about their community in Kulanu’s book Jews in Places You Never Thought Of. They were so delighted he gave them his copy of the book.

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NOTES FROM TURKEY

The Turkish Culture Ministry has announced that it will restore Bet-Ilker Synagogue in Izmir, which was built by the Jews who escaped from Spain, and turn the synagogue into a "Museum of Tolerance." The restoration will be done with the Jewish community.

Culture Minister Istemihan Talay noted that the Ottomans welcomed the Jews who escaped from the Inquisition in Spain in 1492 and offered them freedom of religion. He indicated that the Ottoman Empire offered shelter to Jews in a time when they were killed in all Europe.

The synagogue was decorated with pictures of the boats the Jews used to escape from Spain.

"Restoration of Bet-Ilker Synagogue, which is the first one built by the Jews who came to the Ottoman Empire, and turning it into a museum could constitute a good message for the whole world. This museum could prove that different religions could exist together," Talay commented.

* * *

As part of an archeological tour of eastern Turkey, Aron and Karen Primack visited a functioning synagogue in the ancient city of Antioch, near the Syrian border. Current membership of the synagogue is 70, down from 500 in the 1880s. Although the

congregation formed 500 years ago, causing the Primacks to assume that it was established by Sephardim, the caretaker,

Azra Cenudioglu, said that the founders came from Arab lands, particularly Aleppo, Syria, and present-day Israel.



Antioch Torahs

The ark contains eight Torah cases, one of which is empty. The visitors were shown the candles that congregants light, actually wicks in a pool of olive oil floating on water-filled glasses. Following a synagogue tradition, on erev Yom Kippur congregants place lighted candles in wire hangers that descend from a wire line that encircles the sanctuary.

The Ugly Duckling (concluded)

(Continued from page 13)

returned to Temple Israel and took the class a second time. There was no doubt I was going to convert, and I did so on March 10, 2000, taking the symbolic name Menashe Yosef. My experience in the mikveh pool was the most meaningful in my life. When I held in my hands the Torah Scroll from a congregation which had perished in the Holocaust, I felt I was filling empty shoes.

I had always felt some close affinity with the Jewish people. In 1969 I had been on an archaeological dig in Israel and had gone to the Western Wall to pray, pledging to God I would never declare anything but that God is One. When I said the *Sh'ma* for the first time as a Jew, I knew I was certainly and forever home. The "Ugly Duckling" had discovered what he was all along, and he had come home to his fellow Swans.

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Recycled Paper

Edited by Karen Primack

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