

KULANU

“all of us”



Helping Lost Jewish Communities
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Volume 10 Number 3

Autumn 2003

Lemba Convene Conference

By Ernest Nhandi (Sadiki)

(President's note: Prof. M.E.R. Mathivah, founder and first president of the Lemba Cultural Association, z"l, frequently lamented to me that the Lemba are widely scattered, so much so that they are perpetually out of contact with each other. This report by Ernest Nhandi Sadiki eloquently reflects the challenges facing the Lemba diaspora and that desire to be united despite various divides. The all-day conference was held in Sweetwaters, Venzaland, South Africa on September 13, 2003.)

The Conference, which had a carnival and glorious atmosphere with pomp and fun, opened with a procession to the Cultural Center Hall. The emotional procession was led by the Lemba drum majorettes.

The chaplain, W. M. Masala Mhani, prayed for a fruitful and memorable Conference and a good agricultural season as well. He welcomed all in attendance, acknowledging the attendance of the Zimbabwean delegation.

A five-minute musical interlude where traditional music, especially from Zimbabwe, was being played saw most of the Lemba women taking to the dance floor. Another interlude later in the day featured a number of thrilling acts by Lemba dancers and poets performing Lemba praises and praise songs.

Acting President S. E. Moeti Hamisi officially opened the Conference, clearly highlighting the theme, "We Salute Our Pioneers." The event was a posthumous tribute to the founding fathers of the Lemba Cultural Association -- Ishe M. M. Mutenda Hadzhi and Ishe Prof. M.E.R Mathivha Seremane. Poet after poet came to the podium to recite eulogies for the two leaders. Mutenda and Mathivha were viewed as a symbol of nationhood and resilience. Both men worked tirelessly for the good of the Lemba Nation and embarked on many distant voyages trying to bring all the Lembas together.

A new book on the Lembas was premiered at the Conference. Magdale Le Roux, a scholar with the University Of South Africa, chose the Lemba as her thesis subject, working in consultation with the late Prof. Mathivha and other Lemba elders. Le Roux was urged by Prof. Mathivha to make something out of that well-researched thesis, and as a result she finally wrote and published the book *The Lemba: A Lost Tribe of Israel in Southern Africa?*

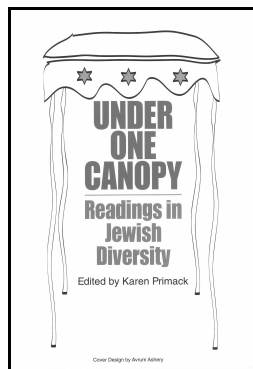
Speakers included Chief N .M Mpaketsane Mhani, Mulungu Hamandishe Zungunde and myself from the Zimbabwe delegation, elder Kgalushi Koka Seremane M. R. Mathivha, and General Secretary F. C. Raulinga Hamisi. Speeches emphasized preserving

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PERFECT FOR CHANUKAH!

Announcing Kulanu's Newest Book!

UNDER ONE CANOPY: Readings in Jewish Diversity was published in November by Kulanu. Edited by Karen Primack, it is a compilation of the works of over 50 poets, essayists, storytellers, and songwriters.



The 150-page paperback is a tribute to Jewish diversity by Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, African, and Asian writers. Proceeds from sales will benefit Kulanu's programs.

The book's Table of Contents and Introduction will be published on the Kulanu web page, www.Kulanu.org.

The book, which sells for \$15 (10 copies for \$100) is available at the Kulanu *(continued from page 1)*

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Sandro Halphen, Champion of the New Jews of Veracruz

By Max Amichai Heppner

Kulanu Regional Coordinator for Mexico

It's only been since the 1980s that Mexicans from Anous stock began to reflect seriously on their Jewish origins. People who wanted to explore formally reuniting with the Jewish world soon began meeting together.

One such group was organized in Veracruz, a seaside city on the Gulf of Mexico. There was no Jewish presence there at the time, so they approached the Jewish establishment in Mexico City. The only positive response they encountered was from Rabbi Samuel Lerer, one of two Conservative rabbis active in town. Soon Rabbi Lerer, an Israeli-born American citizen, spent much of his free time supporting the Veracruz group, which is now called Congregation Beth Shmuel, after the rabbi's Hebrew name.

While mentoring the Jews of Veracruz and doing conversions,

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The "Jewish Life in Uganda" Mitzvah Tour — See page 16

Thrilling Events in Miami

By Yaffah Batya DaCosta
Anousim Affairs Coordinator

Imagine yourself as the guest at *four* weddings under the *huppah*, all in one glorious day ... and not just four Jewish weddings, but the celebration of the renewal of wedding vows (according to Moses and Israel) of couples who have all re-joined the Jewish community after ages (and generations) apart. This is the story of the returning *Bnai Anousim* (descendants of the forced converts of Spain and Portugal of 500+ years ago), otherwise known as Crypto-Jews. It is a story of another dimension to the fulfillment of Bible prophecy, about the "re-gathering of the Children of Israel" in our modern day.

While the organization Amishav in Israel is having tremendous success with the Crypto-Jews of Spain, Portugal and Majorca, we here in the United States are faced with the joy and delight of helping to establish several centers of support for the Crypto-Jewish "returnees" in the Southeastern (Florida), the Southwestern (Dallas, Texas, for now) and possibly later in the Northwestern (Portland, OR) portions of the United States.



Yaffah DaCosta, center, with two happy couples

Sunday, September 14, 2003, was a very special scene in Miami, Florida, and for very special Jews in a Conservative synagogue called Temple Beit Tov Ahavah Israel. These four couples had gone through their formal conversion at this synagogue, and were now putting the final touches on a part of their process of

re-joining the Jewish fold. Rabbi Manuel Armon beamed from the *bima* as he pronounced the *Sheva Brachas* (Seven Blessings) for each couple.

In one ceremony, the couple's three sons helped to hold up the *huppah*. For another couple it was four male friends who had been invited to hold up the bridal canopy. The couples took their vows in turn, in the presence of the approximately 100 congregational members and invited guests. The singing of "*Siman Tov and Mazal Tov*" by the congregation and guests for each couple got stronger and stronger.

I was particularly impressed with the love, warmth and accep-

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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. This newsletter is published quarterly by Kulanu, 11603 Gilsan St., Silver Spring, MD 20902.

Orlando Anousim Complete Second Circle

By Max Amichai Heppner

In the Spring 2002 issue of the Kulanu newsletter, I wrote an article, "Completing the Circle," about the circuitous path to mainstream Judaism taken by a daring group of Anousim in Orlando. Starting with the faith of their fathers, they circled away during centuries of forced participation in Catholicism, and then took a further detour via Messianics who eventually seemed to falsely represent the lost faith of their forefathers.

Circles continue. Even though by some rabbinical standards they could merely resume their Jewish heritage, to avoid further detours, many families decided to go for formal conversion by an Orthodox route.

My main correspondent in the Kehila, Marshall Lopez, kept me up to date on their progress. For over a year, faithful members of the Kehila studied diligently with supervision four times a week via telephone conferences with helpful rabbinical tutors, such as Rabbi Yerachmiel Baruch Landy from New Jersey. As Marshall put it, "Rabbi Landy was instrumental in putting everything together for our conversion. His instruction and encouragement went far beyond what I would expect any rabbi to do for us."

Rabbi Landy came to Hollywood, Florida, to help perform the ceremony and worked together with modern Orthodox rabbis Edward Davis and Yaakov David Hominick from Young Israel of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, who organized a conversion ceremony for the first eight members of Kehilat Beit Israel on September 25.

"We did the whole nine yards," said Marshall when he telephoned Kulanu immediately afterwards to share the good news. "We went to the mikveh, we had the ceremony, and in addition, two couples were married all over again, Jewish style, complete with ketubah. That was our leader, Yosef Mont and his wife Hana, and me and my wife Elsa."

Another group of adults and their children who studied for conversion were to have been converted in Hollywood shortly after the high holidays. Meanwhile, they celebrated their new status along with the High Holidays in quarters rented at a Kosher restaurant-based minyan near Disney Village in Orlando!

Said Marshall Lopez: "What a wonderful way to enter a New Year and get a fresh start. And guess what? We now have Hebrew names. My wife is now Aliza. And you can now call me Moshe ben Levi."



The author, left, with Yosef Mont last year

Introducing Bahalachin

By Karen Primack

In 1996 Solomon (Shlomo) Akale founded the organization Bahalachin--The Ethiopian Jewish Heritage and Cultural Center. He created Bahalachin in Israel, as a response to difficulties his fellow Ethiopian immigrants were having in their new land.

In August, he was in the US, introducing his organization to officers of various Jewish organizations in a few cities, including Kulanu officers in Washington.

Akale studied political science at Bar Ilan University and worked for the Ministry of Absorption for seven years, until 1993. Born in an Ethiopian village, he was educated in Gondar. He is quick to acknowledge that he had many advantages being educated in a city like Gondar, noting that many of his fellow Jews stayed uneducated, in rural villages, to avoid assimilation. It is these former villagers who have the most difficulty with absorption in Israel.

While working at the ministry, Akale noticed how drastically family structures in Ethiopia and Israel differed. In Israel, he elaborated, children live in dorms and are busy with activities. Elders have no authority, and there is tension between children and elders over traditional values. Youths sometimes get involved with drugs and end up in jail.

Akale formed Bahalachin (the word is Amharic for "Our Culture") in Tel Aviv as a multi-faceted center. One unit is devoted to family counseling by elders. He said 4000 couples, many seeking divorces, were served at the center, and 80 percent were able to settle their differences. He observes that the program saves the Israeli Government money.

An education department presents lectures and workshops to inform both Israelis and Ethiopians (and other newcomers) about each other's culture. A genealogy unit preserves family histories on computerized records. Noting that his father can recite by memory 24 generations of his family tree, Akale is trying to get personal histories from Ethiopian elders before they die out, but he laments that he has only one staff person for this pressing work. The center's small but important library is the largest resource and archival center in Israel on the Beta Israel. There is also a documentation project, which preserves the oral culture maintained by the community's elders, mostly through audiovisual recording.

A branch of Bahalachin in Ethiopia will collect Beta Israel documents and holy books that are currently in the possession of churches, monasteries, and some individuals. This work is pressing, since some religious and historical places are being desecrated and destroyed by local farmers.

An important part of Bahalachin is its folklore performance group, for many reasons. The project teaches young Ethiopians about their rapidly-vanishing culture, and bolsters their self-respect and self-confidence. The troupe also introduces non-Ethiopians (it performed in Paris as well as Israel) to the beauty of the Beta Israel culture, smoothing over tension and prejudices.

Akale is interested in putting together a performance tour for the troupe in the US. Interested JCCs and other organizations can contact him at bahal@netvision.net.il. The center's web site (in Hebrew), www.bahalachin.org.il, has further information. Bahalachin has received a \$500 from Kulanu.

Lost and Found: Ecuadorian Conversos

By Ed Samiljan

On a Friday last June, my wife Rae and I and three Ecuadorian families gathered around the kitchen table in Zapotillo, a small town in Ecuador near the Peruvian border. Two of the three families had traveled for hours from distant towns to meet us at the home of the third family. Rae and the three mothers recited the Shabbat prayer over the candles (the sun sets in Ecuador every night at 6:30 p.m.) First, Rae chanted the prayer and then the women and children repeated the prayer word by word. I chanted the Kiddush over kosher wine I had carried 5000 miles in a plastic water bottle. The men and the children repeated after me word by word. Eloy Torres, the leader of a new organization called Ben Levi-Loja, recited the *motzi* over two beautifully braided challahs baked by the ladies in Zapotillo. In my cracking voice I sang "Shabbat Shalom" with vigorous hand clapping. The kids and the adults joined right in.

Rae and I had traveled from San Diego to visit a few families in Ecuador of ancient Jewish descent. Five hundred years following the Inquisition and the conversion of their ancestors, they were seeking actively their Jewish roots.

Six years earlier, my curiosity about the descendants of the *Conversos* who fled Spain and Portugal during the Inquisition was



Rae and Ed Samiljan with Ecuadorians

aroused by readings of the history of the period. Many *Conversos* had escaped to South America, Central America and Mexico. At that time, by coincidence, Rae and I were traveling in the Galapagos Islands and Ecuador. Our guide told us stories about Caucasian people in the mountains who dressed like the indigenous and spoke Spanish, but did not speak Quechua, the native language. To me it appeared more than coincidental.

I returned to Ecuador a year later to investigate the background of these mysterious people with Rabbi Arthur Zuckerman, David Wollner, Andy Loeb and Dr. Barry Reder, all from the San Diego area. On mules, we rode up to the villages of Huasipamba and Pucara at altitudes of 12,000 to 14,000 feet in the mountain range called the Cordillera. Later, we traveled to the city of Loja and the town of Zaruma in an attempt to find historic trails and examples of living persons who could trace their ancestry back to the *Conversos*. We found evidence that at one time *Conversos* had been

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KULANU BRIEFS

New at Kulanu

Kulanu welcomes **Ed Samiljan** as its new Coordinator for Ecuador, **Rabbi J. Hershy Worch** as Coordinator for Pashtun Affairs, and **Emily Chaya Weinstein** as new Coordinator for Volunteers. *Yasher koach!* Also, please note Kulanu's new fax number: 301-593-1911.

Help Wanted: Volunteer professional grant writer needed to help research and write foundation grants for improving education in world Jewish communities. Please contact: Laura Wetzler, Kulanu Coordinator for Uganda, at laura@laurawetzler.com.

Siddurim for Belmonte

Kulanu recently purchased and sent 100 Portuguese-Hebrew siddurim to the Jewish congregation in Belmonte, Portugal. The siddurim were purchased in Brazil with the help of Alan Tigay, Emily Taitz, and Harriet Bograd, and under the auspices of Saudade Sefarad. Rabbi Elisha Salas issued this expression of appreciation: "On my behalf and on behalf of our whole community, I thank all who collaborated in this enormous work of disseminating our spiritual and cultural values and in bringing our brothers close to our heart, the heart of the people of Israel. Little by little, we come closer to the Light and we find the way getting easier, thanks to your company and to the all the acts of love and friendship that we receive from all parts of the world, and for that we thank God and you, our friends and brothers."

Abayudaya Film Debuts on TV

The Hallmark cable television channel presented *Moving Heaven and Earth* to a national US audience on October 5. The documentary by Debra Gonsler Vinik and David Vinik portrays the daily and religious life of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda and the convening of a Beit Din in Uganda in February 2002 that converted over 300 members of the community. Aaron Leibel of the *Washington Jewish Week* wrote that he was skeptical at first, but found the story "truly amazing," "moving," and "overpowering." Writing about the film on the eve of Yom Kippur, Leibel wrote, "I am in awe of the Abayudaya commitment... their resolution to live Jewish lives puts my efforts to shame."

Two Notable New CDs

Abayudaya: Music From the Jewish People of Uganda is a new collection of Ugandan-Jewish music. Compiled by ethnomusicologist Rabbi Jeffrey Summit and produced by Smithsonian Folkways, it includes lullabies, political and children's songs, religious rituals, hymns and celebratory music with song texts in Hebrew, English, and several Ugandan languages. The CD includes a detailed booklet on the songs, history and the culture, with a web page with all of the songs lyrics, both in local languages and translation. We'll have more information in the next newsletter.

A Jewish community in the Brazilian Amazon released a CD of Jewish prayers in Hebrew and Ladino. *Jewish Singing in the Amazon* was produced and sung by Isaac Chazan, cantor of the community in Manaus. The CD was sponsored by the Brazilian Israelite Confederation, the umbrella organization of Brazilian Jewry. In Rio de Janeiro, the CD was launched in a concert of 600

people.

Jewish Stories for Families

One People, Many Stories is a new 6-CD set of over 30 international Jewish stories for family listening. The stories originated in such locales as Eastern Europe, Algeria, Iran, Yemen, Russia, and Iraq. Readers include such celebrities as LeVar Burton, Henry Winkler, Darryl Hannah, and Anne Meara. Orders can be charged by phone toll-free at 1-866-800-BOOK. Or buyers can send a check for \$54 to Jewish Community Library of Los Angeles, 6505 Wilshire Blvd. #150, Los Angeles, CA 90048.

IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy

The Israel Genealogical Society invites proposals from potential speakers for the 24th IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy, to be held on July 4-9, 2004, in Jerusalem. English will be the official language of the conference; a number of lectures will be presented in Hebrew with simultaneous translation into English. For areas of interest, proposal guidelines, and other information, visit the conference website at <http://www.ortra.com/jgen2004>. Deadline for submission of abstracts is December 31, 2003.

Latin American Jewish Studies Association Research Conference

The Latin American Jewish Studies Association (LAJSA) announces its 12th International Research Conference, to be held at Dartmouth College in New Hampshire June 26-29, 2004. The conference, co-sponsored by the Jewish Studies Program at Dartmouth, will explore the transmission of Latin American Jewish experience across generations. The Association invites paper, panel, and workshop proposals that approach the conference theme from a variety of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. Presentations may be made in any of the conference's three languages: English, Spanish, and Portuguese. Specific details will appear on the LAJSA website, <http://www.acad.swarthmore.edu/lajsa/>. Queries about program topics can be directed to the Program Committee Chair, Rosa Perelmuter, at rpperelm@email.unc.edu.

The Reputation of Barros Basto

Amishav director Michael Freund has initiated a worldwide effort to rehabilitate the name and reputation of Captain Arthur Carlos de Barros Basto, a decorated World War I Portuguese army officer who also became a Jewish hero. In 1920 Barros Basto, whose Jewish ancestors became Crypto-Jews during the Portuguese Inquisition, formally return to Judaism. He also inspired thousands of other Bnai Anousim to return to their Jewish religion and was instrumental in establishing a yeshiva, a Jewish newspaper, numerous books on Judaica, and the beautiful Mevor Haim synagogue in Oporto. In fact, he was so successful that a priest brought false charges of moral debauchery against him. Although the charges were dropped for lack of evidence, he was expelled from the army, publicly humiliated, and thwarted in his almost-successful attempt to establish a Jewish renaissance in Portugal.

KULANU BRIEFS

Anousim Resource Web Site and List

Located at <http://www.cs.tau.ac.il/~nachumd/sch/sch/anousim.html>, this new web site contains a section about modern rabbinic responses to returning Anousim. Hosted by Schulamith Halevy, the site also has information about conversion and return, an official return certificate (in Hebrew), articles on the Inquisitions and new world Crypto-Judaism, and the Alhambra decree of expulsion letter.

Olve Utne, a member of Saudades-Seferad, recently started a List for those interested in learning about Sephardic rituals and traditions. Contact NetEsnoga@yahoo.com.

Exhibits of Note

A new exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, "Members of the Tribe? Frederic Brenner's Photographic Odyssey: A Portrait of Jewish Diversity" extends through January 11. It contains 140 images of Jews from all corners of the Diaspora, photographed over a 25-year period.

Through December 31, the American Sephardi Federation hosts a free exhibit "Integrated and Distinct: Images of the Jews of Greece, 1880-1930," displaying clothing, photographs, textiles, synagogue items, and documents. For information: 212-294-8350.

A Traveling Rabbi

Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn of Kansas City traveled to Mexico City recently to explore the city's Jewish history, to perform some conversions to Judaism, and to promote his Spanish-language book, *Hamadrich: A Guide to the Values and Practices of Modern Judaism*. He performed conversion ceremonies for 10 individuals with whom he had previously carried on long-distance, electronic conversations about their desire to become Jews and their knowledge of Judaism. One father and son came from Ecuador to be converted.

A New Resource

Nextbook, a new project to promote Jewish cultural literacy for Jews and non-Jews, encourages the reading of Jewish authors in secular (rather than Judaic) libraries. www.Nextbook.org lists Kulanu as a library resource, along with others such as Hebrew University.

Sharansky Hosts Anousim

There was only one response to a request by Amishav director Michael Freund that Israel government ministers host Bnai Anousim in their homes for Rosh HaShanah. Natan Sharansky, Minister of Diaspora and Jerusalem Affairs, hosted *Anousim* Yoel Loyo and Luanna Spinoza, a young couple who study at Machon Miriam. Loyo and Spinoza arrived in Israel nine months ago from Mexico, to which their ancestors had emigrated after leaving Spain.

Speakers Spread the Word

Rabbi Marvin Tokayer will speak at a Chanukah Weekend Study Retreat in Leesburg, Virginia, on December 21-22. His topic will be "East Asian Jews: China, Japan, India." For information phone 301-770-4787 or see www.foundationjewishstudies.org.

An evening of Contemporary Poetry and Prose in Ladino was

held November 12 at Beit HaSofer in Tel Aviv, featuring poets **Michal Held** and **Eliezer Papo** and the poetry of Anousim poets Arnau Ponce and Isabelle Medina Sandoval. Musical accompaniment was provided by Ladino singer **Ofri Eliaz**, with introductions by **Schulamith Chava Halevy**.

Rabbi Samuel S. Lerer of San Antonio, Texas, was the keynote speaker at the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies conference on August 3. Ordained in Jerusalem in 1935 by Chief Rabbi Abraham Isaac Hacoen Kook, Lerer served the Beth Israel Community Center in Mexico City for over 31 years. During that time, he prepared and converted about 3000 non-Jews to Judaism, about half of whom were Crypto-Jews returning to their ancestral faith.

Dr. Janet Jacobs, Professor of Sociology and Senior Scholar in Women's Studies at the University of Colorado in Boulder, lectured on Secret Jews and Contemporary Culture on October 15 at Florida International University's Institute for Judaic and Near Eastern Studies. The talk was based on her book, *Hidden Heritage: The Legacy of the Crypto-Jews*.

Our Abayudaya visitor, **Rachel Namudosi Keki** spoke at numerous forums in Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Florida. Among these was a public Kulanu meeting on October at the newly-relocated Bnai Klutznick National Jewish Museum in Washington, DC.

Los Caminos de Israel (The Paths of Israel) <www.loscaminosdeisrael.com> hosted a conference on Judaism October 26 in Miami. Speakers, one of whom was Kulanu's **Yaffah DaCosta**, covered such topics as what Judaism offers the world, how one converts to Judaism, how to trace one's genealogy, why Jews don't believe in Jesus, and who the Anousim ("Marranos") are.

Emily Chaya Weinstein presented a slide talk about the Abayudaya on October 19 at Congregation Kehillat Chaverim in White Plains, NY. And she was joined by **Rabbi Howard Gorin** for a presentation about the Abayudaya at Adath Israel of Riverdale, NY, on October 26. Weinstein presented yet another slide talk about her year in Africa at Project DOROT in New York City.

Richard Sobol and **Rabbi Jeffrey A. Summit** gave a multimedia lecture about the Abayudaya at the 92nd Street Y in New York City on November 2.

"Jews of Color Speak Out" was the title of a conference held on October 30 at the Manhattan JCC. Moderated by **Ruth Messinger**, it featured talks by **Rabbi Angela Warnick Buchdahl**, **Yavilah McCoy**, **Jeremy Burton**, and **Jessica Radin**.

Mazal Tov!

Rabbi Leo Abrami's essay on Jewish humor, "It's Not a Joke," was just published in a new book entitled *Best Jewish Writing 2003*, edited by Arthur Kurzweil, Jossey-Bass. Among other selected writers for this volume are Elie Wiesel and Alan Dershowitz. Abrami's essay presents a psychoanalytical interpretation of Jewish humor, with many classical and some original illustrations.

Rabbi Scott and Sharon Glass announce the birth of their first grandchild, **Gavriella Shoshanah**, born in August to **Ann and James Lapin**.

Stevy Epstein has inaugurated a new web site. www.Ponkawonka.com was created to fill a need for religious

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Thrilling Events in Miami (cont.)

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tance of these Crypto-Jews by this congregation. Returning Crypto-Jews in some cases have to contend with suspicion, or a lack of concern (and/or lack of understanding), or even outright hostilities toward them in various communities around the country. This is why I have made myself available to give lectures on this entire history and phenomenon of our people to both Jewish and Christian audiences around the United States. We need to help people to understand that the Crypto-Jews never really accepted the "forced conversion" of our ancestors. In other words, the Crypto-Jews were never TRULY Christian under Jewish law. And Crypto-Jews have always been in their heart-of-hearts "different" from the Christians, and very loyal to the customs and traditions of our own people.

But here in Miami, at this very special congregation, the members had made these Hispanic (Sephardi) Jews not only feel welcomed, but also feel a part of their "congregational family." What a joy and delight to behold this phenomenal acceptance and love. What a sigh of relief could now be released from the souls of those longing/pining to be accepted, finally, as Jews.

One of the leaders of the congregation told me about the first time a young Crypto-Jewish family attended this shul with a little baby. During the Torah reading the baby cried, and many of the people looked around at one another and "smiled" with satisfaction that young people were again attending their services. What a great boon and benefit it will be to the Jewish world when Crypto-Jews start to return in larger numbers (provided we can overcome the hurdles), and accelerate the restoration to the Jewish community of those who have been "outsiders" -- not by choice, but only by the circumstances of the historic persecution and slaughter (attempted genocide) of Israel by the nations.

It was also my great *mazal* (fortune) to meet Dr. Avraham Lavender, a member of this congregation, who just recently was

voted the new president of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies. We spoke at some length about the work of Kulanu (within the *Anousim* USA portfolio) to help the descendants of the forced converts to make their arduous journey back and to "re-integrate" into the Jewish community (either through a traditional conversion process or a "return" process). I hope that Kulanu and the Society can do some projects together, perhaps investigating the veracity of mitochondrial DNA testing as yet another form of "evidence" that Crypto-Jews can use in the defense of claims of Jewish ancestry.

We need to do more educational work to reduce the many unfounded suspicions and hostilities; to increase the acceptance of our returnees within the Jewish community-at-large and at the same time convince the Christian community that we are not stealing congregants from their fold. True love for Israel will some day be reflected in the Christian community, and applauded by the Jewish community, by Christians helping and supporting the Crypto-Jews. As a people, Crypto-Jews never should have lost their religious freedom, and they need to make *tikkun* (a correction) by returning to where they belong as Jews, with the same freedom to worship God according to the Hebrew Bible.

Meanwhile, I applaud those Jewish congregations, rabbis and organizations all over the United States that are performing the great mitzvah of reaching out today to the *Bnai Anousim* returnees. They are demonstrating what true *Torah Judaism* is all about -- expressing *Chesed* (loving-kindness), *Tzedek* (righteousness) *U'Mishpat* (and justice) toward the Crypto-Jews, who as a people have suffered in silence, disconnected from the mainstream Jewish world, for so long.

Working Together for the Portuguese Bnai Anousim

By Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausebaum

I am delighted to announce that there will be a second Conference-Tour to Portugal in the spring of 2004. But before I get to that (see the final two paragraphs), let me bring readers up to date.

The Saudade Sefarad organization originally began in 1996 with a web site, <www.saudades.org>, for people looking for their Portuguese-Jewish roots. This in turn led to a Forum, called Saudades-Sefarad, a private discussion list for descendants of forced converts interested in asking questions relating to Jewish history, traditions, and rituals. More than 650 participate in this Forum, and a large percentage of our members are interested in returning to Judaism; some have already returned, and many more are interested in learning about our shared Portuguese-Jewish heritage.

In June 2002 we had our first Conference-Tour to Portugal, jointly sponsored by Saudades, Kulanu, and Root & Branch. On this memorable trip, we walked in the footsteps of our ancestors and made contact with many of the Saudades Bnai Anousim members who are wanting to rejoin normative Judaism. We celebrated our Jewish heritage with the community of Belmonte, who had returned to normative Orthodox Judaism in the 1990s after living for 500 years in secrecy. Many of us were moved to tears as we sang "*Am Yisrael Chai*" (the people of Israel lives), as this was indeed a cele-

bration of our survival.

It was on this moving trip that a few of us, inspired by this unique community, decided to continue our friendship. This gave birth to Saudade Sefarad, an international, non-governmental organization founded by volunteers to assist the Belmonte and Bnai Anousim communities of Portugal in returning to normative Sephardic Judaism, as well as other community projects to help strengthen and improve knowledge of our Sephardi traditions. The American Sephardi Federation serves as a non-profit, 501(c)(3) umbrella agency for Saudade Sefarad donors and grantors, facilitating the acceptance of gifts and funds. (Donations can be sent directly to the American Sephardi Federation, 15 West 16th Street, New York, NY 10011, with a notation on the check that the donation is for the Belmonte Project.)

Our new organization has undertaken the sponsorship for one of the young sons of Belmonte to attend the yeshiva of the Sephardic Education Center in Jerusalem for rabbinical training for a period of three years. Yosef João Mendes Rodrigo left Portugal to start his studies in August 2003.

In addition, Saudade Sefarad has worked together with Kulanu to provide Portuguese-Hebrew siddurim for the Belmonte congregation and with Amishav to send Rabbi Elisha Salas to serve the Belmonte and Porto Jewish communities. We also have an ongoing project to supply mezuzot and computers to Belmonte.

KULANU BRIEFS (cont.)

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images. Ponkawonka's photographers searched the world for photographs from all religions. Epstein's archive of over 500,000 religious images is available to publications and individuals. He can be contacted at info@ponkawonka.com.

Refuah Shleyma

Zvi Feldman, recuperating in Quebec, Canada.

Yosef Harr-Ell recovering in Beth Shemesh, Israel.

Todah Rabah!

To **Debbie Susman** and **Camp Yavneh** in New Hampshire, for providing such a warm welcome and invaluable experience for Rachel Namudosi Keki as a camp counselor last summer.

To **Diana Altman** and the **B'nai B'rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum** for hosting and co-sponsoring the October 2 Kulanu meeting in Washington. We welcome future collaborations!

To **Rachel Segal**, who sent two mail-bags of religious books to Remy Ilona in Nigeria. Ilona is happily busy sorting and distributing them to Jewish congregations, Israelite discussion clubs, and Hebrew language clubs in Nigeria.

To **Rabbi Mel Glazer** and **Beth David Congregation** in Miami for donating and sending siddurim to our communities in Nigeria. And to **Rabbi Dan Alder** and the **Brotherhood Synagogue** in

White Plains, NY, and **Richard Sobol** and **Temple Isaiah** in Lexington, MA, for their noteworthy success in raising funds for Abayudaya education and welfare projects.

To the students at **Temple Beth Torah** in Melville, NY, who wrote letters to Abayudaya pen-pals as part of an educational project.

To **Judy Neri**, whose \$300 contribution in memory of her aunt, **Lucy Nussbaum**, a Holocaust survivor, will help a young Abayudaya woman pursue her education or a career.

To **Steven Goldstein** for marketing Abayudaya CD's to the Museum of Jewish Heritage Museum Shop in New York.

To **Ralph Shapiro**, who has donated and sent four copies of his new book to Kulanu communities abroad. The book is *Jewish History: 4,000 Years of Accomplishment, Agony, and Survival*.

Grants: \$6,200 from **The Madav IX Foundation**; \$2,000 from **Aleene & Mortimer Smith**; \$700 from **Aid to Artisans** for the Abayudaya Women's Association.

Donations in honor of Rachel Namudosi Keki: \$400 from **Rabbi Robert Scheinberg**; \$400 from **Deborah Sussman**; \$350 from **Conservative Synagogue of Jamaica Estates**; \$300 from **Rabbi Tamar Crystal**; \$300 from **Little Neck Jewish Center**; \$300 from **Maayan Conservative**; \$300 from **Temple Beth El**; \$300 from **Temple Shalom**; \$300 from **Rabbi David Weizman**.

Gifts \$150 - \$350: **Henry & Shirlye Birnbrey**; **Howard Entin**; **Ruby M. Saks**; **Cathy Klein**; **Edmund & Joanne Birnbrey**; **Frank Family Foundation**; **National Center to Encourage Judaism**; **Jean and Ben Schreiber** (in honor of **Amichai Heppner**); **Carla Singer**; **Jeffrey Snow**; **Sandra Reynolds** (in honor of **Yaffah DaCosta**)

The \$100 club: **Jonathan Marshall**, **David & Karen Birnbrey**, **Rabbi Tamar Crystal**, **Rabbi Shoshana Hantman**, **Lee Kresses**, **Robert & Jeri Lande**, **Marshall Lopez**, **Robert & Judith Miller**, **Janet & Sidney Quint**, **M. E. Robkin**, **Barbara Ellison Rosenblit**, **Dr. Norman Weiss**, and **Rabbi Mark Zimmerman**.

Condolences

Rabbi William Raphael Tate died in August, and over 600 Jews, Christians and Muslims attended his funeral in Brooklyn, NY. Active in the union movement for most of his life and a community leader in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Tate and his wife Jeanette converted to Judaism in 1952, when he co-founded B'nai Zaken in Brooklyn. In the 1980s he became a member of the Beth Shalom Congregation, and was ordained a rabbi in 1997 by Rabbi Yhoshua Ben Yehonatan. In recent months, he became an active and outspoken member of the New York local board of the International Israelite Board of Rabbis.



Ilona, left, distributing books in Nigeria

New York City for sending 300 *machzorim* to the Abayudaya. And to **Loudoun Jewish Congregation** in Leesburg, VA, for donating a carton of tallitot to Kulanu for an overseas community.

To **Tifereth Israel Congregation** in Washington, DC, whose Kol Nidre basket of pocket-emptying donations went to "Kulanu and other organizations that strengthen Jewish families and communities."

To **Roberta M. Roos** and **Woodlands Community Temple** in

LETTERS TO KULANU

In Appreciation of Rachel

We want to express our deep gratitude to Kulanu for allowing Rachel Namudosi Keki to be our guest speaker on a recent Shabbat. Our community was so moved to meet her and to hear about her community, and its distinctive history and challenges. Rachel is a truly outstanding speaker and teacher, and we love hearing her sing as well! The story of the Abayudaya community is so inspiring - and it provides an appropriate challenge to American Jews who often take our Jewish identity for granted. It was also wonderful for our community to meet Laura Wetzler, who came to our Friday night program, and early travelers to the Abayudaya community Matt Meyer and Ken Schultz, who joined us at services on Shabbat morning.

Our community is very interested in becoming more involved with the Abayudaya community. In addition to financial contributions, we have started to make inquiries into a pen-pal project, as well as providing a number of items on the "Abayudaya wish list."

Many thanks to you for the extraordinary work of Kulanu, which touches the lives of so many.

*Rabbi Robert Scheinberg
United Synagogue of Hoboken, NJ*

A New Rite for Returnees?

I've heard several times now that the Bnai Anousim, descendants of forced converts, do not feel that they should be required to convert since they really always belonged to Judaism. That contention is backed up by history. Rashi, the great French Jewish sage of the Middle Ages (d. 1105), said "*Yisrael, af al pi sh'het, Yisrael hu.*" That means that even though he has sinned (by not observing the commandments) a Jew remains a Jew. He wrote that in the context of a question regarding whether Jews should treat a convert as if he was Jewish.

A few centuries later, reacting to the massive forced conversions of the Sephardim, the Jewish community felt that some ceremony was needed for those who had practiced Catholicism for a long time and wanted to return, but it was not a full conversion to Judaism (which was actually outlawed in most of Europe). They performed a ceremony of *tevilah*, dipping in a mikveh and rubbing their foreheads with sand. This was to symbolically erase the sign of the cross that had been made with holy water on the forehead of the New Christian. The ceremony was basically secret, as Christians considered it a desecration, but there are some historical records of it. Maybe a ceremony of that kind can be revived for the Bnai Anousim. Rights of passage can be satisfying, even if not legally necessary.

*Emily Taitz
Great Neck, New York*

Feeling at Home with Kulanu

What I have found most attractive about Kulanu is its welcoming attitude. Our common interest is in facilitating identification with the Jewish people. We activists represent the full range of Jewish religious belief, from Sephardic to Orthodox to humanistic to secular. The "lost Jewish communities" are encouraged to identify with the Jewish people, regardless of the form of religious practice they adopt. Kulanu was the only Jewish organization that re-

sponded when I sought support for Muslims in Timbuktu who wished to embrace their Jewish ancestry. Yet it also supports Orthodox conversions for those who wish it. We should be proud of our association with a group whose principles are to make both its partner groups and its members feel at home in the Jewish world.

*Rick Gold
Arlington, Virginia*

Awakening & In-Gathering of The Ibos

On Friday and Saturday, August 30th and 31st of 2003, a historic event took place on the small island of St. Simons, Georgia, which is located about 70 miles south of Savannah. A Chicago-based group of Nigerians from the Ibo tribe, called together Nigerians and all others from Canada to Haiti and all points in between, to come to the place on St. Simons Island known as Ibo Landing.

The Chicago-based organization *Ekwe Nche*, which is in the Ibo tongue "A Clarion Call," called this historic event on St. Simons Island to mark the sanctification of the place where 13 Ibo men cast themselves into the sea rather than live as slaves. It is said that these 13 men locked arms together and jumped into the sea, to the great surprise and dismay of their captors. The Ibo Landing event was held to acknowledge the heroism of these 13 brave men and to give their spirits a proper and fitting memorial through an ecumenical service that was attended by several religious groups. As part of the event, Mr. Bruce Dan Judah Carey presented a paper on the history of the Ibo, Ndi, Igbo and the Hebrew people. Bruce's paper was both insightful and scholarly as he showed the connection between the Ibo people and their ancient Hebrew ancestors. Bruce detailed the various customs of the Ibo that are strikingly similar to the customs of the ancient Hebrews, which include circumcision of their males on the eighth day after birth, abstention from pork and shellfish, the concept of rest from labor on the seventh day, and observance of a day called *Yomora Kippura* in early fall.

Okpala Eze Nri Chukwemeka I. Onyesoh, who represented the High Priest of Ibo Land, gave a powerful lecture on the conditions of the Ibo people under the current government of Nigeria. He wore a red kippah with an eagle feather and a tallith with 613 fringes, which is the garment worn by all Ibo priests when they officiate at a cultural ceremony. I found the attire of Eze Nri striking, because, I was wearing a kippah and I wore my tallith; the only difference was that the Eze Nri wore his tallith vertically, while we Jews wear our tallith horizontally.

I was invited to speak, and I could only compare what I was witnessing to a true awakening of Ibo people to their Hebraic cultural roots. As I thought about why we were in St. Simons Island, Georgia, my mind returned to an episode in Jewish history concerning the Jews at Massadah who, in 73 BCE, cast themselves from the walls of their fortress rather come under the control of the Roman Empire. I was inspired by the history of the 13 Ibo men, who were led by a chief of the Ibo nation to revolt and become martyrs rather than slaves. My mind and spirit were led to the song by James Weldon Johnson "Lift Every Voice and Sing", in which the writer says in the last verse "Let us be true to our God, and true to our native land."

LETTERS TO KULANU

The owners of the property have maintained the actual site of the Ibo Landing for nearly 200 years. I was awestruck as the elderly white woman invited the group of 150 to come onto her property and conduct our services. The "Ruach Kodesh" (holy spirit) overwhelmed me, as several of our group went out onto the actual landing site, and we prayed in the Ibo tongue and in the Hebrew tongue, for the spirits of those men that gave their lives for freedom. The pier has been preserved in its original condition; everything in that space was as it was nearly 200 years ago. It is a local legend that fishermen refuse to approach the site of the Ibo Landing because it is said that you can hear the voices of those brave souls that became martyrs for freedom. The event was powerful, spiritual, awe-inspiring and uplifting as we connected in a way that words cannot express with the souls of the departed.

The Ibo group Ekwe Nche has made a commitment to find other Ibo Landing sites up and down the east coast and to reclaim and redeem the souls of our lost brothers and sisters. The Ibo people are connected to the Gullah-speaking people of Haiti, the Caribbean, and Florida. The Ibo people are also found among the Geechee-speaking people of South Carolina, North Carolina, and Mississippi. I am from South Carolina. I am a Geechee, I am an Ibo, and I am a Jew. *Kol Israel Haraybin!* (All Israel is responsible for each other).

Rabbi Capers C. Funnye, Jr.
Chicago, Illinois

Igbo Pharmacist Polls Nigerians

I earn my living as a pharmacist in Abuja, Nigeria. As young Igbo we were all informed by our parents that the Igbo are Jews. But that was a fact most Igbo did not see as anything special until recently.

I went to Lagos recently on a purchase trip, and in the drugs market which is Igbo-dominated, it just occurred to me to sample the opinion of our compatriots about Igbo and Israel. I am still exhilarated by the interest our people showed in discussions about the subject, but I was shocked when they stated that through the assistance and encouragement of one Lawyer Ilona they had formed an Igbo businessmen Hebrew language club, and are awaiting his visit for the start of the programme.

I saw more of the same when I visited Makurdi, where I am about to start a postgraduate course in medicinal chemistry (pharmacy). On my initiating talk about Igbo and Israel, Igbo students showed much interest, and declared that they are awaiting a certain Lawyer Ilona who initiated such programme in the University of Jos. I have met Ilona only thrice. On the first he strolled over to my pharmacy, introduced himself, and invited me to join a group that is working to help the entire Jewish people, including the Igbo.

But I must confess that I have discovered that you are all doing a heavenly work. In this work lies the betterment of the Igbo people. The shameful reputation of the Igbo in Nigeria since after the war is that they can never be united. To combat this problem, some tried to strengthen abominations like having kings which Igbo got from imitating inferior neighbors, and which the British tried to force-feed us. The idea was for the kings to unite the Igbo. They did not unite Igbo. They betrayed us. Myriad other methods like forming associations like Ohaneze, Massob, etc., were tried. They all tried their level best, but the lot of the Igbo remained pitiable. But I can see why the approach of Igbo Benei Israel can work. It is taking the Igbo back to Israel Bible Holiness

God. Unity can be gotten under God. And the chance of this working is enhanced because of the commitment of Lawyer Ilona. Another plus point is that this group has succeeded in uniting some Israelis, Igbo at home, and Igbo abroad; but, very importantly, it is mobilizing the Igbo on the street in Nigeria.

Norbert Nwankwo
Abuja, Nigeria

Thanks from an Abayudaya College Student

Thanks for the help you in Kulanu are giving me to continue with my education here in Uganda. And I would like to thank you for the establishment of the high school which enabled me pass my Uganda national examination and which is helping many of Abayudaya youth to get into institutions of higher learning.

I am now at Kampala International University, taking Law. The course is for five years.

I send many thanks to Kulanu members for giving me and the Abayudaya youth the opportunity of learning so that we can also help our community in the future.

Moses Sebagabo
Kampala, Uganda

NEWEST BOOK! (cont.)

Boutique (www.kulanuboutique.com) and by mail order (see page 15 of this newsletter). We also hope retailers, synagogues, and other organizations will sell the book (contact Primack@starpower.net for details).

Kulanu offers the book as a resource for synagogue services, home ceremonies, communal gatherings, and quiet contemplation of the rich diversity to be found within Judaism. The canopy in the title is a metaphor for a covering that protects and connects all of the Jewish people – open enough to let in all who wish to come and cozy enough to unite us.

Some of the authors are names familiar to Kulanu readers—Schulamith Halevy, Loolwa Khazoom, Rabbi J. Hershey Worch, Rabbi Angela Warnick Buchdahl, Isabelle Medina Sandoval, Flory Jagoda, and Clara Castelar. Three songs with music are included, one of which -- "Kulanu" by Jerry and Jocelyn Cooper -- was created especially for the organization and dedicated to Yaacov Gladstone. The poems of the winners of the 2002 Kulanu International Writing Competition are featured in the volume.

Previously, Kulanu published the hardcover book *Jews in Places You Never Thought Of* with KTAV Publishing House, also edited by Karen Primack. Kulanu also produced a recording of Ugandan-Jewish music, *Shalom Everybody Everywhere!*

The following are excerpts from some of the 50 authors of *UNDER ONE CANOPY*:

(Continued on page 14)

Lemba Conference

(Continued from page 1)

the rich cultural identity of the Lemba, economic challenges, AIDS, the need for youth to embrace hard work, and Lemba history.

The Conference attracted a considerable amount of attention from the outside world, as media houses such as the Associated Press from the United States and the South African Broadcasting Corporation had journalists covering it.

Toward Uniting The Lemba Nation

A Speech By Mushavi Ernest Nhandi (Sadiki) at the Lemba Cultural Association Conference September 13, 2003 at Sweet Waters, Vendaland, South Africa.

I don't know any Venda language, but I will nevertheless speak to you, my brothers and sisters. The Venda I know only goes as far as *mukapo* and *uuswva*, which I think will not be useful or helpful at this juncture. I have managed to pick out these two words which relate to food because of the hospitality you people have shown us since the second we arrived from Zimbabwe.

While I was sleeping last night in one of your houses, I was dreaming that one day the Limpopo River will be removed. It's a river which is separating a nation—The Lemba Nation.

Coming to this Conference started as a joke to me. One fine day while I was surfing the Internet I came across one Lemba-related website and I responded to it. One lady, Rufina, a Portuguese Jew, responded to me and the next thing she asked me was whether I was attending the Conference in Sweet Waters. Before I did anything, things started happening setting the ball rolling for us to come to this Conference from Zimbabwe.

To you, my brothers and sisters gathered here, I say across the bridge more work has to be done to bring the Lemba people together....

You heard Mushavi Hamandishe alluding to the efforts of Mushavi M.E.R. Mathiva and Mushavi Mutenda, but now our people are no longer in Mberengwa alone, but are scattered all over the twelve provinces of Zimbabwe (Dzimbabwe). It pains me to note that our people have lost some of our traditions and practices due to ignorance.... If we don't act swiftly we risk falling into the same predicament and our children's children and generations to come will not easily forgive us.

To my colleagues the youth I say: Our elders are going one by one to their Maker and we don't have a choice; we are tomorrow's elders. Look around yourself. Mutenda is gone; just a while ago Mathiva followed. They are going every day, and see who is left behind. It's you and me. The death of our elders must not in any way mean the death of The Lemba Nation. None but ourselves can make The Lemba Nation great. We are the future as well as the present of The Lemba Nation. Let's embrace all our cultural practices. Let's embrace circumcision, our kosher dietary laws, and all the other Lemba laws. Let's be proud of our Lemba heritage. Let not any tribe or nation make us feel small.

(Continued on page 12)

Veracruz (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

weddings, and bar mitzvahs, Rabbi Lerer's "day job" was spiritual leader of the Beth Israel Community in Mexico City. However, only a few people in his congregation have paid much attention to the rabbi's involvement with the Veracruz pioneers.

Not so Sandro Halphen. Born into the congregation and bar-mitzvah-ed by Rabbi Lerer, Halphen admires his rabbi's work in Veracruz. His interest in the Veracruz community mounted to the point that, in the year 2000, he began to chronicle their accomplishments.

Halphen's new movie, *Ocho Candelas*, is the result of this ambitious project. In it, he uses eight spokespersons to weave a touching verbal tapestry of personal stories. They exemplify who the "new Jews of Veracruz" are, and why they have willingly undergone religious conversion.

The documentary also highlights that virtually all of Mexico's Jewish mainstream refuses to help. The Mexican *Yishuv* carefully monitors and balances its position vis-a-vis its Catholic environment, and converting nominal Catholics to Judaism endangers this balanced relationship.

Meanwhile, Beth Shmuel of Veracruz is facing repeated challenges. Altogether, there are only about 40,000 Jews in Mexico, about 0.05 percent of the total population. Therefore, the new Jews of Veracruz face feeling lost and confused upon suddenly becoming part of a vulnerable minority. What's more, they consider themselves homeless because their landlord decided to raze the building they were renting for religious services. They use a kindergarten during off-hours, but that's not enough of a "home" for them. Out of contact with the rest of the Jewish world, they need direction.

Rabbi Lerer, who guided their quest for decades, no longer can do so. He has retired to San Antonio, Texas, and his age keeps him from traveling often to Veracruz. Halphen has therefore become their champion.

"I tell them, I'm not the Messiah," Halphen said during a recent visit with Kulanu. "I'm not even Bill Gates. I don't have all the answers and I don't have the money to build a temple (as they call it). However, I do know people and I do know Judaism, and wherever I go to show my movie and I try to interest people in supporting the New Jews of Veracruz. I'm glad I have Kulanu in my corner as I do this, though. No one person alone can weld together a lone group of brave souls who struggle with their Jewish identity."

So Kulanu's Mexico outreach is focusing on helping the new Jews of Veracruz. We encourage Kulanu members to review the movie and show it in their communities. Copies are available by contacting me by email at Heppnershanamax@aol.com or Halphen's US distributor, Ishai Setton in New York City, at

Shabbat in Veracruz

PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE

After retiring from his work as a space scientist with NASA, **Ralph Shapiro** of Silver Spring, Maryland, used his time to write *Jewish History: 4,000 Years of Accomplishment, Agony, and Survival*. Published last year by Vantage Press, the 449-page hardcover is a comprehensive reference book in an easy-to-read style.

In the *NY Jewish Week* of July 25, **Steve Lipman's** article "A Messenger for Portugal's Hidden Jews" reports on the conversion in America of *Anous Fernando Manuel Da Costa* of Lisbon. He sees himself as an example to Portugal's 5000 descendants of Crypto-Jews who may be considering returning to the fold.

In the August 8 JTA article "Israel's Black Hebrews Gain Permanent Resident Status," **Loolwa Khazzoom** reports on the change in status of 2500 Black Hebrews in Dimona. Originally from Chicago, they began immigrating to Israel in 1969, attributing descent from biblical Jewish kingdoms.

"The Secret of Belmonte," by **Steven Plaut**, about the author's time with Portuguese returnees to Judaism, appeared in the *NY Jewish Press* of October 8. And **Jerome Socolovsky's** JTA article (appeared in the *Washington Jewish Week* on October 9), "Hope Springs for Jewish Revival in Portugal," tells of a leaderless congregation of returning Jews that meets in the famous Mekor Haim synagogue in Porto, Portugal. Also, **Jerome Socolovsky's** "For Portugal's Crypto-Jews, New Rabbi Tries To Blend Tradition with Local Custom," was run by JTA on October 13. It introduced Elisha Salas, the Chilean-born rabbi from Israel who took a post in Belmonte.

In "Tourists Outnumber Residents In Storied Indian Community," **Jana Winter** discussed a visit to Cochin in *The Forward* of October 3.

Yair Sheleg's article "A Light unto the Immigrants," in the July 25 issue of *Ha'aretz*, describes a two-week seminar hosted by the Joint Distribution Committee at Kibbutz Ramat Rachel in Jerusalem in which immigration officials from other countries learned about absorbing immigrants. The program attracted 26 officials from 14 countries, including the Philippines, Burkina-Faso, South Korea, Nicaragua, and Croatia. With an interest in bringing back citizens, the group saw an airport welcome of new immigrants from Ethiopia, various absorption centers, and programs such as MITI, a small-business encouragement program.

Michael Freund, in "Exodus from the Amazon," reports on Amishav's and other agencies' assistance to Moroccan Jewish descendants in Iquitos, Peru, who are returning to Judaism. About 60 of these descendants of 19th century immigrants to Amazonia immigrated to Israel in the summer and autumn, and more are planning to join them. The article appeared in *The Jerusalem Post* of September 12.

In the *NY Times* of September 27, **Nicholas Wade's** article, "Geneticists Report Finding Central Asian Link to Levites," reports that 52 percent of Ashkenazi Levites have an unusual genetic signature that originated 1000 years ago in Central Asia, although it is also found less frequently in the Middle East. The geneticists, who work in Israel, the US, and England, conclude that the ancestor who introduced this signature into the gene pool of these Ashkenazi Levites could have been from the Khazars, a Turkic tribe whose king embraced Judaism about 1200 years ago.

Speaking of genetics, the *Baltimore Sun* carried **John Murphy's** story, "DNA/Genes Support a Tribe's Belief That It Migrated 2500 Years Ago from the Holy Land," on September 25. It dis-

cusses the 50,000 scattered Lemba of Southern Africa and the awareness of their newly-proven ancestry that may serve to unite them.

Loolwa Khazzoom's new anthology, *The Flying Camel: Essays on Identity by Women of North African and Middle Eastern Jewish Heritage* (Seal Press), is now available on amazon.com. This is the first-ever anthology of Mizrahi/Sephardi women, as well as the first-ever anthology of Jewish women of color. She is seeking speaking engagements for a book tour in the US in March and April. For further information visit <http://www.loolwa.com/anthology.html>. She can be contacted at loolwa@loolwa.com.

The October issue of *Hadassah Magazine* carried **Alan M. Tigay's** "The 500-Year Round Trip," an article about the "quiet revolution" taking place in outreach to and acceptance of *Anousim* worldwide. He cites *ulpanim* in Israel, Amishav outreach programs in Spain and Portugal, and the movement toward validating "return" rather than "conversion" ceremonies for Anousim.

A staff report in the *Jerusalem Post* of September 14, "Majorca's 'Crypto Jews' Get a Rabbi," reported on the installation of Rabbi Shaul Friborg in Palma de Majorca in time for Rosh Hashanah. Friborg, the former deputy chief rabbi of Munich, will include outreach work with the local *Anousim* (locally known as *Chuetas*). A later staff report in the *Jerusalem Post*, "Majorca's 'Lost Jews' Search for Their Roots," describes an Amishav seminar in October in Palma de Majorca for *Chuetas* exploring their Jewish roots, with participation of rabbis and scholars from Israel and Spain.

In an August 6 *Jerusalem Post* article, **Michael Freund** calls the Ethiopian situation an "emergency." In "Save Ethiopia's Forgotten Jews," he says the so-called "Falash Mura," descendants of Jews who converted to Christianity, many against their will, over the past few generations, are dying of disease and despair while they wait for Israeli immigration officials to process them. The Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Shlomo Amar, visited Ethiopia last year and concluded that Torah law requires that the Falash Mura be brought to Israel without delay.

A JTA article by **Jerome Socolovsky** on September 24 reported on the inauguration of a medieval synagogue in Segovia, Spain, as part of an effort by the city to restore its historic, but largely unknown, *Juderia* (Jewish quarter). Although public funds are being used for the restorations, the Church owns most of the former synagogues and the 12th century "Corpus Christi" synagogue that was just inaugurated is presently used as a convent. The article was entitled "Spanish City Digs Deep To Find Remnants of Its Jewish History."

A recent article by **Jonathan Saul** on haaretz.com, "Full of Eastern Splendour," reports that Sephardi life in Britain is enjoying a renaissance since non-Ashkenazi Jews from the Middle East, North Africa and India are enriching the community. A new project called Emet is part of the rebirth, providing educational resources and organizing events.

The Los Angeles Times of September 27 carried a lengthy article by **William Lobdell**, with pictures, about the Abayudaya documentary by Debra Gonsheer Vinik and David Vinik of Diva Communications. "Film Opens Up Life, Faith of Isolated Ugandan Jews" also includes an interview with Gonsheer Vinik.

Uniting the Lemba (cont.)

(Continued from page 10)

We are the Lembas, people of great honour.

In Zimbabwe we still have got a long way to go, but I believe that with your help, my brothers and sisters, we will definitely unite the Lembas in Zimbabwe; at least some progress has been made and we now have put in place a steering committee just to run things.

I may speak English with excellent diction and accent, but I am nowhere near an Englishman. You may speak Venda with excellent diction and accent; across the bridge they may speak Shona with excellent diction, accent, or vocabulary, but no one of you is Venda, no one of them is Shona. We are all Lembas. Let me warn you, brothers and sisters, let us not be separated by such things as languages, rivers, political boundaries and all the other potential barriers. Let's not be separated by these languages, most of which are not our languages, after all.

I take this opportunity to tell you that in our endeavor to bring the Lembas of Zimbabwe to their true identity we will be holding our inaugural National Conference at Tadzembwa in the Masvingo Province close to the historical MaDzimbabwe, now known as the Great Zimbabwe, which I understand were built by our forefathers. The date of the meeting will be published in due course....

To conclude, I urge you, my brothers and sisters here South of the Limpopo, which I am still praying to be removed, to continue to help and support us in the North.... Lets take our rich cultural heritage to even greater heights. Let's stand tall and proud and put The Lemba Nation where it belongs, that is in greatness. I hope to see all of you in Zimbabwe. I thank you. Shalom!

Portugal (cont.)

(Continued from page 6)

We are now in the process of planning our second Conference-Tour to visit our brothers and sisters in Portugal after Pesach in April 2004. Again, we expect it will be sponsored jointly by Saudade Sefarad, Kulanu, and Root & Branch. As there is enormous interest in the Conference-Tour, and to avoid disappointment, we advise early booking for this very special trip, where we plan on a Shabbat reunion with our brothers and sisters in Belmonte as well as visits with the Bnai Anousim groups throughout Portugal. For more details and booking, please contact me at rufina@netactive.co.za. Final details will appear on www.saudades.org.

Don't miss the opportunity of joining us in this reunion of celebrating our Portuguese-Jewish heritage together with the tenacious and brave souls of Portugal who retained their Jewish consciousness through 500 years of persecution. To read about last year's Conference, visit http://www.saudades.org/My_Diary.htm. To read what those who participated last year had to say about our Conference, go to http://www.saudades.org/Letters_from_those_who_participated.htm.

A Great Read of Almost-Epic Proportions

By Karen Primack

Richard Zimler's second novel, *Hunting Midnight*, casts as its central character a descendant of the title character in his first novel, *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon*. The new work begins in Porto, Portugal, in the early 19th century, 300 years after the first novel.

Because it contains a wide range of ingredients – a South African Bushman, a Scottish winegrower in Portugal, South Carolina slaves, child abuse, characters' artistic pursuits, Beethoven, reverence for nature – it is perhaps more universal in its appeal than the first book.

But it also has its Jewish (and Kulanu) components, such as the narrator's discovery that he is descended from Jews, and the occurrence of an anti-Jewish pogrom in Porto.

The author writes skillfully as the voice of a young Scottish-Portuguese half-Jew as well as that of a slave girl in the American South. He also imparts a seemingly deep knowledge of Bushman belief and culture, in addition to snatches of Portuguese and Hebrew, and departures into Jewish philosophy and Scottish song and literature. The story-telling style is tight, with straightforward prose that builds up tension and suspense effectively.

These disparate elements might seem a bit too much, but it all works well together, and *Hunting Midnight* is a great read of almost-epic proportions. While *The Last Kabbalist* was also a mesmerizing, suspenseful experience, it was more parochial. The first novel did very well internationally and was a best-seller in Portugal. The second novel, being truly universal, may well do even better.

Don't forget: Chanukah
is December 19 -- 26
Do all your shopping
through the
KulanuBoutique
See page 15 or visit
www.kulanuboutique.com



Ecuadorians (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

an important part of Ecuadorian life. We found a history of multiple Inquisitions in the town of Zaruma. We found many people who believed they had “Jewish blood.” We learned that in the city and province of Loja, there were many people who suspected that their ancestors had been part of the migrations from Spain and Portugal. Their Jewish descent was only an interesting historical and anecdotal bit of information; in practice, they are observant Catholics.

During that previous trip, we found very few examples of people who not only claimed this descent but also showed an interest in seeking Jewish roots and renewing a connection to Judaism. We found no one among the people we visited during that trip who practiced any type of secret ritual that could be related to a Jewish practice. I was disappointed that we were unable to lace our trip together with the current literature that describes descendants of *Conversos* as a people who practiced their religion as a dark, closely held family secret.

In May of this year, I received an email from a Kulanu officer that described an effort by a young American student named Jesse Glickstein to raise funds for an Ecuadorian group of families identifying themselves as historically Jewish, who wished to travel to the synagogue in Quito for the second night of Passover. News of this group was a complete surprise and a delight. I contacted Jesse by email and then wrote directly to leaders of this group in Ecuador. I satisfied myself that I would either find valid information about descendants of *Conversos* or I would put an end to my investigations in Ecuador. I made plans to return to Ecuador with Rae as quickly as possible. I brought with me a four-page detailed questionnaire, which I hoped would provide a rational basis for qualifying the Jewish descent of the families we were to visit.

In Zapotillo, we celebrated Shabbat at the home of Yuri and Juanita Veintimilla. Their new home, still waiting for delivery of its glass windows, sits over Juanita’s hardware store. After dinner, I distributed some Judaic items that I had carried from San Diego, including *mezuzot*, small prayer books, and a Kiddush cup that was donated by the owner of the Judaica store Dor L’Dor in San Diego.

Yuri is an engineer about 35 or 40 years old. He is light skinned, European-looking and his attractive wife, Juanita, has darker coloring. They live next door to a restaurant owned and operated by her parents. He told me that his great-grandmother was of Jewish origin. He has a cousin who lives in Israel who was formally re-converted to Judaism. His cousin had investigated the family and determined their Jewish origin. Yuri is anxious to be recognized as Jewish and to have a formal conversion. Previous generations in his family were practicing Catholics. Juanita has no known Jewish genealogical connection, and they were married in a church. Juanita’s parents, who live and work next door, did not participate in any of our discussions.

Jorge Bedoya and his wife and children traveled all day from their home in the north of Ecuador to Zapotillo. Jorge also appears about 35 or 40 years of age. His wife makes no claim to a Jewish descent. Jorge told me that he began working with a Jewish man three years ago and understood for the first time what it meant to be Jewish. His friend taught him to read Hebrew, and he became more familiar with the philosophy and different concepts of Judaism. Jorge was frustrated because he was not born into Jewish life. He knew that his family, Ramos, originated in Spain, then migrated to Colombia, and finally settled in Ecuador.

My principal contact, Eloy Torres, his wife Gina, and their children completed this group. Eloy is thin with dark, Sephardic

coloring, black eyes and long black hair often tied in a ponytail. He recited the *motzi* with ease. He told me that his grandfather on his deathbed had called him to his side to tell him of his Jewish heritage. Eloy has knowledge of Jewish life and rituals to a greater extent than the others. A professional guide who specializes in adventure travel in the jungles of Ecuador, he is intense, focused and committed to building the new organization, *Ben Levi-Loja*, into a central meeting-ground for Ecuadorians of Jewish descent who seek to reconnect. He has a vision of a physical Jewish community in the city of Loja in which people who wish to reunite with their Jewish heritage can live side by side and provide physical and spiritual support to each other. His wife Gina, who is not of Jewish descent, appears devoted to Eloy’s ambitions. At one time they operated a kosher restaurant in the city of Banos. (Considering the paucity of Jews in Ecuador, I am puzzled about the practicality of opening a kosher restaurant there.) Eloy appears to be a zealot in his search for Jewish roots. Many of his waking hours are spent seeking members and financing for his proposed community. He arranged most of my interviews during this trip.

One of the reasons related to me for believing in their Jewish descent is their practice of a festival called the “*Landa*.” The *Landa* is a hair-cutting event for young boys of ages three to seven. Eloy believes the *Landa* is connected to the Jewish tradition of celebrating the first haircut when a boy turns three years old. In order to witness a “Community *Landa*” Rae and I decided to stay over in a hotel in Zapotillo.

We located a small hotel that charged \$8 per night per person. It was next to a function hall where a wedding party celebrated until 2 a.m. By the following morning we were well-seasoned travelers suffering from too little sleep and too many insect bites from the local mosquitoes and *arenillas* (tiny sand bugs).

The following afternoon, we drove into the countryside to visit other members of Ben Levi-Loja who are farmers. Along the way we crossed an active riverbed in our four-wheeled vehicle that gave Rae a little concern. At one farm the parents were away in the fields, but we saw the farmhouse of mud walls with a tin roof. The children were barefoot, dirty and unusually thin. The eldest child, about ten, was watching over the other five children, including a set of 18-month-old twins who appeared sickly thin and gray. We learned the common practice of marrying cousins had serious medical consequences. Despite that, the practice of marrying cousins is very popular in the province of Loja in every demographic stratum, from professional to farmer.

That night after dark, we drove in our vehicle for one and one-half hours over bumpy dirt roads through a pitch-black forest. Finally, we came to a clearing with a farmhouse and a small group of people who had gathered for the *Landa*. As the evening wore on the crowd grew larger until there were about 50 people. Many were nursing mothers with their other children. The farmhouse was electrified and someone had strung wires for an amplification system that blasted loud music from over-sized speakers. A cow had been butchered, cooked over an open fire, and stored in the kitchen for use later that night. A half-dozen children were crowded onto a second-floor porch of the house, looking down on the festivities. An announcer began to speak in Spanish about the *Landa* and the proceedings.

(To be continued in the next newsletter)

UNDER ONE CANOPY

Excerpts from Kulanu's Newest Book

(Continued from page 9)

If I were a journalist, I could tell you my story in one sentence. On Monday, March 26, 2002, Stephen Gomes, a Portuguese-American Catholic, completed his conversion to Judaism. But facts do little to convey my 50-year journey to recover the Jewish heritage of my ancestors.

-- STEPHEN L. GOMES

Like so many S'fardim before us
We bent like tree branches in the wind.
And when we straightened our limbs
To assume our integrity
We were cut down by marauding crowds
In the name of God

--NORMAN CHANSKY

My family remained on the banks of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers for the next 2,500 years until 1950, when the modern Iraqi government forced the Jews to flee as refugees. With a history like that, Iraqi Jews are as authentically Iraqi and Jewish as you can get. Nonetheless, throughout my life, neither the Jewish nor the Middle Eastern communities have been keen on accepting us.

-- LOOLWA KHAZZOOM

"For me, it is surrealistic. I look around, I am in India, near the Burmese border, with tremendous poverty all around me, and here are what appear to be contented Jews living a very Jewish life and having one real hope and dream: to come to Israel as soon as possible and rejoin their people. It is the miracle of Jewish survival," he says.

--MICHAEL FREUND

The Ugandan *huppah* had been made from a white tallit supported by four long stalks of fresh sugar cane. After the final ceremony, the sugar cane poles, which had been supporting the *huppah* through all seven weddings, were hacked into pieces and distributed to the children of the congregation so that they could savor the sweetness of the occasion.

--KAREN PRIMACK

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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! 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, in English, Hebrew, Luganda, and Swahili. *Proceeds benefit Abayudaya.*

Hand-crocheted Ugandan Kippot, dual-colored in two shapes, skullcap and pill-box. *Proceeds benefit the Abayudaya.*

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

Challah Covers from Ghana, very colorful with fine machine embroidery. *Proceeds benefit the Sefwi Wiawso Jewish community.*

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

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

Abayudaya: The Jews of Uganda. 160 pages of beautiful photographs with text by Richard Sobol, complete with a CD of Abayudaya music, with notes, compiled by Rabbi Jeffrey Summit, an ethnomusicologist. *Proceeds benefit Kulanu and the Abayudaya.*

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Deadline for next issue: Jan. 15, 2004

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Edited by Karen Primack

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