



“Falash Mura” Are Still Waiting

Last February, Prime Minister Sharon’s cabinet unanimously voted to expedite the immigration of the 20,000 so-called Falash Mura in Ethiopia who want to settle in Israel, by checking everyone’s eligibility immediately.

In late May, 5000 Ethiopian immigrants in Israel demonstrated outside the Knesset to protest the government’s failure to act on this decision. Some of the protesters carried stretchers covered with tallitot, representing the 26 Falash Mura who had died in Ethiopia since the February cabinet vote.

In June, Interior Minister Avraham Poraz, of the Shinui Party, announced that he does not intend to implement this cabinet decision. He said that, due to financial considerations, only 250-300 Ethiopian immigrants will be allowed to come to Israel each month. This has drawn the ire of Knesset Member Shaul Yahalom, of the National Religious Party, who accuses Poraz of acting in an “anti-Zionist” manner. Poraz has countered that the Falash Mura are not Jews, but Yahalom points out that most have first-degree relatives in Israel and that they have been classified as Jews by Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar. The Falash Mura are Ethiopians whose Jewish ancestors “converted” to Christianity, often under pressure (see president’s comment at the end of this article). They have returned to Orthodox Jewish practice.

By late June, 390 Falash Mura had filed suit in Israel’s High Court of Justice to force Poraz to enact the Cabinet resolution or to

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Ugandan Enters Rabbinic Studies in LA

Gershom Sizomu, spiritual leader of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda, has had the honorific title of Rabbi for much of his life. Now he is looking forward to earning that official title in the five-year program at the University of Judaism’s Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles. He has received an acceptance to the program, financial assistance, and a family apartment in University housing. The Institute for Jewish & Community Research has awarded him an internship to support his studies. Gary and Diane Tobin of San Francisco are to be congratulated for their efforts in bringing this about.

On June 4, Sizomu, his wife Tziporah, son Igaal, 9, and daughter Daphna, 7, arrived in Los Angeles in time for him to start the university’s summer Ulpan program. Igaal and Daphna are attending a synagogue summer camp, where Tziporah is a counselor.

The family was welcomed by Diane Tobin, who reported, “We walked all over L.A. sampling Shavuot and Shabbat services (you’ll be happy to know that everyone was very welcoming). They moved into a great apartment at the University of Judaism. Everything that we all take for granted about life in America became new through the eyes of Gershom’s wonderful family. They are very happy to be here, very excited. We had a lot of fun.”

Back in Uganda, Aaron Kintu Moses (Sizomu’s brother) will fill

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Are These Bnei Menashe Immigrants the Last?

The Bnei Menashe, who claim to be descendants from a Lost Tribe, are well known to Kulanu. Some 5000-6000 of them are living a full Jewish life in northeastern India, and 700-800 have immigrated to Israel. Largely through the efforts of the organization Amishav, about 100 per year enter Israel as tourists, and are formally converted by the Chief Rabbinate after about a year of study and work. They are very popular immigrants with the Israelis.

The most recent arrivals, a group of 50, attended a welcoming ceremony at the Western Wall on June 3. They are the first group of graduates of the Amishav Hebrew Center, which opened in Aizawl, India, last November. Sadly, they might also be the last arrivals for a while.

In early July, Interior Minister Avraham Poraz suddenly announced that he has decided to stop the flow of Bnei Menashe immigrants to Israel.

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This rendition of the Ten Commandments in Amharic is prominently displayed at a compound run by The North American Council on Ethiopian Jewry in Addis Ababa.

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.

Abayudaya “Safari” Announced

As a joint venture with the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda, Volcanoes Safari Tour Company is offering a unique 15-day tour of “Jewish Life in Uganda.” The trip, to extend from January 28 to February 11, 2004, includes visits to the Abayudaya community near Mbale, Uganda, as well as tours in Mt. Elgon National Park, Sipi Falls, Jinja, Kampala, and Lake Victoria. The tour is limited to 24 travelers.

Participants can also choose an optional add-on Gorilla Wildlife Safari or an add-on Community Volunteer option that features staying in a kosher Abayudaya family home.

Tentative arrangements call for a stay of 10 nights at the Mbale Resort Hotel; 1 night at Sipi Falls safari camp; 2 nights in Kampala; and 1 night at Lake Victoria. Hotels are modest and friendly. A Kosher home hospitality option is offered on Shabbat.

Travelers will learn the history of the remarkable Abayudaya Jewish community and enjoy the hospitality of Ugandan Jewish families. They will experience two Shabbats in Uganda and meet the leaders of the Abayudaya Community, visiting the six Abayudaya synagogues and the many Kulanu-supported mitzvah projects. They will attend talks, celebrations, concerts, and arts and crafts demonstrations and learn about the ethnic groups of Uganda, languages, agriculture, economy, as well as unique flora and wildlife (including a baboon sanctuary in Busitema Forest, Tororo).

The trip includes a tour the town of Jinja to see the source of the magnificent Nile River (with a white-water rafting option). A visit to the bustling capital, Kampala, includes African markets, museums and gardens. At Lake Victoria, participants will visit botanical gardens or a wildlife center (with a boat trip to a chimpanzee refuge on Ngamba Island).

All plans are subject to change. (Flexibility is a virtue and a necessity!)

For initial inquiries about the “Jewish Life in Uganda” tour, contact Laura Wetzler at Laura@laurawetzler.com or (413) 634-5617.

For information about the add-on Gorilla Wildlife Safari option, contact: www.volcanoessafaris.com for details on 3-14 day adventure trips.

In the add-on Community Volunteer option, travelers are offered unique, rewarding opportunities to work closely with the Abayudaya community. Volunteers can perform mitzvah work as a teacher of English, Hebrew, or Jewish Studies, or perform other services. This rustic option includes Kosher home hospitality with the Abayudaya community at the modest cost of \$100 per week for food (no electricity or running water). For further information about the add-on Community Volunteer option, contact Laura Wetzler at laura@laurawetzler.com or (413) 634-5617

While Kulanu certainly supports the Abayudaya community and is delighted to publicize this activity, this trip and associated activities (including any extended stays with the community) are not being sponsored by Kulanu and Kulanu assumes no liability related to the trip.

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Amishav in Barcelona

The organization Amishav is certainly making its presence felt in Barcelona, Spain. On May 2, it convened a three-day seminar on Spain’s “hidden Jews” in that city. The seminar, titled “Judaism and Jewish Descendants in Spain: Past & Present Between Identity and History,” attracted more than 30 leaders of emerging Crypto-Jewish communities from Madrid, Majorca, Murcia, and Barcelona. They heard lectures on the history of the persecution of Crypto-Jews and shared personal stories about coming to terms with their identity as *Anousim*.

Amishav director Michael Freund called the seminar “a highly emotional and stirring sight.” He added, “To look around the room and see people whose ancestors were forcibly converted to Christianity over 500 years ago now grappling to return to their roots was very inspiring. Who could have imagined that something like this was even possible?”

Less than three weeks later, on Lag B’Omer, a long-married couple of Barcelona had a Jewish wedding under a *huppa* in Jerusalem. The ceremony, facilitated by Amishav, united Barcelona school principal Nuria (Nurit) Guasch Vidal and her husband Eduard (Yitzhak) Calafi Garrigos, a physician. The couple, descendants of *Anousim*, had undergone conversion two days earlier in Jerusalem.

Jewish Developments In Ibo Land

By Remy Ilon

In the city of Abuja, Nigeria's capital, there are three congregations of Judaism. The Gihon Hebrew Research Organization is regarded as the headquarters. An elderly gentleman named Peter Agbai, a civil servant in Nigeria's Federal Capital Development Authority, leads it. This synagogue is located in Elohim Street, Jikwoyi, Abuja.

Last Saturday, during Shabbat recess, the congregation decided to sing in Hebrew at the prompting of an Ibo visitor, Sam Ozoekwe, who though still a Christian, is nevertheless interested in all Ibos returning to Judaism. The congregation of men, women and children took up the challenge, and for over one hour kept on belting out Hebrew songs. I have it all on videocassette; albeit badly recorded, due to inferior equipment.

This experience helped me to confirm G.T. Basden's assertion, in *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, that the Ibo language bears several interesting parallels with Hebrew. The sounds and sentence structures of Hebrew and Ibo are so similar. The *Ruach Kodesh* seized me, and I presented my personal menorah, a gift from Ahab Elijah of New York, a Kulanu member and coordinator of Ibo-Benei-Yisrael, to the congregation. (Before, the congregation had to make do with placing the candle directly on the table.)

The joy of this gesture reminded me of how the congregating is enamored by the book *Israel Covenant People, Covenant Land*, which Dr. Jack Zeller sent 10 copies of to me. Because I had to spread these 10 to almost all segments of Igbo land, the congregation got only one, and since then it has been passing from hand to hand.

Until now I am still amazed at this Ibo inclination to return to Rabbinical Judaism. The deputy leader of my synagogue states that all major towns in Ibo land have synagogues.

My position in the Ibo/Nigeria Jewish community is public relation officer. A typical example of a dilemma which we face now is the right course for us to take on tithing, among other issues on which we seek guidance.

In our tradition, tithing is exactly as prescribed in the Torah. My late father, as elder/priest of Ilona kindred, received the tithing regularly, and it was done this way: Before the new yam festival, the payers came with the best of the yams (newly harvested) and some chickens. These were cooked and the payer, my father and the local poor partook of this meal. We call it *ibu ihu* in Ozubulu. All Ibo Hebrewists still do this. In my opinion this is far better than the style introduced by Pentecostal Christians. People assemble their tithes in money, and hand them over to their pastors, who inevitably buy Mercedes cars with it.

The Ibos returning to Judaism need to be encouraged, nurtured and guided. Accordingly, I humbly seek donations of books on learning Hebrew, Hebrew dictionaries, Hebrew/English *Tanakh*s, books on *Halakhah*, books on Israeli history, and Hebrew songbooks with English transliteration. My postal address is P.O.Box 11505, Area 10 Post Office, Garki, Abuja, Nigeria.

Thanks in anticipation.

We Live in Miraculous Times

By Rabbi Moshe Cotel

(Excerpted from an ordination speech the writer, a Kulanu board member, gave at his graduation from the Academy for Jewish Religion in May 2003)

We live in miraculous times. Last year I was in northeastern rural Uganda serving on a Bet Din, a rabbinical court, which officially wel-

Judaism is coming alive throughout the developing world. I know that this is true because I have seen it with my own eyes; I have heard it with my own ears.

comed the native Abayudaya Ugandans into the worldwide community of the people Israel.

When I asked one old man at that time, an ancient man who had lived through the persecutions of dictator Idi Amin - a tyrant who had banned Judaism throughout the country - why he would want to be part of a people universally despised and persecuted throughout history, he replied in a quiet but firm voice and with clear blazing eyes: Because I fear Adonai.

Judaism is coming alive throughout the developing world. I know that this is true because I have seen it with my own eyes; I have heard it with my own ears. I believe that in a hundred years a typical Jewish face will be the face of Africa; in a hundred years a typical Jewish face will be the face of Asia.

We live in miraculous times and I wish to be part of this miracle. But the miracle has another side to it—and while there are signs that Judaism is awakening in places throughout the world where we never thought a native Jewish community could exist—here in America, in the highly developed technological world, there are disturbing counter-currents.

A whole new generation has come into being, not across the ocean, but right here in our midst—Generation X, divorced from communal Jewish life and all but written off by our own vaunted Jewish

I intend to devote the rest of my life to wrestling with this paradox—inreach at home, outreach abroad.

establishment. This is the other side of our miraculous time. American Jews have never been more powerful, more secure, more integrated into the whole of society—and yet our young people are opting out in droves.

We must find a way to make Judaism relevant to our own alienated young here in the U.S. And, paradoxically, we must also find a way to make Judaism inclusive for countless seekers around the world for whom our theology of liberation, based upon the Exodus from Egypt, is an inspiration.

I intend to devote the rest of my life to wrestling with this paradox—inreach at home, outreach abroad. Our great religion has been reinvented and reinvented again by each succeeding generation of Jews. And now, we have to gather our strength to reinvent Judaism yet once more.

KULANU BRIEFS

Jews of Color Speak Out

A program on racial dynamics and diversity in the Jewish community will be held Thursday, October 30, at 7 pm at the JCC in Manhattan (Amsterdam Ave at W 76th Street). Speakers will include Angela Warnick Buchdahl, a mixed heritage Korean/Ashkenzi Jewish cantor and rabbi; Yavilah McCoy, an Orthodox African-American; Jeremy Burton, a gay Mexican-American Jew; and Jessica Radin, a Jewish adoptee from Thailand. Ruth Messinger will be moderator. The purpose of the program is to "Re-examine assumptions about 'who is a Jew' and explore avenues for creating a more inclusive and supportive Jewish community. Kulanu is one of the co-sponsors. Call 646-505-5708 to register.

Iraq's Hidden Jews

Amishav, the Israeli organization that assists lost Jews seeking to return to the Jewish people, has been busy on many fronts. In addition to its recent actions on behalf of Spanish *Anousim* and the Bnei Menashe of northeastern India, it has made an appeal on behalf of Iraq's secret Jews. The appeal went from Amishav director Michael Freund to US Ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer, asking the US Government to protect these hidden Jews and enable them to emigrate to Israel.

According to a report in *Yediot Aharonot*, a number of Jews live in secret in northern Iraq in the cities of Kirkuk and Sulaimaniya. Fearing persecution, they have hidden their identities, and some, whose families were forced to convert to Islam, are only now learning of their Jewish identity.

Ethiopian-Judaic Heritage Night In NYC

Beta Israel of North America (BINA) is presenting an Ethiopian-Judaic Heritage Night in New York City on August 21 at 7 pm. There will be guest speakers, arts and crafts, photographs by Joan Roth, and music with Abay. The site is the Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16th Street. The evening is co-presented by the ASF /Sephardic House and the Yemenite Jewish Federation of America. A suggested donation of \$10 will benefit the Ethiopian famine drive. For reservations and information, call 212-294-8350.

Florida Group Commemorates Inquisition

A group of 180 Kulanu supporters recently gathered in Century Village in Deerfield Beach, Florida to commemorate the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions. Yaakov Gladstone organized the program, giving opening remarks on his 1990 trip to Belmonte, Portugal, and reporting that *Anousim* in Northern Portugal are openly embracing Judaism. Drs. Abe Gittelsohn and Abe Lavender spoke about the history and present-day struggle of *Anousim*, and Shula Robin, a Canadian poet, composed a piece, entitled "My Lost Brothers and Sisters," just for the occasion. There were other readings, and a collection netted \$300 for the American Sephardi Federation for prayer books and Judaica books for the Jewish community of Belmonte. Gladstone commented, "For years I had wondered why there is no date on the Jewish calendar to commemorate the terrors of the Inquisition."

Abayudaya Women Receive Artisan Grant

The Abayudaya Women's Association is thrilled to announce that it has received a \$700 grant from Aid to Artisans for the purchase of tools and materials to expand its project making kippot and other craft items. The AWA expresses its gratitude to Laura Wetzler and Harriet Bograd for helping to make this possible.

Crypto-Judaic Society Conference

The 2003 Annual Conference of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies was held in San Antonio, Texas, August 3-5. Speakers included Rabbi Samuel Lerer, Michael Freund, Prof. Stanley Hordes, Bennett Greenspan, and Dr. Abraham Lavender, among many others. For information about the Society, see www.cryptojews.com.

Tebeka at Work

Itzak Dessie Itzik is the first Ethiopian lawyer in Israel. He is the executive director of Tebeka - the Center for Legal Aid and Advocacy for Ethiopian Jews in Israel. Tebeka, which means "advocate" or "protector" in Amharic, was founded in 2000 as a non-profit to advance the legal and social rights of Ethiopian immigrants. Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in Israel encounter communication problems, cultural differences, lack of familiarity with and inability to handle the bureaucracy, and racial prejudice. So far, Tebeka counts among its achievements the following: had a racist commentator dismissed from an Israeli sports channel, advocated for improved housing and absorption policy, and protected the right to in-court translation services for Ethiopian Jews. Tebeka can be contacted at 34 Itzhak Sadie, Tel Aviv, Israel, tel 972 3 6876560, fax 972 3 688 9012, tebekad@netvision.net.il.

Todah Rabah!

Temple Aliyah of Needham, Massachusetts, shipped 50 *hushim* to the Abayudaya community in Uganda. Credit goes to **Rachel Abramson** and **Rabbi Carl Perkins**. **Temple Beth Torah** of Melville, NY, shipped four bags of *chumashim*, *siddurim*, kippot and other Judaica items to Nigeria. Our thanks to **Rabbi Susie H. Moskowitz**. **Ohr Kodesh** of Chevy Chase, Maryland, has donated 100 Hertz *chumashim* to Abayudaya. **Morris Davidson** of Silver Spring, Maryland donated tefillin and Jewish books to the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda.

To **Ed Samiljan**, who donated 16 beautifully mounted 11x17 color photos of Jewish Life in Uganda, to be used by Rachel Namudosi Keki during her lectures in the US.

To **Roz & Ed Kolodny**, who made a donation to Kulanu in honor of **Jack Zeller's** birthday; to **Cheryl Weisman**, who contributed in honor of **David Weisman's** birthday; to **Beth Torah Congregation's** contribution for a talk given by **Karen Primack**; to **Natalie Brenner** in honor of the 50th wedding anniversary of **Margery and Mel Elfin**; to **Jerry Romain** in honor of **Irwin and Elaine Berg**; to **Allan R. Sampson** in honor of **Aron and Karen Primack**; to **Jack & Stephanie Ventura** in memory of **Michael Engel**, father of **Jen Primack**.

Rabbi Howard Gorin continues to sell Abayudaya products and Kulanu books at many speaking engagements. On May 18, he raised \$855, and this happens often! And **Rabbi Scott Glass's** Synagogue's Social Action Committee had a T-shirt contest for their religious

BRIEFS

school, and raised \$400 for the Hadassah Infant School.

To **Aron and Karen Primack**, for their \$1200 donation, and to **Gerald Buchoff** for his \$500 contribution. And to **Congregation Agudas Achim-Beth Israel** for contributing \$200, and to the **Schwartz Family Foundation** for its \$180. And to these members of the \$100 club: **I. Michael Kessel and Sharon Lipper Kessel, Robert & Jeri Lande, Marco & Edith Rabinovitz, Yehuda & Catherine Sherman, Alan Spierer, Daniel Taitz and Penny Nemzer, Robert and Jeanette Walker.**

And we appreciate **Congregation Havurah** in Buffalo purchasing of \$400 worth of challah covers from Ghana (following Harriet Bograd's talk) -- enough to have one at each table for their annual re-treats, and a few extra to re-sell to members).

Mazal Tov!

To **Rabbi Moshe Cotel**, who graduated and received smicha from the Academy for Jewish Religion and has accepted a pulpit with Temple Beth El of Manhattan Beach, NY.

To **Debra Gonsher Vinik** and **David Vinik** on the festive opening of their documentary film *Moving Heaven and Earth* in New York on May 22. The film, shot in Uganda in February 2002, covers the history, lives, and practices of the Abayudaya Jews and the arrival of a Beit Din of American and Israeli rabbis who converted over 300 individuals. To find out more about *Moving Heaven and Earth*, visit www.divacommunications.com

To **Rabbi J. Hershy Worch**, whose book, *The Kabbalist Haggadah: A Handbook of the Seder*, is being published.

To **Ed Samiljan**, who won an award from the Society of Professional Journalists for his article about the Abayudaya in the *San Diego Jewish Heritage*.

Condolences

Dr. Shmuel (Simon) Wapnick died in May. He was passionate in his efforts to reach out to lost and dispersed Jewish communities. Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum wrote of him: *Learning about the sudden passing of Shmuel Wapnick leaves me with a deep sense of sadness. It was Shmuel who introduced me (formally) to local members of the Lemba community (of Johannesburg) Shmuel tried [and worked] tirelessly to initiate a deeper and meaningful interaction between the local Jewish community of SA and that of the Lemba community. His generosity, commitment, kindness and pure intentions cannot be over stated. He was always willing to help his fellow man. A real "mensch." His dream of assisting those wanting to reunite with their Jewish roots put him in contact with many different groups and his willingness to listen, help and/or teach will always be remembered with fondness.*

Victor Perera, a Sephardi Jewish writer who chronicled his family's migrations around the globe, died of a stroke in June in California at 69. The best-known book of his three-part opus, *The Cross and the Pear Tree: A Sephardic Journey*, delved into the history of Sephardi Jews and a curse allegedly placed on his family by his great-grandfather if they left the Holy Land, which Perera's father did. Perera himself was born in Guatemala but lived his adult life in the United States, where he wrote and taught journalism.



‘Falash Mura’ Are Still Waiting (cont.)

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require the Israeli government to circumvent Poraz to do so. In addition, leaders of American Jewry, the US Congress, and Israel have engaged in letter-writing campaigns supporting the Falash Mura, who are living under substandard conditions in Addis Ababa and Gondar while they wait.

Poraz's claim that Israel cannot afford to absorb new immigrants from Ethiopia has been criticized. The cabinet's February 16 resolution called for financial aid from American Jewish organizations, but the federation umbrella organization apparently has not been contacted for assistance. In addition, Israel cut its fiscal 2004 request to Congress from \$60 million to \$50 million.

Expressions of support for the Falash Mura have come from Rabbi Hershel Billet, former president of the Orthodox Rabbinical Council of America; Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism; and Joseph Feit, past president of the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry.

(President's comment: By the Beta Israel definition, sharing a meal with a non-Jew, usually a Coptic Christian, is de facto "conversion" out of Beta Israel. Harsh as that may sound, return simply requires study and repentance in the presence of a kes (Jewish priest) for one week. Of the hundreds of Beta Israel elders I have spoken to, conversion did not involve baptism, renunciation of identity or any ritual undertaking. Thus, few of us who interpret this word in our context could escape that same appellation! Since the term Falash Mura means "stinking" or "putrid," this term may have some applicability to those who use it! JZ)

PUBLICATIONS

Hillel Halkin's letter, "Avraham Poraz's bigoted liberalism," appeared in The Jerusalem Post of July 10. It discusses Interior Minister Poraz's sudden refusal to admit Bnei Menashe immigrants from India.

Richard Zimler's second novel, *Hunting Midnight*, was released on July 1 by Delacorte Press. Its central character is a descendant of the title character in his first novel, *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon*, which was set 300 years earlier. You can read the first chapter on his website <www.zimler.com>. A review will appear in the next newsletter.

Loolwa Khazzoom has been busy. She had a piece ("Hip-Hop Thrives in Israel") in the July 8 *Rolling Stone Magazine* about the growing industry of Hebrew and Arabic hip-hop music in Israel. This followed an op-ed piece in the February 2 *Washington Post*, "American, Iraqi, Jewish—So It Makes Sense for Mr to Live in Israel." In addition, her article "Falash Mura activists demand that Israel follow through on aliyah" was carried by the JTA on May 27.

Rabbinic Studies in LA (cont.)

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in as spiritual leader, and Seth Jonadav will take over leadership at the Semei Kakungulu High School. Sizomu will continue to contribute to the community spiritually while in Los Angeles. He says, "With Hashem's will and with Kulanu's continued support, I trust that the Abayudaya community will thrive."



Rabbi Gershom Sizomu (left) and his brother, Aaron Kintu Moses, who will assume the duties of Spiritual Leader of the Abayudaya in Uganda.

Minyan in Kaifeng Explores Interactions

By Karen Primack

An interesting new film has been making the circuit of Jewish film festivals: *Minyan in Kaifeng – A Modern Journey to an Ancient Chinese Jewish Community*.

In December 1997, a group of 12 Israeli, American and Australian Jews living in Beijing baked some challah, collected some prayer books, and traveled by train to Kaifeng, the site of an organized Jewish community during the 11th through 19th centuries. That community reached its peak of 5000 in the 17th century, and the group was going to visit a handful of their descendants.

Travelers included a student of Chinese, an actor, an internet consultant, and a film teacher. Their guide was Dr. Xu Xin, eminent scholar and professor of Jewish Studies in China.

This is not so much a film about Kaifeng Jewish history as it is a record of a "unique intercultural meeting."

The Chinese descendants consider themselves of Jewish identity, although they have little knowledge about the religion and follow none of its laws or customs. The visitors exposed them to a slice of Jewish life as they conducted a moving Shabbat service (aliyahs were given to the Chinese hosts), said Kaddish at a Jewish grave site, and held discussions about Jewish values. It is not known whether they have a memory or received the information from Xu Xin, who has been teaching

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OPINION

Kulanu and Zionism: Reviving the Jewish People

By Joshua Fox

(The writer, who lives in Aderet, Israel, is editor of *gertzedek.org*.)

The successes of the Zionist movement over the last century can inspire us today, with an example of a cultural-religious-national Jewish movement that helped preserve and re-energize the Jewish people. The similarities between modern Zionism in its early stages and Kulanu today are fascinating. Building on the example of Zionism, we contribute to the wellbeing of our people by bringing in dispersed Jew-

The similarities between modern Zionism in its early stages and Kulanu today are fascinating.

ish communities and converts from the four corners of the earth.

In 1890, Zionism was an ancient but dormant Jewish belief system. Jewish territorial nationalism was alive and well two thousand years ago, fading out after the destruction of the Temple and the Bar Kochba rebellion. But it did not die out completely: Jews over the ages remembered our ancestral land and at times strove to return to it. The principles of Zionism remained a part of our identity, even though we were separated from our land.

Two thousand years ago, conversion of *Gerei Tzedek* was flourishing, and Jews already worked to fulfill the prophetic vision of the Ingathering of the Exiles. During the long period of the Diaspora, work on these goals greatly declined but never faded out: Converts joined throughout our history, while Jewish explorers of all periods sought the lost communities said to lie across the fabled Sambatyon River.

As of 1890, the seeds of Zionism were just beginning to grow. A few authors, such as Leon Pinsker in his *Auto-Emancipation*, were building the ideology for a modern Jewish national liberation movement, and a handful of activists, such as Bilu and Hovevei Zion, made *Aliyah* in order to revive our national presence in the land of Israel.

Likewise, Kulanu is just now beginning to plant the seeds of a Jewish revival, by reaching out to lost and scattered Jews worldwide.

When Theodor Herzl organized the First Zionist Congress in 1896, Zionism truly came to life. The Zionists combined deep faith

We can achieve the organization's goals of gathering in Jews – whether communities lost to us for centuries, or *Gerim* newly joining our people -- from the four corners of the earth.

with political insight, and idealism with realism. The timing of the Zionist movement was right, striking chords of nationalism just when the Jewish masses were ready.

For Kulanu, the time has come to expand our efforts to change the future of the Jewish people, and of the world, for the better. Combining Jewish principles with hard-headed practicality, we can achieve the organization's goals of gathering in Jews – whether communities lost to us for centuries, or *Gerim* newly joining our people -- from the four corners of the earth.

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Kulanu and Zionism (cont.)

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Zionism did not garner the unanimous support of the Jewish people. At first, almost every Jewish ideology and movement opposed it strongly. Most Jewish socialists, assimilationists, and Orthodox saw Zionism as a threat, although Jews from each of these groups were active in the Zionist movement. The proportion of Jews who supported Zionism was very small, at first.

As Kulanu grows in numbers and activity, it can also expect to encounter opposition. Some Jews may feel threatened by the large numbers of dispersed Jews whom we are now connecting to the Jewish people. Some may see our work as endangering local customs by submerging them in Judaism, or endangering Jewish practices by introducing "outside" influences. Ironically, too, some Jews may be uncomfortable with the great fervor that new returnees or converts show for the Jewish religion. By explaining the traditional principles underlying the movement, and by acting according to the ethical principles of Judaism, we can draw in nay-sayers, and continue working towards our goals despite opposition.

Zionism gradually gained acceptance. In the first half of the twentieth century, socialist Zionism grew, and secularists came to see Israel as a place where a secular Jewish culture could flourish. The

Ironically, too, some Jews may be uncomfortable with the great fervor that new returnees or converts show for the Jewish religion.

Orthodox began to see modern Zionism as divinely inspired, and in the last twenty years most sectors of Orthodoxy have come to support Zionism. Today, although there are still non-Zionist Jews, support for the State of Israel has become the norm among the Jewish people.

Likewise, Kulanu is gaining the recognition and support of wide sectors of the Jewish people. Religious Jews appreciate the addition of deeply believing and devoted Jews. Humanists see that bringing in Jews from different races and ethnic groups helps us actualize the principles of ethics and humanism that we have always worked for. All Jews will learn to appreciate the energy and commitment that new and newly-returned Jews bring to our people.

Zionist successes were tremendous. Within fifty-two years, Zionism succeeded in bringing Jews back to their ancient land and re-creating the Jewish state. The Zionist movement established universities, journals, farms, schools, power plants, hospitals, labor unions, social services, and a public health system.

But success was slow at first. Herzl failed to gain support of world powers, and the Zionist movement struggled to work with tiny budgets and little support from world Jewry. It is surprising to learn how few pioneers worked at achieving these successes: Ideologically-motivated *chalutzim* never numbered more than a few tens of thousands. Yet these few changed Jewish history. They created a state where Jews could find asylum from persecution and build a flourishing Jewish culture.

Likewise, Kulanu can achieve very ambitious goals, by careful planning and hard work. Even a small group of dedicated activists can trigger fundamental changes that will help revitalize the Jewish people.

Some say that today, we are in a "post-Zionist" era. Regardless of the merits of that term, it is pleasant to think that, despite the tremendous threats we still face, we may be nearing the day when Zionism is so successful that it can be reabsorbed into its important place in Jewish thought as a whole, rather than a separate ideology.

Similarly, we look forward to the day when dispersed Jews are universally recognized and embraced as such, and when love of the *Ger Tzedek* once again becomes the accepted norm in Jewish thought and practice.

Zionism had many accomplishments that were unprecedented in human history. Never before had a people revived its independent state after a long period of exile, and never before had a language come back from the dead. Nowhere have voluntary socialist communes achieved the success of the *kibbutzim*, and nowhere has an economy grown so rapidly under constant political isolation and armed attack.

Kulanu is also aiming at goals that have never before been achieved. Other religions actively pressure people to convert, but only Judaism will bring in large numbers of converts without pressuring or even actively inducing people to convert. Ethnic groups have been scattered, but never before have dispersed nations revived a strong sense of national identity among long-scattered communities. Kulanu can bring this vision to life, with careful planning and dedication to the goals.

The State of Israel was established as a Light Unto the Nations, a moral beacon in a dangerous world. Likewise, in establishing ties to dispersed Jews worldwide, we propagate the principles of ethical monotheism, our precious birthright that is also our gift to the world.

The Last Bnei Menashe Immigrants? (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

Amishav director Michael Freund has responded, "We have always worked in full cooperation with all the relevant authorities, including the Interior Ministry and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel. There are another 5,000 to 6,000 Bnei Menashe in northeastern India, and they all want to immigrate to Israel. Their aliya has been gradual, because Amishav funds it alone, with no help from the government or the Jewish Agency. There is simply no reason why this aliya should be stopped in the middle."

Hillel Halkin, author of a recent book on the Bnei Menashe, *Across the Sabbath River*, was critical of Poraz's action: "These people are being treated very badly. My opinion is that there is some very incredible link between them and the lost tribes, but even apart from that, this group of people from a remote corner of the world is seriously attracted to Judaism.... My sense is that Poraz, like many secular Israelis, think so little of Judaism, that they can't think that anyone else would be attracted to it."

Kulanu president Jack Zeller also issued a strong response, along with a call for action: **"It is fairly obvious by now from the example that Avraham Poraz set with Beta Israel from Ethiopia, that he wants to keep out *olim* who are not of European descent... Every rabbi in every synagogue in the United States needs to speak up. Nothing would upset Poraz more than knowing that on his next trip to the United States he would be banned from entering any synagogue or Jewish communal building, no matter what! This is a leverage not often used. But if not here and now, when?"**

LETTERS TO KULANU

Speaking Out for Israel

The work of Kulanu is a heavenly work—beneficial to all Jews. I noticed that a fact that encourages this mad dream of some people that Jews can be eliminated is that they view Jews as a small people; an untruth, because in our own case, the Ibos of Nigeria are at the very least 40 million. And in the same Nigeria, from my present research and observation, are many peoples/tribes who definitely came under Jewish influence, because the Ibos lived in most parts of Nigeria; and those people don't really feel hostile to Israel.

Another obligation for all Jewish peoples should be to speak out and write about the oppression of Jews by Palestinians. If a Lemba, an Ethiopian Jew, an Abayudaya, an Ibo, a Honduran Jew, etc., all get articles into papers calling for world sympathy for Israel, I believe the world will begin to realize that the truth is that Israel is in reality the victim. Hiding has never helped matters. Initially Ibos were afraid to open synagogues in Abuja, but they did and the heavens did not fall. Jews everywhere should be encouraged by our leaders in Kulanu to speak out and write for Israel. Anything that could help in clearing the lies heaped on Jews should be encouraged. For example, why can't we spread far and wide the provision of Vatican II absolving Jews of any blame in the killing of Jesus? Also, the suicide bombing of Israeli civilians has been classified as a war crime; we should agitate for charges to be brought against their leaders.

*Remy Ilona.
Abuja, Nigeria*

Avenging the Inquisition

I like Rabbi Leon's suggestion of making Tisha B'av the commemorative holiday for the Spanish Inquisition -- using the fast day as a learning experience, then breaking the fast with Spanish food. I recently attended a service led by Rabbi Manny Vinas in which one of the prayers was read in Ladino. We need a committee whose sole purpose is to see that the Spanish Inquisition is not forgotten. There is much work to be done and some of it can be done without large sums of money, just dedicated people.

*Barbara Shair
New City, NY*

Kulanu's Upcoming Book on Jewish Diversity

The "interface" of publishing a book which reveals the reality of Jews in Africa and Jews in Ladino lands and

Jews in Iraq—besides me, an American-Israeli writer studying Russian in Jerusalem—MIGHT actually awaken or alert persons to the true DIVERSITY in the Jewish world and be a KIDDUSH HA'SHEM (sanctification of God's name) and thus aid the quest for world peace.

*Sue Tourkin-Komet
Jerusalem*

Thanks so much for including my poem in your upcoming publication. I have been a fan of Kulanu and its work ever since reviewing "Shalom Everybody Everywhere," the Abayudaya CD. I think it is exemplary for Kulanu to continue to use all of the arts to further cultural understanding, and I am proud to be welcomed among such outward- and forward-thinking artists.

*Paul Wieder
Chicago*

In Praise of Amishav

I just wanted to tell you I spent a great day with Amishav in Israel recently. As you know I visited Rabbi Birnbaum's ulpan for Spanish and Portuguese speakers in Efrat three years ago. They are still operating in Efrat, but now have another ulpan in Hechal Shlomo in Jerusalem. Both ulpanim are operating at about double the strength of the one I saw three years ago. I had the overwhelming sense that the entire movement for *anousim* had moved from the fringes into the heart not only of Jerusalem but also in the very building of the Chief Rabbinate.

I spent more than hour with Michael Freund, and with him too I sensed that Amishav had moved from a shoe-string organization to one that is able to make its presence felt much more frequently and forcefully in the midst of those communities needing outreach. I met Rabbi Salas, who is leaving soon for Belmonte (he will also be serving Porto). They seemed to have chosen him with great care. Among other things, Michael told me that the rabbi's approach will include respect for and even encouragement of continuing some of the traditions that the Jews of Belmonte practiced in secret. Amishav will also be sending a rabbi shortly to Mallorca, who will be based there. It seems that many of the things we've talked about for so long are coming to fruition.

*Alan Tigay
New York, NY*



Black and White Jews Share Matzot and Minhag in Manhattan

On April 22, the close of Passover was celebrated at the Carlebach Shul on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. This, of course, is not unusual. What made the occasion a milestone was the attendance of seven Black Hebrews from the Commandment Keepers Ethiopian Hebrew congregation of Harlem, Congregation House of Israel of Brooklyn, and Sha'ar Zion Sephardic Minyan (Young Israel) of Manhattan.

Commandment Keepers is the original Black Hebrew congregation established in the US, tracing its beginning in New York to the year 1919 -- the same year that the Abayudaya Jewish Community was formed near Mbale, Uganda. There are several Black Hebrew congregations located in Brooklyn, the Bronx and Queens. Most maintain a style of worship that reflects a synthesis of their Hebraic and African roots.

Arranged by Kulanu board member Harriet Bograd, the service at Carlebach presented an opportunity for the two groups to sing, worship, dance and partake of a final Passover meal together. Members of the Carlebach Shul, including its rabbi, offered observations on the spiritual significance of the day and the gathering. Presentations by Y'sudah Yehudah, a native of Harlem, and Ahab Eliyah, of Nigerian ancestry, followed. Both have been observant Hebrews for most or all of their lives.

Yehudah, an anthropologist, lived with the Abayudaya in Uganda during the summer of 2001 and again in January 2002 to work on her Masters project. She described the founding of the community under Ugandan warrior-hero Semei Kakungulu during the British colonial period. She cited as the community's most formidable challenge in the modern era Idi Amin's oppressive regime from 1971-1979. Yehudah noted that currently the lack of a viable water system and power source present major challenges to the small African community, along with unemployment, poverty and missionizing efforts by Muslims and Christians, which discouraged the pursuit of education. Hunger, illness and the lack of proper clothing have also been deterrents to education. Vigorous efforts to remedy the lack of general and Jewish education have been undertaken through the establishment of Semei Kakungulu High School and the Hadassah Infant School, both being crucial for the survival of the community. Initiatives on the part of Kulanu and members of the Black Hebrew community have contributed to a brighter outlook for the Ugandan community. A spirited question-and-answer period followed, and Bograd made an appeal for monetary and material donations to the Abayudaya schools.

Eliyah, a young researcher from the Upper East Side and representative of the Ibo Benei-Yisrael Association of New York, described the arrival of Jews to West Africa through migrations, trade and travel. His discussion covered the first arrivals of Jews into North and West Africa as well as their decline due to the Islamic invasions, which began in 650 CE. He specifically outlined the three major migrations, customs and practices of the Jewish ancestors of several prominent Ibo (Igbo) clans who comprise the Ibo Benei-Yisrael Jews of Nigeria. These migrations, according to Eliyah, are believed to be from Egyptian and Ethiopian Jewish migration, migration of Jews from Morocco and Timbuktu, and migration of Jewish Berber clans from North Africa. The Ibo, having lost most of the written record of their Jewish identity and the written Torah, were able to maintain oral traditions and practices such as circumcision, kashruth, and purification. Eliyah recounted the episode of British colonial control over Nigeria, which resulted in tensions between the Ibos and other Nigerian ethnic groups and led to the 1960-1966 Biafra War.

Eliyah also spoke of modern-day Ibo communities in Tel Aviv,

Southeastern Nigeria, the United States and other locations, and their current progress in regaining the lost portions of their Jewish identity. Further research is currently being led in Nigeria by Remy Ilona of the Ibo Benei-Yisrael organization of Nigeria to provide clearer accounts of the community's Jewish origins as well as work to link West African Jews with other Jewish communities around the world. The presentation sparked a lively question and answer period.

Several recent events have brought black and white Jews together. This occasion served to underscore the diversity of ethnicities and traditions shared among Hebraic peoples -- some who live right next-door and some who reside in far corners of the world. The evening ended with an exchange of invitations between the two groups for future interaction.

Giant Strides in Portugal

In the early 1990s some 150 Crypto-Jews in Belmonte, Portugal, formally returned to Judaism, and in 1996 their new synagogue was dedicated. Now, thanks to the organization Amishav, the congregation has a new rabbi.

Chilean-born Rabbi Elisha Salas, who has been studying in Israel for the past several years, was dispatched to Portugal in June.

Amishav leader Michael Freund explained, "Belmonte is home to a large and beautiful synagogue and a thriving community of people who had the courage to openly re-embrace Judaism over a decade ago. We decided to send Rabbi Salas to the area to work with the community and ensure its continued growth and development."

In addition to the Belmonte congregation, Salas will serve the Jewish community in Opporto, Portugal, and will do outreach work among other Crypto-Jewish communities.

Portugal has also benefited from Rabbi Leo Abrami, who recently taught seminars in Lisbon and Porto on Jewish topics especially for *Anousim*. Sponsored by SAUDADES (www.saudades.org) and Saudades -Sefarad Forum (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/saudades-sefarad/>) the four-day seminars were offered in June and July.

Saudades has also undertaken to sponsor a young man from Belmonte, Yosef Rodrigues, to attend a yeshiva in Jerusalem. His life-long dream has been to return as a rabbi, ritual slaughterer, and Hazan to his community in Belmonte. He leaves Portugal on August 31 for Jerusalem.

Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum, the founder of Saudades.org and the Saudades -Sefarad Forum, invites readers to consider helping the efforts in Belmonte and on behalf of Portuguese *Anousim* by donating computers, mezuzot, and funds for Rodrigues's study.

A Jewish Camp in New Hampshire

By Rachel Namudosi Keki

I will always remember the day I landed on the soil of USA. At Newark Airport, I was welcomed by my two sisters, Laura Wetzler and Y'sudah Yehuda. As we embraced each other, I could not believe I was in USA, because it is my first time to travel outside East Africa. We drove all the way from Newark Airport to Laura's and Madelaine's house in Massachusetts. Exhausted from the long journey, I took a quick shower after dinner and went to bed.

Before joining camp, I accompanied Laura to her concerts in Pennsylvania, where I also gave speeches about my Abayudaya community. We traveled through seven states in three weeks. We also visited New York City, which was very amusing! As we drove through the city, Laura kept showing me some of the historical sites. I was also taken to a place in New York called Harlem, where I got braids. I was hosted by friends from the Commandment Keepers Ethiopian Hebrew congregation of Harlem. While in NY, I was taken on a bus tour and



also boat riding, and took many pictures. While on the boat, I saw the Statue of Liberty. It was interesting to be in NY and meet people from all over the world.

We returned to Massachusetts to get prepared for camp. Laura and I went out for shopping and it was fun because we almost spent a full day in the store.

Now I am at Camp Yavneh in New Hampshire < www.campyavneh.org >. Besides being a counselor, I teach a different class every day about my community, and also teach Abayudaya songs. I love Shabbat in camp, though the prayers are a little bit different from those of my community. Every day I learn new things which I hope to teach my people when I go back home. As I teach Abayudaya songs, I also learn new songs from camp. It is amusing to be in camp.

Special thanks to Rabbi Scott Glass and all Kulanu members. Without your hard work, I would not be in the USA. Also, special thanks to Camp Yavneh staff.

(Editor's note: Rachel, 21, is on a five-month American stay that includes camp and a limited speaking tour. Her chief sponsors are Laura Wetzler of Cummington, MA, and Rabbi Scott Glass of Ithaca, NY. Rachel is a lead singer with the now-famous Abayudaya choir, heard in commercial recordings.)

Kulanu's Pashtun Outreach

By e-mail, we recently heard from a Pakistani Muslim who read about Pashtun Jewish history on the Kulanu web page. He wrote that he wants to know more about his roots and "genuine origin." We referred his message to our expert, Rabbi J. Hershy Worch, who replied with this warm response:

Dear ---

My name is Hershy Worch and I am a member of Kulanu. Your letter was forwarded to me because I am a rabbi, a teacher of Jewish religion, law, customs and sacred texts and because I am interested in being of assistance to Pathans wherever they live. Currently, I live in Chicago, USA.

Bene Israel and Bene Yudah have been separated for thousands of years by geography and politics and religion, so there is a lot of catching up to do if you want to learn all about the roots of your people and family. Perhaps you might begin by asking me specific questions. I will be happy to respond to any question.

Thank you for reaching out to Kulanu - All Of Us. We are delighted when our efforts to connect with our long lost family and compatriots is rewarded this way. On behalf of all the members of Kulanu I bid you Shalom.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours truly,

J. Hershy Worch, Rabbi

(J.H.Worch@worldnet.att.net)

Minyan in Kaifeng Explores Interactions (cont.)

(Continued from page 6)

them about their heritage for a few years, but the descendants were aware that the Kaifeng Jews were different from other religious groups – they gave gifts to the poor, performed good deeds, and hung medicines on the synagogue gate for those who needed it.

The interaction was moving for the visitors. One American asked during the film, "Were we doing this for them or for ourselves?" Apparently it was also a positive experience for the Chinese as well. One year later, they took pride in their heritage. And one of the leaders of the Kaifeng descendants, named Moshe, wants to recreate Jewish culture for the people of Kaifeng.

The 74-minute film was produced by Steven Calcote, Jonathan Shulman, and Matt Trusch. It was narrated by Leonard Nimoy. For further information, see <www.GorpBrothers.com> or email Minyan@GorpBrothers.com.

The Kulanu Boutique

Also accessible online – with photos – at www.KulanuBoutique.com

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.*

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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.*

Journey to the Vanished City. Story of the Lemba by Tudor Parfitt. *Proceeds benefit Kulanu.*

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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