

KULANU

“all of us”



Helping Lost Jewish Communities

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Exquisite Photos and Music Of Uganda's Jews

By Karen Primack

It's what we've all been waiting for – a beautiful coffee-table book about the Abayudaya! Richard Sobol has just come out with *Abayudaya: The Jews of Uganda*, an exquisite volume of photographs with text about this remarkable group, and a CD of Abayudaya music is included in a pocket attached to the back cover. The music was recorded and annotated by Rabbi Jeffrey Summit, an ethnomusicologist at Tufts University.

Those of us who have lived and traveled in sub-Saharan Africa universally bemoan the fact that our pictures cannot capture the color and contrast, the rhythm, the unique beauty that is Africa. Richard Sobol, a seasoned pro, has captured the essence of these African scenes as few others can (Carol Beckwith comes to mind). Views of the Ugandan countryside and towns, of Abayudaya prayer and study and feasting, of women washing dishes and carrying water and preparing food, of elders in contemplation, of adults and children at play, of vendors of colorful housewares, of stunning posed portraits – it's all there, and each photo is a masterpiece.

And Sobol's 18-page essay about Abayudaya history and life and Jewish practice is a fine summary for those who have not been introduced to this unique community before.

Summit has written a five-page text to introduce the CD, which is entitled *Abayudaya Music of Worship and Celebration*. This essay is both informative and poignant. It reviews the various influences on Abayudaya music – Zulu music, church and Salvation Army music, Bantu folk music, Western visitors and their recordings, and Nairobi (Kenya) synagogue melodies.

Summit recorded this wonderful sampling of Abayudaya music in informal sessions in Uganda in 2000 and 2002. The first half of the CD includes unaccompanied traditional hymns and psalms, some dating back 20 or 30 years, one composed by the community's founder, Semei Kakungulu, in the 1920s. A particularly precious rendition is Rena bat Esther's solo in Psalm 121, used by the Abayudaya to provide strength and comfort when a person is ill. This is one of the few compositions on the CD by a female composer. Another woman's composition is the melody to Psalm 130, which is sung repeatedly during a burial while shoveling earth and filling up the grave. Women seem to specialize in consolation music.

Twagala Torah (“We Love the Torah”) is a charming children's song composed by one of the youth leaders of the community, Moses Sebagabo. The text, in Luganda, English and Hebrew, is sung by Abayudaya children who attend public school.

The more upbeat second half of the CD features guitar accompaniment by Gershom Sizomu and electric keyboard by John Mark Nkoola, musical director of the Abayudaya high school. In an interesting contrast, Summit placed the *a capella* rendition of Psalm 136 in the first half and the electric version of the same psalm in the latter half. J.J. Keki's song “Ali Omu Yekka” (“My Only One”) sounds like a standard love song: “I have one chosen one. I only have one love. I'm warning those others,

(Continued on page 14)

How To Solve Our Demography Woes

By Barbara Shair

(The author is the director of *Becomingajew.org*, a web site designed to direct, support and nurture those who wish to join the Jewish Community)

Recently the Jewish Agency spent \$6,000,000 to tell us that the Jewish Community is graying and getting smaller. Another \$1,000,000 is being allocated to lessen any more population losses to the Community. I offer the following suggestions for ending the problem free of charge.

- 1) Create an 800 number for potential converts so they can hear a supportive, friendly voice willing to help in their spiritual journey.
- 2) Establish Outreach Centers housing a rabbinical student, books, a genealogical program and as much conversion information as possible.
- 3) Make Outreach part of the training of all rabbis, Hillel directors, and Jewish Community Center directors.
- 4) Use synagogue outdoor bulletin boards and newsletters to advertise information for those seeking conversion.
- 5) Distribute bumper stickers with the 800 number. (Bumper stickers are an easy, effective and inexpensive method of advertising)
- 6) Triple the number of “Taste of Judaism” courses.
- 7) Create and widely distribute a comprehensive pamphlet listing all resources, websites, organizations, and courses that provide information for converts.
- 8) Establish an advertising fund to offer grants to those of us already involved in this endeavor.
- 9) Allow Judaism courses offered on college campuses to be used toward the conversion process.
- 10) Expand the concept of Ambassadors for Judaism, thereby engaging Jews by Choice in outreach to others who may be interested.

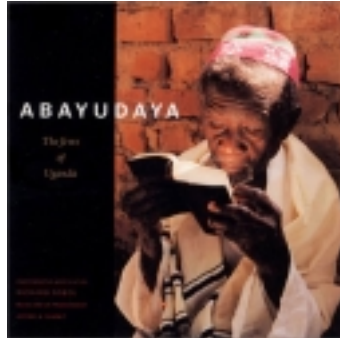
If the Jewish Community is to thrive, Conversion must become a priority. Retired rabbis, rabbinical students, genealogical organizations, community leaders must all become involved in the effort. We need to tap two valuable resources in our community--those already involved in conversion and those who have converted.

Perhaps because of the lessening of anti-Semitism, the arrival of Israel as an international force, or the Church's discovery of its Jewish roots -- whatever the reason -- Judaism is now very much on par with the other religions of the world and many people are showing a deep interest in who we are. The Internet is providing the catalyst for this exploration and websites which deal with conversion to Judaism are getting tremendous traffic. Who are these people who want to join the Tribe?

After seven years and 475,000 visitors, the Conversion Center has learned a great deal about who is seeking to join the Tribe, where they are coming from, and what motivates them to want to be part of a small minority so maligned throughout history. The answers often conflict with conventional wisdom.

Though the Jewish Community continues to define conversion in terms of intermarriage, increasing numbers of converts are not romantically involved with Jewish partners. People with a Jewish ancestry and spiritual seekers are providing the greatest number of new Jews. Programs which reach out only to the intermarried may yield minimal results. Only 10% of the intermarried convert. Taste of Judaism, which targets a much

(Continued on page 12)



LETTERS TO KULANU

Sad News from the Lemba Community



Words are always so inadequate at a time like this. I wish I could express how deeply I feel at this time. Losing Professor Mathivha is a loss not only to his family and community but to all mankind. One of the nicest, warmest, and wisest people I have been honored to meet in my lifetime, Professor Mathivha, has passed away. It is a sad day for the Lemba community and all those who were fortunate to have met this great man. I wish the Mathivha family and the Lemba community strength at this time of loss. May you be comforted with all those who mourn for Zion

and Jerusalem. *Lala kahle Baba*

*Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum
Johannesburg, South Africa*

I was with Professor Mathivha at the last annual gathering of the Lemba Cultural Association over which he presided. It took place on the 7th September, which date coincided with the Jewish New Year. Professor Mathivha was already a sick man but he manfully bore the bitter cold and driving rain which penetrated the synagogue without walls near Elim. He was full of the conviction that the Lemba were Jews and that they were celebrating the New Year like Jews everywhere. His voice repeatedly rang out with cries of Shanah Tovah!

I wish to send my deeply felt condolences to his family and to all the Lemba who loved and respected him as a great leader.

*Tudor Parfitt
London, England*

Searching in Brazil

I've been searching and studying about Judaism in Brazil, especially what some call crypto-Judaism. I was born in the northeast of Brazil (I live in Rio de Janeiro now) and I identified many habits that have been described in articles about Marranos in Brazil in my family, both on my father's and mother's side. Since childhood I always remembered my father telling me not to kneel in the church among other things. His family is from Pernambuco.

But during all this time many Brazilian Marranos don't even know of their origin and are not interested to know more about it, unfortunately. But there are a few like me who are interested in our origins, and only recently I tried to approach the "real" Jews and I learned of the processes of return (*teshuva*) and conversion. I agree that those who want to become Jews must go through a conversion process so they can learn more, with accuracy, with no distortion about Judaism.

I was criticized and treated with sarcasm by a rabbi when I explained that I wanted to convert to Judaism. He said my wife and my daughter had to convert too. But that was a personal option from me that I could not impose on my wife. I understand his idea, but apart from that I was refused to even attend speeches or classes - even as a listener (paying for the classes) - and I was told that those were for Jews only, no gentiles. I could not believe what I was told, especially after reading a book of Rabbi Nachman of Breslav. I study Hebrew, Kabala, read the Torah, pray using the Siddur, and most of all I believe in the unity of God. I study every day, using internet, books, magazines that I get from a Moroccan Jew whose descendants had emigrated to Amazonia, who is my best friend. I do all that alone most of the time, and I have to keep it to myself, because nobody understands how I can consider myself a Jew when I'm not a Jew according to other Jews. It's very complicated. I don't worry. I continue my life easily. I can only thank God for the wonderful life I live and He is the one I have to really love and be concerned about.

What I wanted to say is that after reading "Searching for Brazilian Marranos" by Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn with Robert H. Lande, *Jews in Places You Never Thought Of*, I felt like a rock had been taken off my back. It's good to know that other Jews don't discriminate against the Marranos, after all these 500 years of secrets and ignorance. I wish one day this situation would change and the "pure" Jews in Brazil would have a more open mind towards what they consider the "fake" Jews. Maybe only when the *Mashiach* returns... who knows? It was very, very important to find the Kulanu site. Really.

*Claudio Terto
Rio de Janeiro, Brazil*

Ziv and the Abayudaya

I smile when I think about the Abayudaya and their sudden pop up into Jewish consciousness (I am not referring to Kulanu—you have been on to it). It was in the very first years that I was working with Danny Siegel, then as a volunteer, that I received the tape of their beautiful Shabbat songs along with the "report" from the Brown student. Their speech patterns and their tunes really got me and I remember asking our succession of cantors (at my synagogue here in NJ) to transcribe the *L'Cha Dodi* and teach it to us. Finally, one of them did and taught it to the youth choir who performed it one Shabbat.

Here we are, many years later and they are at last getting some attention! Ziv is pleased to be on board and I look forward to writing "their story" for our upcoming annual report. Hopefully, more people will learn about them and support their efforts to be Jews in a remote place.

*Naomi Eisenberger
Managing Director, Ziv Tzedakah Fund
Milburn, NJ*

Praising Challah Covers

The challah covers from Ghana are just beautiful! I am framing on and one we are raffling off during a synagogue event.

*Rabbi Barbara Aiello
Bradenton, Florida*

Jewish Genes

Tudor Parfitt is fascinated by the finding of some form of Jewish genes in the Lemba tribe, and he is looking for them elsewhere. However, I was pleased to read that he considers this endeavor as an intellectual exercise and not a test of Jewishness. I want to remind folks that it was Adolph Hitler who said that Jewishness was "in the blood." He was wrong. It is not in the genes, either. It is in the mind. Jewishness is not something physical. It exists on a mental level, or better yet, a spiritual level.

*Yehuda Sherman
Lafayette, California*

KULANU ("ALL OF US") is a tax-exempt 501 (c)(3) 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.

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A Lemba Chanukah

By Sandy Leeder

This last Chanukah I made my third visit of 2002 with the Lemba in Thohoyandou, South Africa. The two earlier visits were at Kulanu-sponsored Recapture Seminars held at Bhuba Lodge, an isolated retreat setting, with leaders of the Lemba Cultural Association and Lemba students. These seminars were led by Rabbis Leo Abrami and Hillel Avidan, and myself. Chanukah was the first time we brought actual Jewish ceremonial practices into the homes of ordinary Lemba.

I stayed at the home Dr. Gedzu Mathivha (MD, MPH Harvard), in Sibasa, and each night of Chanukah we lit a six-foot Chanukiah outside different Lemba homes. I gave gifts of Chanukiahs and candles to my hosts and their guests. This is a description of one such gathering.

Gedzu and I left his home in the late afternoon. After driving through the muddy unmarked roads of a tract housing development in a Venda area in lower Thohoyandou, and asking directions from locals, we arrived at the humble house of the Mathivha family. A few old men and young children were waiting and others were still coming. Lucas Sadiki, who had attended lightings at Gedzu's house, organized this event.

Just after we arrived Gedzu began to play Mbarei music on his Land Cruiser's stereo and some of the old women began to dance. I joined in, imitating their steps as best as I could, and broke the ice. Lucas handed out the Chanukiahs and candles, as well as Chabad instruction pamphlets.



Gabriel Malaka, Lucas Sadiki and Gedzu Mathivha

Then, as were where waiting for it to get dark to light the large Chanukiah, I was asked to explain the significance of the ceremony. I told the story of the Macabees and the redemption of the Temple in Jerusalem, which was contemporaneously translated into Venda by Lucas.

After the explanation, I was asked by an old man, if was this a religious observance. Yes, I answered, and then he asked me if this religion was the same as his.

So I started to outline the basic premises of Judaism as follow:

1. We believe in one God, with his response, "this is the same!"
2. We keep the Sabbath, "the same".
3. We circumcise our males on the 8th day, the same (date not emphasized)
4. We keep kosher, do not eat pork. "This is the same".
5. We celebrate the new moon, "the same"
6. We marry in our religion, "the same"
7. We celebrate the holy days in the Bible, no response.

The ancient threads of tradition still connected the Lemba to their Jewish roots.

At another time, discussing the Temple with Gedzu, he had remarked that sacrifice was important to the Lemba, but elaborated no further.

As darkness fell, the candle lighting ceremony started. I said the blessings in Hebrew, then English, with repetition by Lucas and commentary by Gedzu in Venda, and I proceeded to light the candles. The Chanukiah and the candlelight were beautiful.

Later we blew the Shofar I brought, as it was the new moon and I knew blowing Shofar was a Lemba custom. The Shofar's magic sound transcends language. The older people recognized the sounds and said that they remember that the Shofar was blown in the mornings and evenings when the cows were taken out to pasture, though no one knew how to blow it. I then passed it around and the kids tried to blow it. After many

tries a few got the hang of it and make various sounds.

We then brought out the driedels, and the children loved them. I played a few rounds with the kids but unfortunately we did not bring enough small change to give out Chanukah gelt.

An old lady began singing the Lemba Dindai song, with a chorus of the middle-aged women. Gedzu was amazed that I was privileged to hear the Dindai song, as the Lemba keep their ceremonies secret and typically don't sing with strangers present, but by now I was one of the family.

We sang and danced for quite a while. I was sorry to leave as these people longed for a taste of Judaism. They were thirsty for their tradition and there is no normative Judaism for them to emulate, as there isn't another practicing Jew within 300 miles.

Her People Fell in Love with Her

By Andrée Aelion Brooks

(Excerpts from the Prologue of *The Woman Who Defied Kings, Paragon House 2002, a book based upon newly-discovered documents in 13 languages, located in seven different countries.*)

Ultimately the *conversos*, and most of the openly-professing Jews of the Eastern Mediterranean, would view Doña Gracia as their unquestioned leader. She would be revered as much for her wisdom and compassion as her capacity to stand up to tyranny; not to mention her willingness to give up her fortune to ensure the survival of this *Aremnant*® of Israel, as her people were called in those days.

Here was a woman who made sure that she was constantly looking out for their welfare as they became a continual stream of frightened refugees, wandering stateless through the mountain passes, walled towns, hostile duchies and muddy roads of Europe. Here was a woman who would become so furious upon learning that Inquisition officials had burned twenty-three of her people in the Italian port of Ancona that she would organize a shipping boycott that would bring the city to its knees. And when they arrived in the safety of the Ottoman Empire, it was she who supported the building of synagogues and *yeshivas* that enabled them to reconnect with their ancestral faith. Moreover, in her final years, it was she who would make one of the earliest organized attempts to re-settle some of the refugees on sacred soil, four hundred years before the founding of the modern state of Israel.

In her personal life, she would have the courage to stand face to face with Queen Marie, Regent of the Low Countries and sister of Charles V, the powerful Holy Roman Emperor, and say she would rather see her only daughter *Adrown*® than marry the disreputable Catholic nobleman the monarchs had commanded the girl to wed. As a patron she reflected the best of Renaissance culture by supporting the creative works of her own people. In business, her name was repeated so prominently, and in so many documents, as to imply she was not simply the titular head of any enterprise. She ran it. And whenever she found herself in a tight corner, she regularly pursued a number of options simultaneously, rather than rely upon any single course of action. There are lessons here for us all.

Her people fell in love with her daring and regal spirit at a time when the pride of a people B any people B was bound up in the personality and accomplishments of its monarch. She gave the Jews and *conversos* a sense that they had a leader of substance and style, just like the Christians and Muslims. Her death would be lamented by the great rabbis of her day as equal to the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Sa-adiyah Longo, a leading poet-scholar in the Jewish world of those times, even admitted that his views of the capacity of women for wisdom and leadership had changed on account of her amazing deeds and strength of character...

David Turetsky Departs

*By Jack Zeller
President of Kulanu*

Kulanu is 10 years old. David Turetsky was present from Day One bringing answers to the strategic struggles of the founders by showing us that there are new and amazing ways to expand Jewish civilization, diversity, intensity and biblical narrative - with modest financial resources. At that time most of us knew very little about computer modalities and I thought that Java was a new brand of coffee, something that a computer junky drank deep into the night.

David started the Kulanu web site and discussion list and did it virtually all on his own. He never cut corners. I recall many a time that he picked up something in a linking web site that was passed over by me or others. He loved free discussion but for the sake of the Kulanu focus, changed the discussion to a moderated one. He thought through changes carefully and always engaged his Kulanu colleagues in the most congenial matter, making the merit of a discussion the primary arbitrator of a decision.

Another side of David was the joy of being his friend. He mixed humor and intensity in a very alluring juxtaposition. His welcome to the list serve and suggestions to submissions were a classic act of Jewish hospitality and civility.

More than once when I asked David to do more he warned me that he was hanging on by his fingernails. I asked one time too many. David has for too long neglected his personal financial status for Kulanu work. He has resigned from both his position as the list serve moderator and web master and over all Vice President Director of communications for Kulanu.

After accepting the reality of his departure, what next? As you might expect, David gave me generously of his advice and time on how to go on. And for all of us, going on is all the easier and more promising because of David's impact.

From all of us, the thousands you have made for the better, thanks, many thanks, ne'er enough thanks.

A New Nigerian Friend

Yisrael Ben Yehuda is a lecturer in Business Education at Rivers State University of Science and Technology in Port Harcourt, Nigeria. He is also devoted to the practice of Judaism. He is the founder of the 200-member Beit Knesset Or Vaderech. He is putting the finishing touches on their new 500-seat building in Akwa Ibom State.

Yisrael and his wife Sarah have five children. The two youngest are in college in Wisconsin, and the three older ones are in Nigeria, where one is a banker and two are in university.

Our new friend is a member of the small Ibibio tribe and is anxious to work together with his brothers in the Igbo Tribe. "I believe strongly that if all the scattered Jewish worshippers in Nigeria are brought together our learning and study will be highly enhanced."

Yisrael will tell us about his fascinating path to Judaism in the next newsletter.

A Sensational Volunteer In Uganda

Emily (Chaya) Weinstein went to Uganda last fall for a year-long photography internship sponsored by Visions in Action.

Yes, Emily is taking pictures, but somewhere along the way she found herself doing a thousand other things to assist her new friends, the Abayudaya. She has been working on grant proposals, assisting a member of the community with his college research, doing TOEFL tutoring to prepare two students for study abroad, training women on the use of the computer, teaching and consulting at the community's Hadassah School, teaching a Saturday women's yeshiva about daily issues in living a Jewish life, assisting with the Saturday children's service and teaching Hebrew at a Sunday yeshiva for children.

In addition, she teaches English and Hebrew at the Semei Kakungulu High School, handling the community's internet communications, and planning a series of monthly in-services for the Abayudaya and greater community with a health educator, who would also consult with the schools.

Weinstein also sends a monthly newsletter to friends and colleagues, trying to raise awareness about the Abayudaya. Here are some excerpts from this remarkable volunteer's December newsletter:

The Sunday School is in full swing. The rabbi started it up this fall in order to train lay leaders. A significant number of students do not have a strong Jewish background in the home, in part because of the many people who left Judaism during the reign of terror of Idi Amin. He prohibited Jewish practice and Jews were badly persecuted, and many even stopped practicing the religion. Now there is a renaissance of Jewish life, with much input from Kulanu.

In Sunday School, the rabbi teaches about the Shabbat and the holidays, and reviews the parasha of the week. He taught the Mourner's Kaddish prayer and we are now working on the Friday night Kiddush (prayer for wine) and other Sabbath blessings. The rabbi teaches a group in advanced prayerbook Hebrew, and I teach Hebrew to beginners.

Chanukah with the children of Hadassah School was fun. They are enthusiastic singers and learned the Chanukah songs very quickly. They were fascinated with the story of Chanukah. We also teach them the weekly Torah story and they particularly enjoy bibliodrama, enacting the parts of the Bible characters.

The school had to close a week early because of lack of funds. Although we have some contributions for the teacher salaries, a main problem is that very few parents can afford to pay the tuition! This is especially daunting given that there are 20 boarders for whom food must be purchased and health care provided. We met with some parents who agreed to maintain the current costs of tuition, and we indicated the need to pay fees before the first day of the new school year in February. The response remains to be seen! It is truly hand-to-mouth at this point.

I have been doing some photography of the Abayudaya and intend to do more when the new school semester begins. I have not yet put any photos from Africa on my site <www.joyofcolor.com>, but plan to do so upon my return if not sooner.

Sending Books Is Easy!

Several of our communities would benefit from shipments of educational and art supplies, Jewish books and ritual objects, toys, and clothing. Unfortunately, it is expensive to ship most objects to other continents (even by surface mail), so it may be better to send funds so that the needed items can be purchased locally. **Books are another story!** Some think it's a complicated business to send books to our Jewish communities overseas. It's not! Here are some simple rules to consider (most of them are just common sense):

- + When selecting used or new children's Jewish books, reject books that seem to stress material wealth – such as going to a well-stocked toy store for Chanukah or featuring sumptuous holiday table settings.
- + When selecting used or new adult Judaica books, keep in mind that in many cases the person's first language is not English, and that the person may not have had many educational opportunities. There are some exceptions, but generally the books should be clear and simple rather than "scholarly." Most of the people in our communities are not ready to read a book that is only in Hebrew text.
- + Appropriate books: Bibles, *chumashim*, prayer books, Hebrew primers, Jewish histories, books on practicing Judaism, Jewish novels, children's books.
- + The cheapest way to send books abroad from the US is with "Economy (Surface) M-Bags" available at the US post office. Only printed matter may be put in an M-Bag, and each bag must weigh between 11 and 66 pounds. Books are first packed in small cartons (each with a complete address), and the cartons are placed in the large canvas M-Bags. The postage is about \$1.50 per pound. Each M-bag must have a #2976 Customs Form attached, obtained at the Post Office.
- + Keep in mind that for some items it is cheaper and more efficient to send the community money for the item rather than the item itself. If people have donated clothing for a community, it is probably worthwhile to ship this by surface mail (it will take some months). But if the clothes need to be purchased and then shipped, it is cheaper to send money and let the community shop for the clothing locally.
- + Approach Jewish school and synagogue libraries and let them know you are interested in having appropriate books for Kulanu communities in the Third World when they are ready to "retire" books from their collections. Select carefully; you don't have to send everything you are offered!
- + Consider purchasing books for a Kulanu community for your bar and bat mitzvah table centerpieces instead of flowers. Cards at each table can give information about the community selected.
- + Here are some addresses that would welcome books, ritual items, toys and clothing:

Aaron Kintu Moses
Abayudaya Community
PO Box 225
Mbale, Uganda

Tifereth Israel Synagogue
c/o David Ahenkorah
PO Box 57
New Adienbra St.
Sefwi Wiaswo, W/R
Ghana

Lemuel Henkhogin Haokip
Secretary, Bnei Menashe Council
Amishav House, Jail Road, Old Lambulane
Imphal, Manipur 795001 INDIA
(Orthodox books with Sefardi *nusach* preferred)

Mr. Sadok Yacobi
Bene Yacob Synagogue
Kotha Reddy Palem Post
Chebrolu - 522 212
Guntur District
Andhra Pradesh, INDIA

Sarah Yisrael Yehudah,
20 Plot East-West Road
Adamac Group Headquarters
Rumuodara, Port-Harcourt
Rivers State, Nigeria
(books and ritual objects only)

A Jewish Community in Distress In Zimbabwe

By Ann Haendel

(Editor's note: In a January 1 account in The Washington Post, Michael Grunwald reported that half of Zimbabwe's 12 million people were at risk of starvation, and that "there is strong evidence that President Robert Mugabe's ruling party has used food as an instrument of power – to reward allies, punish opponents and attract new supporters." Few stop to think about the impact this might have on an isolated Jewish community)

During my 1999 visit to the Jewish community in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, in Southern Africa, I wondered how long the community could survive. Recent messages from a friend there indicate that the community now is now truly in distress.

Bulawayo's Jews left in large numbers in the 1960s out of displeasure with the increasing racial intolerance and ensuing political turmoil. Still others left in the late '70s fearing a hostile business environment under indigenous rule that was to come. Those who remained in 1999 were largely (1) the elderly, nearly 39 of whom are well provided for in a Jewish-only retirement home that has been compared to a five-star hotel and (2) those whose business interests prevented them from moving to Australia, Canada, South Africa or Israel.

Among the organizations that still operated in this contracting community in 1999 were a Chevra Kadisha and a Free-loan Society. And several charitable Jewish women's organizations were functioning actively. The once flourishing Jewish-sponsored day school still served youngsters of primary school age, although Jewish children comprised only 8% of the enrollment. Along with their academic subjects, the Jewish children studied Hebrew and "Jewish Studies." (For the non-Jewish students, the study of Hebrew is optional after grade one. Several elect to do so and often an Indian or indigenous child wins top Hebrew honors.) There was also a Jewish pre-school, though with only two Jewish students.

At college age, the young Jews of Bulawayo, without exception, leave the country in pursuit of their higher education. They do not return. The grandparents I talked with were united in their regret at being far from their grandchildren growing up abroad.

It is neither the Holocaust nor anti-Semitism that created this remnant community. It is the economic situation in Zimbabwe, where inflation, unemployment and lack of opportunity have become endemic and no one in government seems willing to reverse the tide.

Life used to be good for the Jews of Bulawayo. They were among the first Europeans to arrive there over 100 years ago as traders and explorers and among those who opened up the mining and cattle industries. They became politicians, newspaper owners and proprietors of hotels. As did most whites who arrived there, most Jews amassed a staff of maids, houseboys and gardeners. They built homes in newly developed suburbs and enjoyed diverse cultural and social activities. The 1950s saw a rapid increase in the size of the Jewish population despite occasional flare-ups of anti-Semitism from the Zimbabwe government following the creation of the State of Israel and later the equating of Zionism with racism.

In December 1999, the Bulawayo Jewish community of 270 persons was still able to provide an all-male minyan twice a day at the Bulawayo Hebrew Congregation. (The Congregation's rabbi also taught at the day school.) Those Jews who wished to could keep kosher thanks to a South African *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) who came to the city four times a year. But I was left wondering, with a mixture of despair and of hope, whether this community could be saved.

In September 2002 I received this disheartening communication from a friend in the community: I will protect her privacy by not naming her.

We no longer have a rabbi and, in the present circumstances, we are a community in distress. At this point in time, the Jewish community of Bulawayo, which before Independence in 1980 numbered 3000, is now down to 200 people. By the end of the year, we will be down to 150 Jews,

(Continued on page 12)

Preaching to the Converted

By Michael Freund

(this article originally appeared in the *Jerusalem Post* on January 1, 2003)

For all those present, it was a sight as remarkable as it was moving.

The young couple, recently arrived from India, sat before the three members of the Rabbinical Conversion Court, answering questions on subjects ranging from Jewish philosophy to ritual observance.

The examination was demanding, probing the extent of their Judaic knowledge and spiritual commitment, challenging them to recall the finer points of the law as well as the prophetic vision of the Final Redemption.

"Israel is the chosen people of God," Daniel told the judges in fluent English, "God loves us, and that is why we have come here." Suddenly, overcome with emotion, he switched to his native tongue, telling the court through an interpreter about his heartfelt desire to live as a Jew.

Just four months ago, Daniel and his wife arrived in Israel from Manipur, an Indian state on the border with Burma. They are members of the Bnei Menashe, a group claiming descent from a lost tribe of Israel. For over two decades, they have lived a Jewish life, observing the Sabbath, keeping kosher and attending synagogue.

Now, after a period of rigorous study, the young couple stands on the threshold of fulfilling their dream – formally entering into the covenant of Abraham.

"What blessing is recited on cake?" asks one of the rabbis. "And what about an orange?" Daniel and his spouse are unequivocal, and unhesitating, in their replies, answering the queries with a mix of confidence and knowledge that many Israeli Jews would find hard to muster.

"Cake is *Borei Minei Mezonot*," they respond correctly to the first question. "Oranges are *Ha'etz*," says Daniel, referring to the blessing for tree-grown fruit. "And bananas?" inquires one of the rabbis. Daniel's wife offers a knowing smile. She realizes it is a trick question, designed to see how deeply she has delved into the laws of blessings. For while bananas may grow on trees, their blessing is nevertheless the same as that of produce which grows directly from the ground. "*Ha'adamah*," she replies, with a giggle, and a discernible sense of accomplishment, evident in her voice.

It is clear that Daniel and his wife have mastered the material. Not just because they have studied it, but because they have been living it too.

When the questioning is over, the rabbis talk among themselves, reviewing the couple's performance and trading impressions about their level of sincerity and dedication. The consensus among them is unmistakable – Daniel and his wife have passed with flying colors.

Upon hearing the news, the young immigrants were overjoyed. They stood before the court, agreed to accept the yoke of the commandments and recited the *Shema*, declaring God's unity and their undying allegiance to it.

It is a touching scene, and one that is increasingly repeating itself across Israel, as growing numbers of prospective converts seek to join the Jewish people.

Sometimes the language is Russian, or Amharic, or Spanish. But regardless of the dialect involved, the goal is ultimately the same – to cast one's lot with the eternal people of Israel.

This past Sunday, none other than Prime Minister Ariel Sharon addressed the subject, when he told the weekly cabinet meeting that the con-

version process has to be accelerated. "It should be made possible for anyone who wants to become a Jew to do so," Sharon is reported to have said.

The Prime Minister, of course, is correct. People who demonstrate a sincere desire to be Jewish, and who are willing to adhere to the procedure laid out in Jewish law, can and should be welcomed with open arms.

And the fact is that in recent years, more and more people are doing so. Until 1990, there were just 250 to 300 conversions performed in Israel annually. In the year that just ended, according to Israel's Chief Rabbinate, the number will have exceeded 3,500, or ten times the rate of just a decade ago.

Obviously, when compared with the untold thousands of non-Jews who have immigrated to Israel in recent years alongside the mass aliyah from the former Soviet Union, this is merely a drop in the bucket. But it is certainly a positive trend that needs to be encouraged further.

If Sharon means what he says, and all those who genuinely wish to convert should be enabled to do so, then there is no reason to limit his vision to within Israel's borders. Instead, the country should also look beyond them, and apply his prescription to the many people around the world who would like to move here and undergo a sincere conversion to Judaism. They range from the 6,000 Bnei Menashe still in India, to other communities practicing Judaism in places such as Peru, Uganda, Mexico and elsewhere.

Obviously, such groups need to be carefully evaluated to determine their level of commitment, and to ensure that their longing for Zion is motivated by a desire for spiritual, rather than just material, gain. But if they too wish to be Jews, and are willing to convert according to Jewish law, then why should they be denied the opportunity to do so?

Toward this end, Israel should consider establishing a Rabbinical Deployment Force (RDF), which would serve as a global traveling Beit Din (religious court). The RDF would consist of three respected scholars who would be dispatched on behalf of the Israeli government to visit communities, meet their leadership and study their lifestyles and practices. They would submit their findings and recommendations, which would enable the State to formulate a comprehensive policy toward groups seeking to adopt Judaism.

At a time when the Jewish people worldwide are struggling with declining birthrates and mounting intermarriage, such groups need to be cultivated and embraced, rather than shunned and ignored.

By reaching out to the groups such as the Bnei Menashe, and enabling them to join the Jewish people, we will strengthen ourselves demographically, reinforcing our shrinking numbers and injecting us with some much needed spiritual adrenaline.

They will also add some refreshing diversity to Jewish life, proving once again that Zionism and Judaism are color-blind, and that we are happy to welcome all who are willing to tie their fate with that of the Jewish people.

It is time for all of us to realize that when Daniel and his wife stood before the rabbinical conversion court earlier this week, they were doing more than just ensuring themselves of a Jewish future. To a certain extent, they were helping to secure ours too.

Shabbat in Ghana

By Audrey Sasson

This past Friday (November 8), after spending a blissful week exploring Ghana's coast, I started a long, and at moments apocalyptic journey to Ghana's lush western region, to a small town called Sefwi Wiawso. A friend had emailed me with news about a Ghanaian Jewish community and thanks to the wonders of cyberspace, I got in touch with one of their contacts in the US and she directed me to their exact location in Ghana. Amazing, considering the town itself is virtually inaccessible, either through telephone, email, or even ROADS.

I finally found the shop of Kofi, the man I had been told to look for. He came out of his shop to greet me. I had to do a double take, as I noticed the kippah on his head. He did not know that I was coming, and yet he greeted me with total openness. I did not even have to explain who I was. All I said was that I had heard about the community and that I wanted to spend Shabbat with them. He practically finished my sentence for me, and then we exchanged "Shabbat Shalom's." He brought me to the house of the community's chairman, where I was welcome to stay for the entire weekend. I had found my Jewish home, and it was totally overwhelming. I look around and see all the trademarks of a Jewish home. Sitting on top of the TV is a mini-Torah, a kiddush cup, and a havdallah spice box. On the table I see a few prayer books, and hanging on the

(Continued on page 12)

The Jewish Descendants of Timbuktu

*Continued from the last newsletter; © 2002 by Irwin Berg
(Some of the names in this article have been changed
to protect the individuals)*

My wife, Elaine, and I visited Timbuktu and the surrounding areas from February 25 to March 9, 2001. From the nearest road, Timbuktu is a five-hour drive across a hot, trackless and empty semiarid region called the "Sahel." Without any road or path or track, our driver navigated only by recognizing landmarks which were meaningless to his passengers. After the five hours, we crossed the Niger River by ferry and then drove on a road for an hour into the Sahara to Timbuktu. The only difference between the Sahara and the Sahel is that the former is pure sand while the latter is mainly sand with some scattered vegetation.

By far, the high point of our visit to Timbuktu was the several meetings we had with Ismael. Being the eldest son, Ismael inherited from his father three large trunks full of old manuscripts, documents, and books. They had been handed down from father to eldest son for over 500 years. Some of the documents are in Spanish and date back to when the family was in Spain. Some of the documents are in Judeo-Arabic. Most are in Arabic. Over the centuries, the family was in commerce, and most of the documents are business records. At one time, the family owned a hotel, and Ismael has a deed to the hotel.

Some of the documents have notations in handwritten Hebrew script. We were unable to decipher the Hebrew except for the words "El Cohen." The handwriting on some of the letters, although unmistakably Hebrew, was difficult to read. Also, I suspect that the words were in Judeo-Arabic rather than in Hebrew. Judeo-Arabic is a form of Arabic written in the Hebrew alphabet, much in the same way that Judeo-German (Yiddish) is a written form of German written in Hebrew letters.

Ismael's next book will be on the history of his family. This will require him to review the documents in the three trunks - a mammoth undertaking. The manuscripts are in deplorable condition. I was afraid that they would crumble if I touched them. The documents are in Spanish, Arabic, Hebrew and Judeo-Arabic. Ismael is familiar with the first two of these languages but not the latter two. He will need to involve other scholars to assist him. Ismael is very protective of his documents, and he is loathe to allow them out of his possession. A solution would be to photograph them digitally in such a manner that they can be displayed on a computer screen. For this, Ismael would need financial assistance.

My wife, Elaine, asked Ismael's wife about polygamy. She said that it is legal in Mali to marry up to four women at one time. Whether a man has more than one wife depends less on his economic circumstances than upon his proclivities. Most men who have more than one wife can't afford separate homes for their wives so they live in the same home. This frequently results in tension among the women. Ismael's father, Diadie, had 14 children with four wives, although not all the women were married to Diadie at the same time. Ismael has one wife and four children.

On one of my visits to Ismael's home, we were introduced to several of the officers of Zakhor, all of whom were in their forties. Ibrahim comes from Tangassane, a village on one of the channels of the Niger River about 80 miles from Timbuktu. Alamir comes from Dire, a town about 50 miles from Timbuktu. Mahamane was born in Kirshamba, a village near Timbuktu known to have Jewish descendants.

Since we wanted to visit the Jewish villages, Alamir offered to be our guide. The first village to which he took us was Tindirma. When we arrived, he made an obligatory visit to the village chief, whose home was a bamboo-framed tent covered with straw mats. We were joined by the village chief, the chief's brother, and the village mayor. The mayor's father's family is descended from Jews. In his words, he has "Jewish blood." Mayors are elected, but chiefs are hereditary. The fact that the mayor had "Jewish blood" spoke eloquently that being a descendant of Jews was not a disability. He also confirmed this to us orally.

The mayor knew of others in the village who were of Jewish blood, and he introduced us to several of them. He suspected that many more of

the villagers had Jewish blood but were unaware of it - he didn't know how many. He didn't believe that anyone chose to hide his or her Jewish ancestry.

Tradition kept alive by word of mouth holds that Jews arrived in Tindirma even before Timbuktu was founded. This would place Jews in Tindirma sometime before 1100 CE. Thus, Jewish presence in Tindirma preceded the expulsion from Spain, but did it also precede the arrival of Moslem traders to the area about 800 CE? Their memory was not so precise. But they knew that at one time the Jewish inhabitants of Tindirma were so numerous that the town was known as the "Capital of the Jews."

The mayor offered to show us the local mosque. As we were taking off our shoes prior to entering, some bystanders objected, and we did not proceed. Later we were told that some historians believe that the mosque was previously a synagogue. Since we entered several mosques in different communities, it may well be that the history of this particular mosque added to the sensibilities of the community.

The mayor then took us to the area where the Jews once lived. There was nothing there except for the foundations of houses. We were also taken to two Jewish cemeteries. What we saw were raised mounds of earth in a row which he said were Jewish graves. He also showed us skeletal remains protruding to the surface where the wind had blown away the earth from one of the mounds.

The mayor was interested in tourism. He thought that if he fenced in the areas which he called cemeteries, he might attract tourists. However, the village had no money to build a fence and he hoped that foreign Jews would subsidize the project. He said that some Europeans had come, taken pictures (as we did), promising to send money, but they were never heard from again. The mayor also showed us an area where there had once been a well now filled with wind-blown sand. Nothing but a few blades of grass gave away the secret of water beneath the ground.

Ismael later confirmed much of what the mayor had told us. Ismael had records which showed that tombstones in Hebrew once existed over Jewish graves and on stones surrounding the well. In 1496, the Songhai king, Mohammad Toure Askia, ended Tindirma's existence as the "Capital of the Jews" when he decreed that all Jews must convert to Islam or leave his kingdom. He destroyed synagogues and Jewish cemeteries. All remaining evidence of prior Jewish life was destroyed in the middle of the 19th century, when a wave of Islamic fanaticism swept through the area.

From Tindirma we drove to Dire, where we rented a pinasse (a motorized canoe) with a crew of three. For over two hours with our guide, we went downstream along the Niger River and then onto a channel which may have been man-made. On the way, we saw many small villages with homes of mud and thatched roofs. Everywhere women were pounding millet in a pestle and grinding it into a fine powder from which bread could be baked. Later in Tangassane we tasted this bread - still warm from the oven. The bread was round and flat - a little grainy, but tasty.

The Niger River was very low since it had not rained for six months. Several times one of the crew would test the depth of the water with a pole, and we had to maneuver constantly from one side of the channel to the other. The pinasse beached about 1½ miles from Tangassane because of the shallowness of the water, and we walked the rest of the way. Along the channel were fields planted with millet, rice and other grains. Pumps financed by the U.S. Government fed water from the channel to the fields. Alamir was born in Tangassane. His father, brothers and sister still live there.

Tangassane - like all other villages - had a mosque. We heard the call to evening prayer from the mosque after we reached the compound where Alamir's family lived. The compound consisted of about 10 mud-brick homes around an open area measuring about a half acre. In front of each house was a matted tent like the one in which we had been received by the chief in Tindirma. During the heat of the day, the people would sit

(Continued on page 13)

KULANU BRIEFS

A Great Lemba Loss

Prof. Matshaya Mathivha, founder and president of the Lemba Cultural Association, died in October at the age of 80. He was born in Venda homeland, South Africa, where his father was a traditional healer and subsistence farmer. Matshaya Mathivha is survived by six children, four of whom are medical doctors and two of whom are in the field of education.

Professionally, Mathivha is known for his contributions to the field of education. First a schoolmaster, he became a college teacher of Bantu languages, a university vice-rector, and minister of education in Venda. He was instrumental in having the Venda language recognized as an academic discipline, having produced creative writing and textbooks in the language.

To Kulanu readers, Mathivha is known as one of the world's leading authorities on the history of the Lemba (the so-called Black Jews of Southern Africa). In the early 1950s he traveled around Southern Africa visiting scattered Lemba individuals and groups and worked on consolidating them. He organized the Lemba Cultural Association in 1977. He initiated the building of a Lemba cultural center in Limpopo, Venda, which will include a synagogue and library. For tributes, see LETTERS TO KULANU, p. 2.

Afghani-Jewish Networking

Rabbi J. Hershy Worch would like to start an Afghani-Jewish Networking and Resource Development group in the Chicago area. Those wanting to be involved should email him at j.h.worch@att.net.

Some Facts about Ethiopian Jewry in Israel

According to Shula Mola, director of the Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews <www.iaej.co.il>, the following are true:

- Of all Ethiopians drafted to the army, over 36% serve in combat units, far above the national average.
- The dropout rate of Ethiopian students is more than double the national average.
- 47% of Ethiopian Israelis aged 25-54 are not in the labor force.
- 66% of Ethiopian families are dependent on government welfare in order to meet basic needs
- Ethiopians are underrepresented in government ministries and schools with high academic reputations.

Fortunately, the solution to these problems is at hand. More than two years ago the Ethiopian National Project (ENP) was conceived by the Jewish Agency in partnership with United Jewish Communities, the Joint Distribution Committee, the Israeli government, and the Ethiopian community. But this \$660 million, nine-year effort to ensure a more complete absorption and integration of Ethiopians into Israeli society is on hold due to war and recession in Israel. Both the Israeli Government and American Jews have shifted support away from social programs.

Shula Mola's comment? "Israel can become the example of a diverse country effectively welcoming and integrating immigrants. Rather than reinforcing the mistaken image, rampant in the international press, of Israel as an apartheid state, we must become a true example of democracy. The absorption of immigrants from the 'third world' into a highly technological society will change the country's image."

Xu Xin Receives Honorary Doctorate from Bar Ilan, Tours US

The Senate of Bar-Ilan University in Israel voted in November to bestow an Honorary Doctorate on Xu Xin in recognition of his contribution to Jewish Studies in China. Shortly thereafter, Xu began a US trip that will extend to March 8. His US tour has included and will continue to include various synagogues and a number of top universities -- Northwest-

ern, Notre Dame, the Rochester Institute of Technology (where his son is a student), Yale University Council on East Asian Studies, Kenyon College, Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Gratz College, Montclair State University, Pitzer College of Claremont University, Occidental College, and Skirball Education Center in Los Angeles. For information contact Beverly Friend <friend@oakton.edu>.

Judaic Tour in India Planned

Prof. Nathan Katz, an authority on Indo-Judaism, will lead a 14-night Judaic Tour in India in March 2003. The tour will include a visit to the 1568 Cochin Synagogue and other sites important to Judaism in India. Travelers will meet the Jewish communities in different cities, eat and pray with them. For information see <www.spiritualjourneys.net> or call 508-358-4267, fax 508-358-8148 or Deepak@SpiritualJourneys.net.

Uganda Travel Plans

Rabbi Howard Gorin of Tikvat Israel Congregation in Rockville, Maryland, is coordinating a second Beit Din trip to Uganda, scheduled for mid July 2003. Last year's trip, during which the Jewish status of over 300 Abayudaya was officially recognized, attracted worldwide notice. Rabbi Gorin also accepts speaking engagements about the remarkable Abayudaya community, as his schedule permits. For information on the trip or speaking, he can be contacted at hdgorin@umd5.umd.edu or tel 301 762 7339, fax 301 424 4399.

Effort to Clear Barros Basto

The organization Amishav is trying to persuade the government of Portugal to posthumously clear the name of Arthur Barros Basto. He was a Jewish army captain driven out of the Portuguese military on trumped-up charges in the 1940s. He has become known as the "Portuguese Dreyfus." "This year marks the 60th anniversary of Capt. Barros Basto's discharge from the military," said Michael Freund, director of Amishav. "He was a Jewish hero and role model, and his only transgression was that he sought to inspire people to return to Judaism at a time when that was not popular with either the Portuguese government or the Church authorities." His "offense" was attempting to ignite a mass return to Judaism among descendants of Portugal's crypto-Jews.

Kids' Curriculum Developed on Spanish Jewry

"Out of Spain" is a collection of multi-media resource materials and student books for the Jewish classroom. It teaches children about the lives of the Jews from Spain both before and after Expulsion. Developed by Andree Aelion Brooks, it enables the teacher to incorporate an area of Jewish history and heritage often overlooked for lack of resources. No prior knowledge or extended time needed. Each lesson or activity can stand alone. The target age is 10-12 years. For information contact Hitchcock Books, 15 Hitchcock Road, Westport, CT 06880 in the US (tel 203.226.9834, fax 203.226.0814) or andreebrooks@outofspain.com. For information in the UK contact Yvonne Behar at yvonnebehar@outofspain.com or call 0208-907-3434.

ABC Program Features Abayudaya

A documentary about Jewish study aired in the US in January on ABC-TV. "The Highest Commandment," which was co-produced by the Conservative Movement's Jewish Theological Seminary and Diva Communications, tracks Jews around the world who overcame major obstacles in order to study Jewish ritual and texts. Among them are a hearing-impaired mother, an 89-year-old woman, and Uganda's Abayudaya community.

A Smithsonian Seminar

An all-day seminar on Jewish Communities of Asia will be presented at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC, on February 23. It will be

KULANU BRIEFS

co-sponsored by the American Sephardi Federation. With Louise Werlin as coordinator, the speakers will include Ori Z. Soltes (historical overview and Jews of Kaifeng), Kenneth Robbins (Jews of India), Ruth Cernea (Iraqi Jewish Diaspora), Alanna E. Cooper (Jews of Central Asia), and Linda Tobin (Jewish communities in Asia today)

Latin Jews Organize in DC

Washington's Adas Israel Congregation has formed a "Jewtino" committee as a social network for Jews of Latin American origin. The network's activities have included a Havdalah service in Spanish and Hebrew (with Latin snacks and dance music) and fund raising for Argentine Jewry. The congregation's senior rabbi is a fluent Spanish speaker who held his first rabbinic post in Argentina, and an associate rabbi, while touring in Ecuador, invited qualified spouses of Jewish community members to come to Adas for conversion ceremonies.

Sarajevo Haggadah Still Survives

The National Museum in Sarajevo, Bosnia, presented the 600-year-old Sarajevo Haggadah for permanent public display in December. It is the centerpiece in a special room (with documents from Islam, Catholicism and Orthodoxy) that serves as a symbol of ethnic and religious tolerance in Bosnia. The book was carried out of Spain by its owners during the Inquisition in 1492, and was rescued during World War II by the museum's Catholic director and Muslim librarian.

Preserving the Heritage of Cochin Jewish Women

Thirty women from the Cochin community in Israel meet once a month at the Avraham Magen Synagogue in Rishon LeZion to analyze, translate, and resurrect their ancestors' poetry and songs from India. Some of the women travel as much as four hours by bus to attend the meetings. Over 2000 Cochin Jews left their homeland to make aliyah in the 1950s; a handful still remain in India. During its 2000 year history in Southern India, the Cochin Jewish community did not follow the Talmudic injunction against women singing in public. In fact, women wrote and performed songs about Bible and midrash in their local language, Malayalam, and it was customary for each woman to keep her own song notebook. The group of 30 is sifting through 260 song texts preserved in 25 hand-written notebooks – the voices of their grandmothers. Now Dr. Scarta Zacharla, a professor of Malayalam at the University of Sanskrit in Kerala, India, is collaborating with the Hebrew University to publish a book of some of these songs in Malayalam with translations into English. In addition, the Jewish Music Research Center at Hebrew University will be producing a CD.

Kudos to Our Bnai Mitzvah

Kyle Victor of Wayne, Pa., recently celebrated his Bar Mitzvah at Temple Brith Achim. This celebration will not go unmarked in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana. Kyle planned his celebration to include table centerpieces of books for Kulanu in lieu of flowers. Kulanu leadership declined to pick a community for him. Instead, he read through the very long Kulanu web site <www.kulanu.org> and made his own independent decision: the Jewish community in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana. Cards on every table explained that the wrapped-book centerpieces were being sent to the Kulanu-supported community in Ghana. To complete the mitzvah, his family assumed responsibility for mailing the \$800 worth of children's books about Judaism and for paying for the postage. Kyle is the grandson of Barbara Rosenblum, who heads Kulanu's Tucson chapter.

Logan Brenner of Logan Valley, Pa., and **Lauren Haas** of Villanova, Pa., adopted a bat mitzvah project of raising money for the Lorna Margolis Fund for Abayudaya education. As a result of their sales of bagels and "delicious" lollipops, a total of \$540 was raised!

Justin Zweifach has donated 10 percent of his bar mitzvah gift money, \$1053, for Abayudaya education. So generous!

MyJewishLearning.com Debuts

Since supporters of Kulanu possess such varying degrees of knowledge about Judaism (from rabbinic scholar to curious non-Jew), we are particularly happy to bring to everyone's attention this new web site, which truly has something for everyone. Funded by Edgar Bronfman and Lynn Schusterman, and co-produced by Hebrew College in Boston and Jewish Family & Life, the site teaches about Jewish religion, history and culture in a user-friendly format.

Ziv Is on Board

Kulanu is especially proud that Ziv Tzedakah Fund, founded by poet and tzedakah writer Danny Siegel in 1981, has adopted the Abayudaya community as one of its beneficiaries. Executive director Naomi Eisenberg announced that Ziv <www.ziv.org> is making a \$500 contribution for expendable school supplies, with the choice of the purchase and distribution of paper, pens and assorted materials left up to the Abayudaya governing council

Speakers Spread the Word

In November, the Root & Branch Association Lecture Series in Jerusalem featured **Yaffah Batya DaCosta** speaking on "Today's Return to Judaism of the B'nai Anousim (descendants of Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal 500 years ago)" The session was chaired by **Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausebaum**.

Cantor Romiel Daniel described Indian Jewish Chanukah customs and chanted in Washington at the home of India's Ambassador to the US, Lalit Mansingh. The program was part of a series of events showcasing the diversity of the religions of India.

A photo exhibit and slide presentation were held on September 26 in the Lawrence Family Jewish Community Center in LaJolla, CA. About 200 persons attended the reception and presentation of "Jews of Africa" by **Ed Samiljan** of Rancho Santa Fe, CA. The exhibit was divided into two parts, Jews in the Making in Uganda and Ancient Jews of Ethiopia. In his photos and slide presentation, Samiljan juxtaposed the joy and excitement of the Abayudaya of Uganda during their recent formal conversion to Judaism against the ongoing struggle of the remaining Jews of Ethiopia to achieve immigration rights to Israel. **This 70-photo exhibit may be made available to appropriate galleries and Jewish Community Centers in the U.S.** For information contact Samiljan through this newsletter.

In January, **Aron and Karen Primack** spoke on "Jews in Places You Never Thought Of" as part of the L.I.F.E. lecture series at B'nai Israel Congregation in Rockville, Md.

On February 23, **Rabbi Marvin Tokayer** will speak at Congregation Beth El in Yardly, Pa. The topic will be "Pepper, Silk and Ivory: The Exotic Jews of China and Japan." The evening will also feature a Chinese vegetarian dinner. The cost is \$22, and reservations must be made by February 14 (call 215 493-1707).

Amy Lederman spoke on "Grandmother's Candlesticks – Passing the Flame from One Generation to the Next" at a Kulanu-sponsored lecture in Tucson in December.

Jay P. Sand, a multi-talented journalist, photographer and musician, has been traveling around the world to learn about Jewish communities. He is available to give programs on "The Jews of Africa" which can be anything from a straightforward speech to a multifaceted, multimedia presentation. A dozen African Jewish communities are covered on his web site at www.thejewsof africa.com. Contact him at JayPSand@yahoo.com.

(Continued on page 14)

A Rabbi Truly Reaches Out

(Editor's note: We asked Rabbi Barbara Aiello if we could share her letter of encouragement to a descendant of Crypto-Jews. It tells us of her interesting background, but it also stands as a model of outreach to Anousim. Aiello also has a weekly radio program, Radio Rabbi, heard all over Southwest Florida on WLSS AM 930, Sunday mornings, 8-9 am. She opens and closes the program with music from the Abayudaya CD and at some point during every show she talks about Kulanu)

Dear _____,

I am a rabbi of a synagogue in Bradenton, Florida and a member of Kulanu. I am very interested to learn more about you and to answer any questions you might have because I have a Hispanic/Marrano background myself.

My father was Italian and fought the Nazis in the Italian Underground during World War II. My mother is Argentine and grew up in Mendoza and La Plata in Argentina. They married in 1945 and came to the US in 1947, the year I was born. My family's roots go all the way back to Spain (the surname "Ayala"), then, during and after the Inquisition, to Gibraltar, Morocco, Sicily, Italy, Argentina and then to America. Some of my family are practicing Catholics and although most of them are aware of their Jewish roots, they are grounded in the Catholic Church and don't like to think about being Jewish. Others in my family are happy to know they are Jewish because, like you, they never felt comfortable with Catholicism and always searched for their missing link. Even my own father had an unusual background. There were 10 children in his family. He was the oldest and his brother, Guileromo, was the youngest. There were eight girls in the middle. My Nona (grandmother) told her two sons about their Jewish heritage but did not tell the daughters. So today we have Jews from 20 percent of the family and Catholics from 80 percent.

But although my father was Jewish, he knew very little about his faith. Growing up, his was the only Jewish family in the province of Canzaro, and he knew about four things ... the candle blessing, the kosher slaughtering of chicken, the prohibition against eating pork and shellfish and the three stars in the sky for Havdallah... that's all! His family was called "Crypto Jew" because they practiced what little they knew in secret. And even when my father brought my grandmother to America in 1952, she still insisted on lighting the Shabbat candles downstairs in the cellar, behind closed doors. Because, as she would say... "You never know what might happen if they find out we're Jewish!"

So, I grew up with this background and never was an active Jew until I was 31 years old and the mother of my daughter (now 24). When she was born, my father said to me, "I hope that Rosanna will not be lost to the Jewish people," so I decided to be sure that she had a Jewish education and traditions in our home.

When I set about to find a synagogue, I felt much as you did. I was afraid. How would I be welcomed... if at all? Would my Italian/Hispanic background be a problem for me and my daughter? I must tell you that I had to do some searching before I found a synagogue that was welcoming to me. Some questioned my Jewishness... some were suspicious... but not all. I found a wonderful Temple family at Temple Micah in Washington, DC. That is where I became a teacher and my daughter became a Bat Mitzvah.

I always wanted to be a rabbi. Even when I was a little girl and my knowledge and Jewish identity was marginal, I felt drawn to the synagogue and wanted to serve as a spiritual leader. What a laugh I got when I told people that when I was a little girl! But, as time went on, I never gave up on my dream. At 47 years of age I went to seminary and today I am 56 years old and a pulpit rabbi for almost 4 years now. Our synagogue reaches out to the Latino community because I know from personal experience that there are many Jews out there who are just like you. If ever you come to the East Coast, you have a warm welcome waiting for you in our synagogue, Temple Beth El, in Bradenton, Florida (just north of Sara-

sota and south of St. Petersburg). This Sunday we are having Caribbean Chanukah, with a steel drum band and reggae Chanukah music -- to celebrate the Jews of the Caribbean and to rededicate ourselves as a congregation to helping all of those lost Jews, like you.

Feel free to write me with your thoughts or questions. All the very best.

B'shalom,

Rabbi Barbara Aiello <rabbi@tbeflorida.org>

Bnei Menashe Update

The organization Amishav launched a new Jewish outreach center in November in the state of Mizoram in northeastern India. According to Amishav director Michael Freund, the center was developed to assist the Bnei Menashe, who claim descent from the Lost Tribes of Israel. Although the Amishav Hebrew Center was built to accommodate 50 students, more than 350 signed up for Hebrew and Jewish history classes, which were being taught by two Bnei Menashe instructors sent from Israel. More instructors were anticipated, allowing more students to learn. Amishav hopes to open an additional outreach center in the neighboring Indian state of Manipur, where most Bnei Menashe live. About 6000 Bnei



Bnei Menashe at prayer in India

Menashe are practicing Judaism in India. Some 700 have made aliyah and settled in Israel. Freund noted, "The Bnei Menashe have a remarkable thirst for Jewish knowledge. They have been cut off for so long from Israel and the Jewish people. It is our responsibility now to reach out to them and facilitate their return."

A special Beit Din (rabbinic court) of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate converted four Bnei Menashe families in Israel in December. The families had made aliyah in August under the auspices of Amishav. According to Rabbi Eliyahu Birnbaum, who served as one of the three judges overseeing the conversions, the candidates' "Jewish background and sense of Jewish identity were particularly moving and impressive." After completing their conversion, the four families were remarried in a Jewish ceremony.

Happy Passover!

PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE

How Black Africans Saved Jerusalem

The year is 701 BCE. The Assyrian army is about to smash Jerusalem, but is unexpectedly turned back by an army from Kushite Egypt, a fighting force of black Africans. **Henry T. Aubin**, in *The Rescue of Jerusalem: The Alliance between Hebrews and Africans in 701 B.C.*, credits this Kushite rescue with the survival of Judaism. The author, a journalist in Montreal, won the Quebec Writers Federation Mavis Gallant Prize for Non-fiction with this volume.

First Hebrew-Mizo Dictionary Published

A new dictionary has been published containing hundreds of entries in Hebrew, English and Mizo, the language spoken by the Bnei Menashe, a group in northeastern India claiming descent from a lost tribe of Israel. The dictionary, authored by Bnei Menashe scholar **Allenby Sela**, took over a year to compile and edit. It was recently released by the Jerusalem-based Amishav organization, which is distributing the dictionary to Bnei Menashe communities in India and Israel.

Sephardic Genealogy

Jeffrey Malka's new book, *Sephardic Genealogy: Discovering Your Sephardic Ancestors and Their World*, is being published by Avotaynu. It is a comprehensive guide to researching Sephardic ancestry – for beginners as well as advanced researchers. More information can be found at <http://www.avotaynu.com/books/sephardic.htm>.

India's Jewish Heritage

Indo-Judaic Studies: Some Papers, by **Yohanan ben David**, a Bene Israel Jew born in Iran, has been published by BP <www.bpagency.com>. It contains previously unpublished papers from public and private archives in India and Israel, including a section on art dealing with a noted collection of Indian miniatures and manuscripts.

A "New" Medieval Work

The City of Light was written by **Jacob D'Ancona** around 1270 C.E. and translated and edited by **David Selbourne** in 1998. The original author's medieval Italian manuscript describes his journey from Italy through Syria, the Persian Gulf, India and China. It tells of his meetings with Jews on the West Coast of India at their synagogues and cemetery. Here is an excerpt:

"Thus we journeyed towards the South East and after the Sabbath Vayeshev came at last to Singoli (Cochin) a country in which there are over one thousand Jews.... The Jews here are much favoured by the princes of the place and enjoy tranquility and honour. For it is the Jews who are given to acquiring knowledge of the world as well as being proficient here not only in the Torah but in diverse languages and other arts, from which they reap much profit.

"But above all things, they are of perfect faith, their Talmud being all in Hebrew, and they are diligent in observing its precepts."

Medieval Spain's Culture of Tolerance

Maria Rosa Menocal recently released the highly acclaimed *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created A Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*. It examines how the past may be able to offer a model for today's world problems. The Cuban-born author is the R. Seldon Rose Professor of Spanish and Portuguese and Director of the Whitney Humanities Center at Yale University.

Rescue of Ethiopian Jews

Saving the Lost Tribe: The Rescue and Redemption of the Ethiopian Jews, by **Asher Naim** and **Tracy Brown**, was published in January by Ballantine Books, a division of Random House, Inc.

Memoir of an Indian Jewish Girl

Carmit Delman has completed *Burnt Bread and Chutney: Growing Up Between Cultures – A Memoir of an Indian Jewish Girl*. The author, daughter of an Ashkenazi Jewish father and a mother descended from the Bene Israel Jews of India, had complained, "My authenticity as a Jew was mistrusted by Jews, and as an Indian by Indians." However, in an interview following publication, she indicated she has come to terms with her multiple heritages: "At this point in time, my identity is made up of numerous cultures and each one seems to flow into the next. At times, one or another rises to the surface, but overall there is a lessening of boundaries between many influences inside me and they have gelled together."

HaMadrij Is Making a Difference

A 48-year old mechanic in Havana, Cuba, and a 47-year-old formerly successful businessman in Buenos Aires, Argentina, are among the readers whose lives have been changed by **Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn's** book, *HaMadrij*. The book was originally designed as a study guide for Spanish-speaking conversion candidates, but, according to some reviewers, it immediately became a sociological phenomenon in Latin American Jewish communities. One purchaser of 50 copies is a Catholic priest in Mexico, who bought the books for his parishioners to ward off incipient anti-Semitism. The priest was quoted as saying, "It's a fantastic book. Simple but not simplistic. And it's edited exceptionally well, in a very user-friendly format." The book, which costs \$25, can be ordered directly from the author (tel 1 913 940 1011, fax 1-816-523-2454, Rabbi1994@aol.com).

Don't Count Out the "Lost Jews"

An article in the October 4 issue of the *New York Jewish Week*, "Lost Jews' Find New Friends," by **Gary Rosenblatt**, points out that "believers from Burma to Uganda" are being ignored unwisely as demographers worry with Jewish survival.

Multiple Strands in Our Society

An article by **Paula Amann** in the January 2 *Washington Jewish Week* discusses a special program in the Israeli town of Beit Shemesh. "Healing the Strains of Change" identifies the town as a "mini-cosmos of Jewish communities around the world" that has attracted *olim* from the former Soviet Union, Ethiopia, Morocco, France and America, with a religious spectrum from *haredi* to secular. The program is a federation-sponsored eight-session series that reaches 960 fourth and fifth grade students. Entitled *G'vanim B'Mirkam haChevrati* (Multiple Strands in Our Society), the program shows the beauty of different cultures to break stereotyping, in part through the use of the performing arts.

"Found Tribe"

Andrew Rice, a journalist and Fellow of the Institute of Current World Affairs, has written an exceptionally thorough and sensitive 11-page article about the Abayudaya for the Institute's *ICWA Letters*. Entitled "Found Tribe," the article delves into Ugandan history and comments from non-Abayudaya neighbors as well as present Abayudaya achievements and practices.

A Barros Basto Work

Xabier Zabaltza, a Kulanu supporter in Spain, has presented our organization with a copy of the 40-page booklet *Sepher ha-Nesher* by the revered **Arthur Carlos Barros Basto (Avraham Ysrael Ben Rosh)** in 1920. Zabaltza had received the book from Dr. Alvira Azevedo Mea. Readers interested in translating the work from Spanish into English should contact the Kulanu office.

(Continued on page 16)

Zimbabwe (cont.)

(Continued from page 5)

most over 65. Younger people with school-age children don't see any future here for their children any longer. Many black people, particularly teachers, nurses and social workers, are leaving. In fact those who see an opportunity to get employment of any kind which will help their families survive are going.

What is happening is a man-made tragedy. The worst is yet to come, as productive farmers are pushed off the land by the government of Robert Mugabe and the effects of the El Nino are felt. You can't imagine how depressing it is to see long queues of people waiting to buy bread. They have to stand in line for hours to get one loaf, as most places restrict customers to one loaf each. Just imagine the man-hours that are wasted and the frustration that is caused. The prediction is that by December things will be chaotic.

I am distressed by the tangible increase in racism engendered by Mugabe, another Hitler, and his Goebels, Jonathan Moyo. They have certainly succeeded in their propaganda, destroying the racial harmony that existed before. The helplessness one feels in the face of the total disregard for the law and ownership is most distressing. I felt outraged when I saw white farmers, many of them elderly men who had not committed any crime, handcuffed and barefoot as if they were dangerous criminals locked up in prison. Land is an issue but not one that should have been handled in such a destructive manner. We have friends who are third-generation Zimbabweans who have worked towards the uplifting of the country now forced to give up their farms without compensation. Even if there is a change, it will take decades to reverse the damage that has been done by this insane, destructive land resettlement program. I cry for the wonderful people of Zimbabwe who are being made to suffer so unnecessarily.

Having said all the above, let me reassure you by telling you that we do not feel threatened or unsafe at present. My husband remains optimistic and determined to stay. Being in business at the present time is in fact doing battle. Raw materials are difficult or impossible to get. Workers, most of whom walk long distances to work because they cannot afford transport, are too tired and hungry to work. My husband is one of the few employers who feeds his workers. Though salaries have been increased substantially, people cannot afford basic necessities (when they are available) because of rampant inflation, which is running at 123% at present and expected to reach 200% by the end of the year. A compounding factor is the AIDS pandemic with the number of orphans increasing every day. The irony is that if you sat on our patio, with the sun shining and the birds singing, you would think all's right with the world!

The situation in Israel upsets me beyond words. I much more concerned about what is happening there than with what is taking place in Zimbabwe.

Demography Woes (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

broader group, is a much better approach.

People who are converting are not necessarily coming from large, Northeastern cities. They are far more likely to come from areas where religion is part of the everyday fabric of life. Texas has sent us more Ambassadors for Judaism than any other state. With its large population, strong religious heritage, and substantial number of Crypto-Jews, we get far more visitors from this state than from N.Y. Tennessee is another area with a keen interest in conversion to Judaism. The Chabad B'nai Noah has headquarters there and that might help fuel this interest. California is also at the forefront of conversion efforts and the response is good. The University of Judaism has done a great job with its well-advertised conversion programs.

People who convert often come from serious Christian backgrounds. The Church's willingness to explore its Jewish roots has sent many curious Christians to Israel and the Hebrew Bible. Many converts have comparison-shopped and find Jewish theology more acceptable and compatible with their way of thinking. Judaism does very well when it allows people to have a look at who we are and how we are different. The Internet has made Judaism available to lots of people who might never have an opportunity to explore the religion. Requests for information about Judaism have come from almost every country in the world.

People who convert seek greater religious practice, not less. Many Jews by Choice are avid readers of texts about Judaism and are anxious to keep kosher homes even though they may live in remote areas. Converts are often more knowledgeable and observant than born Jews. If the Jewish Community does absorb large numbers of Jews by Choice, we may actually find Judaism becoming a more theological and less culturally based religion.

One of the most interesting phenomena emerging is the interest in Judaism by teenagers. Many of the requests for information are by people in their teens. Again the Internet may be revolutionizing Religion as young people, born and bred with Internet skills and raised on the concept of choice, use this tool for knowledge to decide on a religion suitable for them. As more and more young people move from family centers in search of jobs, the religion of one's birth becomes less important.

The real question is whether or not the Jewish Community will be ready to accommodate a Jewish Community which looks very different and has very different needs. Though converts are finding their way to Jewish Community, we have done precious little to reach out to this incredible human resource which may revitalize the entire religion.

Shabbat in Ghana (cont.)

(Continued from page 6)

wall is the generic Jewish calendar.

After a peaceful and much appreciated night's rest (after the long and difficult journey), I awoke to discover the beauty, tranquility, and serenity of the village that until that point I had only seen after dark.

The organized community is made up of approximately 100 people and is quite young. Their "founder" had a vision that he was Jewish, and not Christian; he noticed that some of their time-old traditions had their roots in the Old Testament (keeping the Sabbath, circumcision...). He gradually attracted followers, who are the Jews I met this weekend. For years, they thought that apart from some small communities in the rest of West Africa, they were the ONLY Jews in the world. At some point in the last ten years, they made contact with the outside Jewish world, and through this contact, they are learning more and more about Judaism. But if you ask them, there is NO DOUBT in their minds that they have ALWAYS been Jewish, but that they lost touch with their Judaism over the centuries (through outside influences). They consider the whole Sefwi tribe to be a Jewish tribe, but not all Sefwi people agree. All the people I met essentially grew up as Christians and have had to break away from their Christian families to follow what they believe to be their true religion.

In the spirit of Jewish minimalism, the synagogue is a one-room cinderblock with no fancy ornaments or decorations. There's a small Torah sitting on a small table at the front of the room. It's covered with a tallit, which seems to serve as the arc. The religious leader, David, is sitting at a table with a stack of prayer books. There are two sets of bench rows, divided by a centre aisle; men sit on one side, women on the other. By the time the service begins, approximately 15 adults and 30 children have assembled.

They start by singing some songs I've never heard before, and I'm already feeling the tears well up in my eyes, as the strong voices and beautiful melodies carry me to some faraway place. I am forced to contain myself, as David comes to stand next to me in order to provide a simultaneous translation. The songs are in Twi, and they are about God and giving thanks and about Jerusalem and Zion and King David and Solomon. The melodies, harmonies, and rhythms are distinctly Ghanaian, in that they seem to be a cross between Ghanaian gospel and "traditional" music. One of their American visitors recorded their songs on a simple machine, so the quality is not great, but I'm certain that if they could have access to professional recording equipment, they could, as others have suggested, produce a fantastic CD that could be sold, with the proceeds going to their community. Suffice it to say, the songs set the tone for what proved to be a truly inspiring and fulfilling service.

Songs were followed by the actual prayers, which were recited for the most part in English. The *Sh'ma* was the only prayer they seemed to know in Hebrew. Try to picture how intense it was for me to be standing in this synagogue, in the middle of this tucked-away village, surrounded by Ghanaians and feeling so far away from home, and yet feeling a total sense of brotherhood and community. At the moment that they uttered the *Sh'ma*, it was a feeling that transcended time and space.

After the prayers, David and Kofi read the Torah and haftarah portions in English and Twi. Whenever David felt the congregation's attention waning, he'd interrupt himself and slip in a "praise the Lord," to which the congregants would reply with an enthusiastic "hallelujah," and David would then continue his commentary as if he never stopped. I had to laugh when I heard the first quiet "hallelujah" slip almost involuntarily from my lips. I guess I figured this was too unique an experience not to participate in fully.

After afternoon service I took advantage of a moment of hesitation before people got up to leave to ask if they had ever heard the *Aleynu* prayer sung in Hebrew. They

(Continued on page 13)

The Jews of Timbuktu (cont.)

(Continued from page 7)

in the tent, while at night they would sleep in their mud-brick homes.

The hottest months are April, May and June, when the temperature in Tangassane regularly exceeds 110° F. During the same period, Timbuktu is about 120° F. The nights, however, are much cooler. Having arrived just before nightfall, the temperature was a comfortable 80° F. During the night it got slightly chilly - about 65° F.

Oral tradition holds that those in Tangassane who have a Jewish ancestor are descendants of El Hadj Abdul Salam Al Kuhin (or Cohen). Al Kuhin came from Fez, Morocco, early in the 18th century and died in Tangassane in 1776. Al Kuhin is remembered as a Jew. The "Hadj" in his name indicates that he had made a religious pilgrimage to Mecca. When I pointed this out to Alamir, he said that it was possible that he made the pilgrimage to Mecca after he arrived and started a family in Tangassane, but he believed that he was a Jew at birth.

It became dark as we were sitting in Alamir's family's compound in Tangassane. The visiting and socializing seemed to pick up at this time. The children stared at us as if they had seen few, if any, foreign visitors. The moon and the stars were brilliant; their light reflected so strongly off the white sand that I could read the time on my watch.

We did not get the impression that Tangassane was a desperately poor village. Irrigated fields were awash with millet and rice - more than enough to feed the 1,000 or so population of the village. Goats, sheep and cows abounded. All the adults seemed reasonably well dressed, even the women. Still, the village had no electricity - which means that there are no lights; all water is taken from the river or drawn from wells; toilets consist of holes in the ground outside of the houses; and all work is done by hand. A few of the children however, looked sick, malnourished and dirty.

At about 9 p.m., Alamir took us to his mud-brick home, which was located about 100 yards from the family compound. Before we could go to sleep, about 20 men entered his tiny home to meet us. After greeting us with a "salaam aleikum", they sat down on the straw mats which covered the floor. It was clear to Elaine and me that this was going to be a serious meeting.

These men were all descendants of Al Kuhin and members of Zakhor. They questioned us about how we could assist them economically. They expressed bitterness toward those who had visited them previously, made promises to them of economic support, but had failed even to write them a letter. In particular, they felt that their prior visitors who had photographed them had taken something of value from them and had given them nothing in return.

It was not easy to explain that we visited their village out of friendship and could offer them no financial support. Later, Alamir reported to us that the villagers had praised us for being "honest."

That night Elaine and I slept in our clothes on a mat-covered, dirt floor. For Elaine, it was the most memorable night of our trip. Despite spraying our clothes with 100% deet, she was bothered by a mosquito that would not go away. A little later, a bat flew into the hut. Until it found its way out, it shrieked as it flew back and forth dislodging pieces of mud from the ceiling which fell on and around us in the deep darkness of the night. I slept through it all.

It had been planned that we would visit a third village, Kirshamba, where there were 400 Jewish descendants. According to our guide, the name of the village derives from two Hebrew words: Kir (wall or house) and Shemamah (desolation), or "wall of desolation." Kirshamba is the village where the Kali and Albana families (Ismael's families) live. Unfortunately for us, the Niger River was too low for our boat to reach Kirshamba, and the land route was impassable by motor vehicle. This means that Kirshamba is cut off except by donkey or camel from the world for a few months in each year.

When we returned to Timbuktu after our visit to Tinderma and Tangassane, I expressed my opinion to Ismael that members of Zakhor were less interested in the goals which Zakhor had professed than in finan-

cial assistance. When he formed Zakhor, Ismael had hoped that it would perform the mission of helping the Jewish descendants to remember their origins. At the same time, he would not rule out that Zakhor could assist villagers to achieve economic goals. The economic, physical and psychological problems the members faced were profound. To date, Zakhor does not have the resources to maintain a school, a clinic or a cemetery. They have received less than a dozen Jewish visitors since 1993 and have not succeeded in maintaining ongoing contact with any of them.

We were told by members of Zakhor that they practice Islam in the same way as their neighbors. They are not aware of any family customs not shared by others that may be Jewish customs. They believe that some of their family names may have a Jewish origin, but have been Arabized. Yet despite their complete integration into Mali's Islamic culture, Jewish descendants in the villages almost always marry other Jewish descendants. This should not be surprising because marriages are arranged among kinsmen by village elders. However, when Jewish descendants leave the villages, they often intermarry with non-kinsmen.

A number of scholars have observed that certain Jewish rites are practiced by native Africans without knowledge of their origin. This has been noted particularly in the case of the Christian Ashante who live in Ghana and among some other West African tribes whose population is predominantly Christian. One might expect that the Jewish descendants of Timbuktu who are so aware of their Jewish origins would also have retained some Jewish rites. The answer may lie in the fact that Islam is not only a religion, but is also a civilization - a total way of life. Islam has been more intolerant to non-Islamic practices among its converts than Christianity to non-Christian traditions. Whatever the reason, we did not observe any Jewish rites or customs, and our hosts could not identify any.



WHO IS THIS MAN HAVING SO MUCH FUN IN THE SNOW? For the answer, see page 16!

Shabbat in Ghana (cont.)

(Continued from page 12)

hadn't. They asked me to demonstrate. I started out without any problems, but halfway through, the intensity of the whole experience caught up with me. The tears came to my eyes, my voice started shaking, and I'm certain I only managed to complete the prayer due to a lack of viable alternatives... singing one octave too high, and with a lump in my throat, it felt like an eternity before I finally finished the prayer. Everyone was very grateful, and I was relieved that it was over. More importantly, I was glad that I mustered up the courage to do it.

I realize that this is sounding like the "confessions of a born-again Jew," but don't misunderstand me. I think it's more about the power of community, the power of belonging to something greater than ourselves, and the power of a tradition that is ancient and rich. I do believe it's very possible that my roots, as a Jew, and the roots of this community, as a "lost tribe," can potentially be traced back to the same time and place (wherever and whenever that is), and that's significant, if not awe-inspiring.

KULANU BRIEFS (cont.)

(Continued from page 9)

Today Rabah!

Kulanu thanks the **Isaac Franck Jewish Public Library** in Rockville, MD, for donating two cartons of children's instructional books on Hebrew and Judaica to Kulanu for our communities overseas. A special thanks to **Beila Organic** for initiating this gift.

Thanks to **Richard Sobol** and **Debra and David Vinik** for contributing laptop computers, and to **Bliss Siman** and **Bert Linder** for contributing a desktop computer for the Abayudaya Community. (If you have a laptop that you'd like to donate to any of our communities, please contact **Harriet Bograd**, hbograd@compuserve.com, 212-877-8082. The hardware needs to be in good working condition, 66 Mhz or better, with a power adapter, and a floppy drive - and preferably with a CDROM drive. We are focusing on laptops at this time because the shipping costs for desktop computers would be too expensive.)

Daniel Yamshon paid a brief visit to the Jewish community of Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana, and left in his wake CDs and players and books (the curriculum used in his religious school for learning Hebrew, preschool through grade six, plus workbooks, books on Israel, an introduction to the Torah, an introduction to the Mishna and an introduction to Jewish Law).

After hearing Gershom Sizomu speak, **Janice Berg's** Dalet (fourth-grade) class at **The Jewish Center** made beautiful challah covers for Abayudaya children.

Donations of \$1,000 or more: **Temple Shalom** of Norwalk, CT, \$4400 for Abayudaya electrification, **Lionel Okun** \$3000 in honor of Aura Herzog and in memory of Chaim Herzog, **Drs. Jack & Diane Zeller** \$1622 for Mexico outreach, **Edward & Rae Samiljan** \$1,000 for Semei Kakungulu High School, **Harriet Bograd & Kenneth Klein, Irwin & Elaine Berg, Dr. Jules Harris, Howard Metzberg**

Donations of \$250-\$999: **Morris Feder, Larry Paul, Bernard & Rena Shapiro**, Social Action Committee of **Tifereth Israel Congregation** of Washington, DC (for Abayudaya), **Mel & Margery Elfin, Marcia Kaplan** (to the Lorna Margolis Orphan Education Fund in honor of Brian & Jen and Gretchen & Gus), **Faith Avner** (Abayudaya Hadassah Infant School - matching funds for tzedakah money raised by primary grades religious school of **Congregation BJBE** in Glenview, IL), **Barbara Fischbein** (Semei Kakungulu High School), **The Madav IX Foundation, Howard Rosenbloom**

Donors of \$150-\$249: **Louis Blumengarten, Stanley & Judy Tanenbaum** (in loving memory of Grandma Lil and Grandpa Sam Tanenbaum and Aunt Jessie Hantman), **Liz & Bill Adams, Jack & Denise Bresler, Congregation Beth El, Congregation Bnai Israel, Ira & Marilyn Polon, M. S. Smith, Herman Storick, David Holtz & Diane Glatt, Rabbi Scott L. Glass, National Center to Encourage Judaism**

\$100 Club: **Rabbi Barbara Aiello' Rabbi Howard Gorin, Rebecca Cook, Janet Jonina Duker & Alan Lichtman** (in honor of Aron & Karen Primack), **Oscar & Theda Firschein, Rabbi Scott L. Glass** (in honor of Jack Brooks), **Brian Gold, Joseph & Bea Hantman, Kandy & Edward Hutman, Manuel and Joan Jacobs, Terrence D Kalley, Joanne Kalnitz, George Kaplan, Raymond Kaplan, Drs. Edwin & Roz Kolodny** (in honor of Jack & Diane Zeller), **Seymour Kunin, Robert & Jeri Lande, Rochelle Larkin, Lenore & Morris**

Levin, Libby Lovett, Robert & Judith Miller, Barbara & Joseph Psotha, Rabbis Reiner & Portnoy, New Reform Temple, Daniel and Ruth Sachs, David and Helen Samuels, Todd Schubert, Charlotte Schwartz, Julius & Barbara Shair, Rabbi Peter Tarlow, Steve, Aviva, and Shoshan Waldstein, Dr. Norman Weiss, Marvin Wolf

Purchasers of at least a dozen challah covers from Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana: **Wendy Light, David Silverberg**

A contribution was made by **Patricia Hirsh-Simon** in honor of the bar mitzvah of **Jed Greenwald**.

Mazal Tov!

To **Susan Pollack**, executive director of the DC-based Friends of Yemin Orde, who received the Jan Karski Freedom Award for Valor and Compassion last September. She was recognized for her work in secretly moving Ethiopian Jews to a transit camp near Addis Ababa in 1989. She is credited with rescuing 18,000 people by repeatedly crossing enemy lines with exit papers, medicine and food over a six-month period. Many of those she rescued were later airlifted to Israel in Operation Solomon. Her current work supports the Yemin Orde Wingate Youth Village in Israel, which takes in young refugees from Ethiopia and 26 other countries.

Miriam Hana Gardsbane born on Jan. 15th, daughter of Arlene Gardsbane, of Rockville, MD., the veterinarian who was instrumental in bringing the Heifer Project International to the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda.

Elliot Chamovitz Nilson, son of Julia Chamovitz and Brad Nilson of Pittsburgh, born in November. Mom was one of the original visitors to the Abayudaya community in modern times, in 1992.

Dahlia Cukierkorn was born in August in Overland Park, Kans, daughter of Rabbi Jacques and Denisse Cukierkorn. Dad led the first Kulanu mission to the Abayudaya in 1995 and has recently written the book *HaMadrij*, a Spanish-language primer on Jewish practice.

Refuah Shleymah

To **Barbara Rosenblum** who is laid up from hip surgery.

Exquisite Photographs and Music (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

don't come near me, she's enough...." But Summit points out that the Torah is the object of the songwriter's love, and the song is a veiled warning to Christian and Muslim proselytes in Uganda!

A few of the selections were heard on the community's first recording, "Shalom Everybody Everywhere!" produced by Kulanu with the Abayudaya in 1997. It is particularly satisfying to hear the beautiful, mature voice of Rachel Namudosi, in "Adonai Mukulu" ("God Is Great"). We heard her lovely child's voice on the earlier recording. Happily, more recordings are in the works.

Abayudaya: The Jews of Uganda, with accompanying CD, *Abayudaya Music of Worship and Celebration* (Abbeville Press 2002), is available at book stores, on the Internet, and through the Kulanu Boutique (see page 15).

The Kulanu Boutique

A lso 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.*

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

Hand-crocheted Ugandan Kippot, extra-fine multicolored and simpler dual-colored skullcap. *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.*

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.*

NAME _____ Tel # _____

ADDRESS _____

Email address, PLEASE _____

	Number	Cost Each	Shipping/handling	Total
<i>Jews in Places You Never Thought Of</i>	_____	\$29.50	\$5 in US & Can. (\$2 each additional)	_____
<i>Shalom Everybody, Everywhere!</i>				
CD	_____	15.00	\$3 in US, \$4 in Can. (\$2 each additional)	_____
Cassette	_____	10.00		_____
<i>Hand-crocheted Kippot of the Abayudaya:</i>				
extrafine multicolored	_____	15.00	\$4 (ea. addl. \$1)	_____
simpler, purple and white	_____	10.00	\$4 (ea. addl. \$1)	_____
simpler, gray and black	_____	10.00	\$4 (ea. addl. \$1)	_____
pillbox-shape various colors	_____	10.00	\$4 (ea. addl. \$1)	_____
<i>(sorry, no returns!)</i>				
<i>Challah covers from Ghana.</i>	_____	25.00	\$4 (ea. addl. \$2)	_____
<i>(for 12, \$20 each and \$10 shipping)</i>				
<i>Multi-colored tallit of the Abayudaya</i>	_____	100.00	\$6 in US and Canada	_____
<i>Tallit of the Bnei Menashe</i>	_____	100.00	\$6 in US, \$8 elsewhere	_____
<i>Kippah of the Bnei Menashe</i>	_____	15.00	\$4 (ea. addl. \$1)	_____
<i>Journey to the Vanished City</i>	_____	14.50	\$5 in US and Canada) (\$2 each additional)	_____
<i>Abayudaya: The Jews of Uganda</i> (List price \$75)	_____	52.50	\$7 in US and Canada (\$3 each additional)	_____

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PUBLICATIONS (cont.)

Ugandans Complete Second Visit to US

(Continued from page 11)

The Varied Background of Moshe Cotel

PrimeTime News of Johns Hopkins University published a profile of alumnus Morris Moshe Cotel in its fall 2002 issue. In "The Big Jump," Caterina Provost-Smith tells the story of Cotel, a Kulanu board member, who retired after 25 years as a professor and chair of Music Composition at Peabody Institute to pursue rabbinic studies. Previously, Cotel had graduated from Julliard, won the American Rome Prize in Music Composition, and lived in Rome and Israel. Cotel, who expects smicha (rabbinic ordination) in May, served on a Beit Din (rabbinic court) in Uganda in February 2002. He was featured on an ABC-TV documentary "Face First - Second Career Clergy" in 2002, and will appear in 2003 a program entitled "Moving Heaven and Earth," a documentary about the Uganda Beit Din's conversion of 300 Abayudaya Jews in Uganda. The article reports that Cotel has developed a "rabbinic piano recital" for his final thesis in rabbinical school, in which he intersperses nine classical piano pieces with ideas from rabbinic literature to depict his own path from composer to rabbi. He hopes to bring the program to synagogues and churches around the US (contact mmcotel@aol.com).

After attending the Bechol Lashon conference on December 9 in San Francisco, Abayudaya leaders JJ Keki and Gershom Sizomu embarked on a whirlwind speaking tour of the US.

In addition to speaking, selling Abayudaya products, and experiencing serious snow for the first time, the two Ugandan leaders benefited in many other ways. Thanks to Harriet Bograd, they were able to develop a relationship with the American Jewish World Service, which has already resulted in the assignment of an Israeli agricultural volunteer to Uganda. They received various offers to assist the community with water, electricity, and Internet projects, and received much favorable press coverage. They were also able to meet with officials of the American Jewish Congress. They received a donation of recording studio time and services from Laura Wetzler, as well as lessons in proposal preparation by Kenny Schultz. The donation of three computers and training from Harriet Bograd in how to use these also resulted.

Kudos to the following, who arranged programming on short notice: Diane Tobin in San Francisco and Los Angeles, Ed Samiljan in San Diego, Rabbi Jeffrey Summit in Boston, Laura Wetzler and Madelaine Zadik in Western Massachusetts, Kenny Schultz in New Jersey, Rabbi Howard Gorin in Washington, and Harriet Bograd and Debra Gonsler Vinik in New York City.

Sizomu and Keki had last been in the US in 2001.

By the way, that's JJ Keki enjoying the snow in Massachusetts on page 13!

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