



The First Abayudaya Presence in Israel

By Karen Primack

The first Abayudaya Jews of Uganda to visit Israel arrived on September 2. Abayudaya spiritual leader Gershom Sizomu, together with his wife Tziporah and their two children, are spending the school year in Jerusalem as part of Sizomu's 5-year course of study in the University of Judaism's rabbinic program.

He describes the arrival: "From the air we saw the Dead Sea and the Negev Desert. Our sight of the Holy Land from the air gave us a special feeling and I unconsciously began to sing *Od lo avda tikvateinu*. Tziporah thought she was dreaming,



Tziporah, Igaal (11 yrs.), Dafnah (9), and Gershom in Jerusalem

Dafnah had an excited face with a big smile. Igaal, who usually cries when landing due to ear pain, was quiet and calm and as the plane almost touched the ground, he shouted the *She-hechianu*. As he mentioned *vehigianu*, the plane amazingly touched the ground and we all shouted back, *Amen*."

At the gate of entry the Immigration officer was impressed with Sizomu's ability to communicate in Hebrew. She quickly stamped their passports and bid them "*Bruchim Habaim* (welcome).

Thanks to the Institute for Jewish & Community Research, sponsor of Sizomu's schooling, the family was picked up at the airport, taken to a bank, and settled in at a waiting apartment on Tchernichovsky Street. The apartment is being sublet from one of Sizomu's professors back in Los Angeles

The first few days were taken up adjusting with school friends – shopping, praying, dining, and getting the children

(Continued on page 9)

On the Igbo, *Teshuvah*, and the Resiliency of the Jewish Spirit

By Rabbi Brant Rosen

This past summer, I received a profound lesson in the resiliency of the Jewish spirit – and how it invariably manages to take root even in the most unexpected of places.

After participating in a congregational delegation to Africa this past spring, I had a profound desire to spend a longer period of time there on my summer sabbatical. As I searched for the best possible way to serve as a volunteer rabbi, I found my way to Kulanu, who informed that they had long been interested in sending a volunteer rabbi to Nigeria. Upon further conversation, I received an extensive education on the Igbo tribe – a large Nigerian tribe of 40 million whose clans trace their lineage to the lost tribes of Israel. For many years both Igbo and Western scholars have noted the striking similarities between native Igbo customs and Israelite tradition. Today, the Igbo are almost entirely Christian, having been thoroughly missionized by the British – but they nonetheless retain a strong sense of kinship with the Jewish People.

Over the last decade or so, an astonishing phenomenon has developed: a Jewish "rebirth" of sorts occurring throughout the Igbo community. Synagogues have been forming spontaneously throughout Nigeria, along with the tentative growth of Hebrew and Torah study. Kulanu explained to me that they had developed a relationship with the Igbo Judaic communities, who were especially eager for a visit from a rabbi for an extended period of time.

After I said I would consider a visit to Nigeria, Kulanu put me touch with their field representative there, an Igbo lawyer and scholar named Remy Ilona who would quickly become my dear friend and my new Igbo brother. Remy has done extensive research on the Israelite heritage of the Igbo and over the past few years he has become an important resource person for their new Judaic communities. As I corresponded with Remy, I was immediately taken by his intense passion and commitment to his heritage, to his people and to what he called the Igbo *teshuvah* – their "return" to reclaim their original birthright.

It is not an exaggeration to say that after just a few initial e-mail conversations, his passion and excitement won me over. And so, with Remy as my host, I spent an amazing month of July in Nigeria with the Igbo. I spent two weeks in the capital city of Abuja, and traveled for ten days throughout the Igbo state of Anambra, one of the many states in the south of Nigeria

(Continued on page 10)

KULANU ("ALL OF US") is a tax-exempt organization of Jews of varied backgrounds and practices dedicated to finding lost and dispersed remnants of the Jewish people and assisting those who wish to (re)join the Jewish community. Kulanu is undertaking a variety of activities worldwide on behalf of these dispersed groups, including research, contacts, education, conversion when requested, and relocation to Israel if desired. This newsletter is published quarterly by Kulanu, 11603 Gilsan St., Silver Spring, MD 20902.

Abayudaya-Kulanu Coffee Project Soars

By Laura Wetzler

In August, Thanksgiving Coffee in California introduced Mirembe Kawomera Coffee to the world. This exceptionally delicious coffee is grown by the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda together with their Muslim and Christian neighbors in a 400-farmer Fair Trade Certified coffee cooperative. The Luganda name of this organic, kosher coffee translates as "Delicious Peace." In addition to earning the highest price for their beans through Fair Trade, one dollar of every bag sold is sent directly to the coffee cooperative to help farmers build a better life.

This newsletter and many other publications carried the news, and already many synagogues and businesses have contacted us to tell us that they are now serving Mirembe Kawomera Coffee, using the coffee to raise *tikkun olam* awareness, fuel positive interfaith alliances, and raise funds for Kulanu and other not-for-profits. We'd love to hear more of these stories!

Since Kulanu is an all-volunteer organization with no promotional budget (our donated funds go to the communities we serve), we need your help:

(1) Please go to the Kulanu website (www.kulanu.org) and download the coffee flyer for your group and your favorite stores and organizations. Please send the coffee press release to your press list. Perform a mitzvah with every cup. Great for holiday gift sales! Order now at 800-648-6491. Wholesale: 1 800 462 1999. For more information, visit www.thanksgivingcoffee.com.

(2) Also, come visit the Abayudaya community (and the coffee farmers) with me on the "Jewish Life in Uganda Mitzvah Tour and Wildlife Safari" January 9-23, 2006. This is a Kulanu economic development project in which \$600 of every traveler's fee goes directly to support the Abayudaya Jewish community. It is also the best safari bargain in Africa. See the information on the back page of this newsletter.

Jewish Books for Nigeria

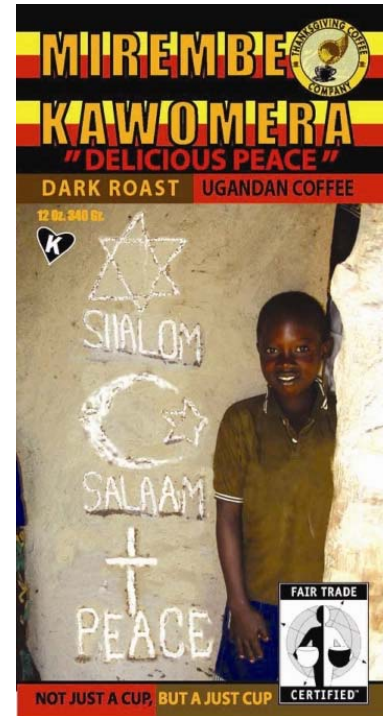
By Rabbi Howard Gorin

In February 2004, I had the privilege of traveling to Nigeria to visit some of the Jewish communities found throughout the country. I was deeply touched by the people whom I met. Their commitment to the practice of Judaism and to learning more about our religion is beyond anything that can be expected of people who have virtually no access to rabbis and educators and who have no Jewish resources to speak of. Throughout my trip -- to the Federal Capital Territories, to Port Harcourt, and to Abia, Akwa Ibom, Niger and Rivers States -- I visited a lot of synagogues, but I saw very few books: a small number of *siddurim* (prayerbooks), many of them photocopied; a smaller number of *tanakhim* (Jewish Bibles) and *chumashim* (Five Books of the Torah); and almost no books of introduction to Judaism and Jewish history, of explanations of how Jews pray, or of guidance as to how holidays are celebrated and what they signify.

I felt that the most durable contribution that I might be able to make to the development of Jewish life in Nigeria would be the establishment of Jewish libraries and collections of books for synagogues.

I am collecting books for a container to be sent to Nigeria in late December or early January. All the information regarding this project I have undertaken can be found at <http://rabbihowardgorin.org/Books4Nigeria.htm>. If you have any of the books that I am looking for -- for a list of those books, please visit <http://rabbihowardgorin.org/BookList2.htm> -- please contact me directly at hdgorin49@yahoo.com.

Please note that this is not a Kulanu project. However, there is a benefit for the Kulanu communities in Nigeria. I have offered to Jack Zeller to include in my container as much as one ton of books Kulanu collects for its contacts in Nigeria.



KULANU PERSONNEL

Board of Directors

Jack Zeller (President)
Aron Primack (Vice President)
Karen Primack (Secretary)
Harriet Bograd (Treasurer)
Rabbi Moshe Cotel

Regional Coordinators

Brazil	Regina Igel
China	Ray Kaplan
Ecuador	Ed Samiljan
Ethiopia	Sam Tadesse
	Yohannes Zeleke
Ghana	Bluma Teram
India	Romiel Daniel
Mexico	Max Amichai Heppner
Nigeria	Ehav Eliyah
South Africa	Sandy Leeder
Tutsi	Rabbi David Kuperman
Uganda	Laura Wetzler

Other Appointments

Archivist	Joe Hantman
Liaison to Saudades	Rufina B. Silva Mausenbaum
Liaison to Masorti Olami	Moshe Cotel
List Moderators	Ray Kaplan, Harriet Bograd, Jack Zeller
Boutique Coordinator	Tamu Ngina
Newsletter Editor	Karen Primack
Speakers Bureau	Ray Kaplan
Volunteer Coordinator	Emily Chaya Weinstein
Webmaster	Stevy Epstein
Coordinator for Schools, Camps, and B'nai Mitzvah	Lauri Donahue

Rebuilding and Growing a Central American Jewish Community

By Jeffrey M. Freedman

I have been traveling to several Central and South American countries as part of my interest in photography and I have tried to get a flavor for the Jewish culture in each of these areas. Recently, I visited Guatemala and spoke with several members of the Jewish community.

While preparing for my trip to Guatemala, I read an article in the *Jewish Ledger* by Rabbi Abraham Tobal of the Mount Sinai Alliance in Mexico City, where he identified a significant Jewish issue. He stated “the loss of Sephardi tradition is not caused by mixed marriages. These are just a result of a cultural erosion that can be compared to the Holocaust. The Holocaust killed physically, and this kills our essence.”

Rabbi Tobal’s observation applies not just to the Sephardic tradition in Mexico City, but to all of the small Jewish communities -- Sephardic and Ashkenazi -- spread throughout Central and South America, which are struggling to survive.

Outside of Mexico City and in small Central American countries such as Guatemala, the challenge of preserving Jewish tradition is huge. In fact, it’s not unusual for Jews living in any of the Latin American countries to travel to Mexico City looking for a Jewish spouse.

Guatemala is a country approximately the size of Louisiana with a population of 13.9 million, of whom about 280 families, or 800 individuals, are Jewish. One of the biggest problems this small community is facing is how to preserve and grow the Jewish population.

“There are no new Jews moving to Guatemala,” said Jaime Russ, a senior member of the Jewish community in Guatemala. “And many of the young Jews move away because they don’t have good opportunities here and they are drawn to the culture in the United States.”

This exodus is mainly the result of the limited career options and a limited “dating pool,” not because of environmental conditions. Guatemala offers a temperate climate and a stable political structure. It has a lengthy and rich Jewish culture dating back to the late 1800s, when many German Jews immigrated in response to the first signs of anti-Semitism and a stagnating European economy.

“Back then, there was a mix of professions: doctors, writers, businessmen and farmers,” Russ said. “Many of them couldn’t find Jewish mates in Guatemala even at that time, so about 40 percent went into mixed marriages, and many aban-

doned their Jewishness.”

Later, after World War I, there was another influx with Guatemala absorbing many Jews who had been turned away from the United States when its quotas for immigrants were filled. And some single Jews came when they were turned away by Cuba, because Cuba would only allow married couples to immigrate there.

These people did not arrive with great wealth. Many were like the grandparents of Zelik Tenenbaum, who came to the Central American country from Poland with a single gold coin to his name in 1930.

“They were tailors, and that’s how they started out,” Tenenbaum said.

The second generation of Jews began to contribute significantly to the economy of the country, managing textile mills and coffee plantations, and getting into real estate, construction and holding companies. During a brutal 36-year civil war that ended in 1996, many Jews left Guatemala, depleting the population. And now the third generation is gravitating more towards professional careers and studying in the United States, not wanting to return to their homeland.

“I have four daughters,” the 42-year-old

Tenenbaum said, “and it is important to me that they marry Jewish men so that they can continue with our traditions. We take them to the United States and other Latin American countries for them to meet Jewish boys and girls. We want them to have a strong Jewish identity. We are working with the Joint Distribution Committee to bring Jews from other countries here. But looking forward – it’s tough.”

Guatemalan Jews have created a strong sense of community and freely practice their faith. Ninety-eight percent of the population lives in Guatemala City, where there are two temples, the Sephardic, with about 180 members, and the Ashkenazi, with about 200 members. Rabbi Richard Kaufman, who is originally from Uruguay, serves the two temples.

“Both temples work together to be a united Jewish community,” Jaime Russ said. “Both are a mix of Orthodox and Conservative – the food is kosher, we celebrate all the holidays – if one temple has a program, the whole community becomes involved.”

The Guatemalan Jewish community is one large family,

(Continued on page 9)



Construction at Har Carmel, Guatemala

KULANU BRIEFS

Luganda Chumash

Dr. Ora Horn Prouser and Rabbi Joseph Prouser have completed a Hebrew-Luganda version of all five books of the Hebrew Torah, as well as the *haftarah* for each *parshah*, for the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda. The Prouseres painstakingly matched up a text from a Luganda Christian Bible with Hebrew text, and supplied a summary and analysis of each *parshah* in English. Twenty five copies of each book of the Torah have been sent to the community.

The Prouseres hope to work with members of the Abayudaya community to do a second edition in which the Luganda translation will be refined to better reflect the Jewish Bible.

Unique Kente Cloth Tallitot Available

Magnificent, colorful Kente Cloth tallitot (Jewish prayer shawls) from Ghana's Jewish community are now available from Kulanu. The tallitot are made from 100% cotton Kente Cloth by weavers near Kumasi, Ghana, and are decorated with embroidered *atarot* (collars) and corners made by Ben Baidoo, the tailor in the Jewish community of Sefwi Wiawso.

To view color photos tallitot, visit the Kulanu Boutique at www.kulanuboutique.com. If you want to choose your colors



and reserve a tallit that is now in stock, please contact Harriet Bograd (harriet@kulanu.org, 212-877-8082) before you place your order. We expect these to sell out soon, so act quickly! If you don't reserve one in advance, we'll pick colors for you and send one as soon as we can, hopefully within two months.

Kente Cloth was used for the clothing of Ghana's royalty and leaders as far back as the 12th century. The name comes from the word *kenten*, which means "basket" because the woven cloth resembles woven baskets. The cloth is handwoven in 4 1/4-inch strips which are then stitched together. Incidentally, various historical accounts claim that Jewish travelers from Persia had organized exchanges of Chinese silk for gold in the Kingdom of Ghana; the Ashanti needed the silk for weaving Kente Cloth. To this day it is said that the Ashanti words for numbers relate to those in Parsi, the language of Persia

Kulanu's tallitot incorporate four to six strips for a width of 17 to 25.5 inches. The lengths range from 74 to 76 inches. Our introductory price is \$180 for each tallit. Proceeds from the sale of these tallitot will support the Jewish community of Ghana and other Kulanu projects.

Speakers Spread the Word

On December 1, the Manhattan JCC will feature a presentation by **Sandro Halphen**, award winning Mexican filmmaker and teacher, on the descendants of victims of the Spanish Inquisition.

Yaffah daCosta joined **Rabbi Marc D. Angel** at Congregation Shearith Israel in New York City on November 8 in a talk about *Anousim* from Spain, Portugal, Brazil, and parts of the Americas returning to the religion of their ancestors. Yaffah daCosta is founder and director of Ezra L'Anousim, a Jerusalem-based organization dedicated to reconnecting crypto-Jews with their Jewish heritage.

Gloria Mound's November US lecture tour was set to include Boston, West Palm Beach, and Washington. Her November 14 talk at George Washington University was entitled "Marrano Women in Culture and Society."

Amichai Heppner and **Ana Kurland** led a month-long course on the Jews of Mexico at the Jewish Study Center in Washington, DC in September. Amichai focused on the lessons we can learn from the video *Ocho Candelas*, the struggle for recognition by the "New Jews of Veracruz" and other returnees, and Ana expanded on her story of return to Judaism, "T'Shuva," published in the summer 2005 issue of *Na'amat Woman*. Both the video and the article are available from Kulanu.

Rabbi Mark Sameth spoke on the Jewish community of China at the Manhattan JCC on November 1. The talk was co-sponsored by the Jewish Multiracial Program of Westchester Jewish Community Services and Families with Children from China of Greater New York (FCC)

Painter **Gheorghe Parascan** addressed a Washington audience at the Romanian Embassy's October 20 opening of an exhibit of his paintings of the synagogues in Romania.

Shana HaAbayudaya in Toledo

Congregation B'nai Israel of Toledo, Ohio, has just launched Shana HaAbayudaya, the year of the Abayudaya. The observance, to be spread out over the year 5766, will include a screening of a film about the community, and talks by Gershom Sizomu and Rabbi Howard Gorin. As Rabbi Barry Leff said, "May God help us remember that all Jews are our brothers, whether they live in Toledo or Manhattan or Jerusalem or outside of Mbale, Uganda"

Nigeria on Kulanu's Web Page

Nigeria is now included in the Communities section of the Kulanu web page (www.Kulanu.org). This section contains articles about African Jewry and Jewish migrations to Iboland, as well as a link to Ehav Eliyahu's excellent web page -- <http://www.jewishnigeria.cjb.net/> >

Basic Judaism in Espanol

Spanish-speaking Jews around the world will now be able to learn more about their heritage thanks to a new set of CDs on basic Judaism that was just released by the Shavei Israel organization. The set, which consists of seven compact discs, is enti-

KULANU BRIEFS

itled *Nuestro Judaismo*, and contains a series of lectures by Rabbi Alfredo Goldschmidt, Chief Rabbi of the Jewish community of Bogota, Colombia, and director of the city's Colegio Hebreo. For more information, contact <spanish@shavei.org>

Sidg in New York City

The Ethiopian holiday of Sidg was celebrated in New York City under the co-sponsorship of Chassida Shmella and the JCC of Manhattan. The holiday commemorates the giving of the Torah and the ancient communal gatherings in Jerusalem in the days of the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah. The observance featured a traditional group walk, led by two Ethiopian *Kessot* (Jewish priests) to Central Park, where prayers and Torah readings were conducted in Gez, the ancient language of Ethiopia. The group then gathered at the JCC for lunch and a program of Ethiopian/Israeli music.

Multicultural Jewish Music

The Manhattan JCC featured "The Days of Awe" on September 22, performed by David Chevan and the Afro-Semitic Experience, with guest trumpet player Frank London. The performance drew from the musical traditions of gospel, klezmer, Yourban drumming, niggunim, spirituals, and funk.

Scattered Among the Nations Exhibit

A photo exhibit at the Sixth and I Historic Synagogue in Washington, in coordination with Scattered Among the Nations, will run through November 28. Entitled "Jews of Color: In Color!" this exhibit of photographs and stories of isolated Jewish communities around the world was compiled by Bryan Schwartz, Jay Sand, and Sandy Carter for their upcoming book by the same name. For more information see <http://www.scatteredamongthenations.org/>, which contains many beautiful photographs and information on Jews in Uganda, Zimbabwe, Tunisia, Morocco, Ghana, and South Africa.

Sheba Film Festival in NYC

The Beta Israel of North America (BINA) Cultural Foundation presented the 2nd annual showing of its Sheba Film Festival, in Harlem, NYC, on September 24 and 25. Films shown were *Adwa: An African Victory*, *Black Israel*, *From Swastika to Jim Crow*, and the NY Premiere of *Yaldereke Enba*. The festival also included dancers, arts and other exhibits. Kulanu was one of the festival's co-sponsors.

Todah Rabah!

Rabbi Jeffrey Summit at Tufts University Hillel continues to be an awesome source for the Abayudaya. He raises money for university tuition for the community (\$4000 in the latest round), and also donates all royalties (\$4912 so far) from his Smithsonian Folkways recording, *Abayudaya: Music from the Jewish People of Uganda*. He writes, "I am deeply committed to raising money for Abayudaya students' university tuition and am thrilled that more students are attending university. In that tuition bills are growing, it would be great to see if we could involve some more supporters in this project." To help, contact him at jsummit@tufts.edu.

Rabbi Scott Glass and Sharon Glass sent a donation for the Abayudaya Orphans Education Fund in honor of the birth of their granddaughter, **Sarit Adina Lapin**, daughter of their children, Ann and James Lapin.

Herman Storick continues his personal project of sending excellent Judaica books for Remy Ilona's collection in Abuja, Nigeria.

The Rotary Club of Seattle, Washington, raised \$4625 for latrines and a generator for the Semei Kakungulu High School in Uganda. The idea was initiated by **Peter and Hinda Schnurman**, long-time volunteers with the American Jewish World Service, who had a brief visit with the Abayudaya while volunteering elsewhere in Uganda. (Find out more about their volunteer experiences from their blog at <http://peterandhindas.blogspot.com>).

Hope and Matthew Feldman have generously donated over \$7000 for Kulanu programs.

Donors of \$1000—\$2000: the **Jack and Pauline Freeman Foundation**, **Peggy & Mark Zilbermann**, **Lionel Okun**.

Donors of \$500—\$825: **Tenet Healthcare Foundation**, **Ziv Tzedakah Fund**, **Woodlands Community Temple**, **Irwin & Elaine Berg**, and **Sidney Wasserman**.

Donors of \$101—\$250: **Bridget Etoh**, **Lisa Bernard**, **Jo Ann Graham**, **Jon and Paula Mack Drill**, **Brenda Miller**, and **Jaime Walman**.

The \$100 club: **Harold Alderman**, **Caryl Bernstein**, **Judith Geller**, **Richard & Sharon Hammerman**, **Donald Menzi**, **Todd Schubert**, **Mark Shroder**, **Albert & Christine Singer**, **The Progressive Chavurah**, and **Jerry Wein**.

Happy Chanukah!

Book Comment

From Falasha To Freedom (Gefen 1996) by Shmuel Yilma

Reviewed by Irwin M. Berg

When I read this book initially, I was left with the impression that the Ethiopians who immigrated to Israel prior to Operation Solomon in 1991 were modern *Chalutzim* – similar to the pioneers who left Eastern Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries -- desirous of building a Jewish homeland for themselves and their children. This impression is not altogether wrong because the Ethiopians and the *Chalutzim* both faced physical dangers and a strange and difficult land. But upon a second reading, I realized that Yilma and his family and the others who left Tigre province had more in common with those Jews who settled The Land in the 16th century for religious and mystical reasons. For Yilma and his family, the time for redemption had come, and God would lead them to Jerusalem as He led the children of Israel from Egypt to the land which He promised Abraham.

The book begins with the author as a child of 11 years in 1979 in the village of Adi-Worewa, populated by 30 Jewish families. The Jews kept among themselves because of religious persecution by their gentile neighbors. Shmuel's father was a blacksmith and a farmer. Almost all the Jews, in addition to being farmers, made a living as artisans. Shmuel was born in a house made of straw. He and his family, although poor by Western standards, were relatively well off by the standards of the village. The village had a synagogue. Hebrew was taught to the children in the village, but the nearest government school was three miles away. Only Shmuel (then Bellette) and one other Jew attended the government school.

Sometime during the 1970s the Ethiopian government put Shmuel's uncle, Memher Feredeh, in prison for Zionist activities. Escaping from the prison, he disappeared and was not heard from for several years until Shmuel's grandmother, Avehet, was approached by a Moslem who came from the Sudan with an important message. Unbeknownst to her, Feredeh had reached Khartoum, where he had made contact with HIAS and the Jewish Agency. He became their agent to get Ethiopian Jewish refugees out of Sudan and into Israel. Feredeh eventually sent letters to all parts of Ethiopia announcing that a channel of emigration had opened that could make a reality of a 2,000-year-old dream of Return to Jerusalem. This was the message which the Moslem brought to Avehet. In Yilma's words, his grandmother said this to the family upon receipt of the message:

"I will get my boys ready. I will provision them for the journey and send them off with my blessing, sure that no harm will come to them. For this can only be the hand of God."

With those words, 15 family members, including the grandmother, decided to make the journey. All preparations had to be made in secret so as not to alert their Christian neighbors. One night at 11 p.m. -- "for did not our ancestors leave Egypt at night?" -- they walked into the desert separating Ethiopia from the Sudan. They walked mainly at night so as

(Continued on page 13)

A New Center for the Study of Jewry in Calabria and Sicily

By Dominick J. Porto

It has been estimated that prior to the Inquisition, at least 40 percent of the combined population of Calabria and Sicily was Jewish. In fact, in dozens of small towns and villages throughout Calabria and Sicily, interesting remnants of Jewish life remain to this day. Historians have discovered indications of a thriving Jewish presence in the "*quartiere*" in major Italian cities and the "*via giudecca*" in smaller towns and communities.

With the advent of the Inquisition in Italy, when the long arm of Torquemada reached into Sicily and Calabria, many of these Jewish families were forced to flee, convert, or practice in secret (crypto-Jews). Yet, despite persecution, many families retained a remnant of their Jewish past. Today, as thousands of Italian Americans, as well as others of Italian ancestry or connection from all around the world, embark upon genealogical research to learn about their roots, knowledge of Italian-Jewish heritage can be essential in this process. An overwhelming number of Italians who have emigrated are from the South of Italy and among them a great number from Calabria and Sicily.

We have established a Center for the Study of Jewry in Calabria and Sicily as a non-profit entity dedicated to advance research and study of the Jewish heritage of Calabria and Sicily. Our web site is in gestation. We will offer links to assist our guests, from whom we will welcome comment and information.

Our first meeting was held on July 18, 2005. Dr. Giuseppe Mascaro discussed his years of research on the Hebrew presence in Catanzaro and distributed copies of a scholarly treatise published in *Calabria Letteraria* in 2003, in which he discusses the establishment by Moses of the Hebrew lunar calendar, its subsequent adoption by the Romans, and changes made thereafter. There was a lively and enthusiastic exchange of information and suggestions for the future of this Center. The meeting was followed by a tour of the Nicastro ghetto, where a Hebrew community was active from the 12th to 15th centuries and the remains of a mikveh still exist. (This ghetto is the subject of a book recently written and published by one of our members, Prof. Vincenzo Vilella.)

The Center is not connected with any synagogue or particular Jewish Community. Likewise we do not endorse commercial or business ventures. Our focus is research and study of Southern Italian Jewry, and the free exchange of same, for anyone interested in our history and past, as well as related current events.

For further information, please contact me at <djporto@libero.it>.

Let My People In!

By Michael Freund

(From *The Jerusalem Post* of November 2, 2005)

For a country that says it wants more new immigrants, Israel sure has a funny way of showing it.

This past Sunday, thousands of protesters gathered outside the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem. As at all such gatherings, the participants waved banners and placards, shouted slogans and catch-phrases, and appealed for their elected representatives to heed their calls and take action.

Those in attendance were not calling for Jews to be allowed out of some foreign land, however. Ironically enough, they were there to demand that Israel let Jews in.

The crowd consisted largely of Ethiopian immigrants, many of whom still have loved ones stuck in Ethiopia thanks in no small measure to the government's indifference, incompetence and utter lack of concern.

It has been eight months since Prime Minister Ariel Sharon bowed to pressure at home and abroad and agreed to increase the number of Falash Mura immigrants from Ethiopia allowed in to Israel each month.

Descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity, many against their will, the Falash Mura now wish to rejoin the Jewish people, and there are still some 18,000 of them waiting to come home to Zion.

After pleas from a broad spectrum of prominent Jews, ranging from Israel's Sephardic Chief Rabbi to the Canadian Minister of Justice to the head of the Reform movement, Sharon promised that beginning in June, the monthly quota of Falash Mura aliya would double from 300 to 600 souls.

We are now in the month of November, and that has yet to happen.

Indeed, according to the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, the number of immigrants from Ethiopia in the month of June, the month when Sharon's new policy was due to take effect, was - you guessed it - just 300. In July, it was 303, in August just 302, and in September 440, all far short of what the Prime Minister had promised.

Why does the number 600 matter so much? Do some quick arithmetic, and you'll see why.

With some 18,000 Falash Mura still waiting in Ethiopia to make aliya, a monthly rate of 300 translates into another 6 years for the remainder of Ethiopian Jewry to be brought home. Double the monthly allotment to 600, and we can restore this ancient community to the land of their ancestors in just two-and-a-half years instead.

As a result of the government's ongoing failure to speed up Falash Mura aliya, Ethiopian families will continue to be needlessly divided, and future immigrants might be compelled to wait until 2011 or even later before seeing their loved ones again.

Delaying the arrival of the Falash Mura only places them at greater risk, as Ethiopia contends with an ongoing food crisis, rising rates of HIV/AIDS, and a simmering conflict with neighboring Eritrea.

A recent report by the UN's World Food Program noted ominously that, "Twenty years after famine killed an estimated one million people in Ethiopia, hunger still looms large in a country where population growth is among the highest in the world."

"More than three million people," the report stated, "face persistent hunger and need emergency food aid" in Ethiopia.

The situation becomes even more absurd when one considers that it was back in February 2003 that the Israeli cabinet, headed by none other than Sharon himself, formally adopted a decision to bring the remaining Falash Mura to Israel.

In effect, then, the protesters this week weren't actually seeking to force a change in the government's policy. They were just trying to convince Sharon to implement his own decision from over two years ago.

So, just how does the government explain its failure to boost the monthly quota of Ethiopian immigrants? Why, by blaming someone else, of course.

On Sunday, Reuters reported that an unnamed spokesman for the Absorption Ministry "blamed the delay on Ethiopian elections, saying it had been impossible to finalize details sooner."

That sounds reasonable enough, except for one minor catch: the Ethiopian elections were held back in May, before the monthly Falash Mura quota was set to double. Moreover, the balloting was won by the incumbent, Meles Zenawi, so Ethiopia's policy remained unchanged.

Nice try, Mr. Spokesman. But the obstacle to increased Ethiopian immigration lies in Jerusalem, not in Addis Ababa.

Believe it or not, the Falash Mura aren't the only potential immigrants that are being stonewalled by Israel's government. There are thousands of others out there too, from the 15,000 Subbotnik Jews of the former Soviet Union, to the 7,000 Bnei Menashe of northeastern India.

The Subbotniks are descendants of Russian peasants who converted to Judaism two centuries ago, and who clung to their new-found faith despite Czarist oppression, Nazi persecution and Communist cruelty. Thousands moved freely to Israel until the Interior Ministry inexplicably halted their arrival in 2003.

The Bnei Menashe, a group claiming descent from one of the Ten Lost Tribes, were formally recognized by the Chief Rabbinate on March 30 as "descendants of Israel," but Interior Minister Ophir Pines-Paz seems in no hurry to welcome them home, either.

Taken together, these three groups - the Falash Mura, the Subbotniks and the Bnei Menashe - number over 40,000, all of whom wish to tie their fate with the people of Israel and make aliya.

The only thing preventing them from doing so is Israel's government, which offers little more than empty excuses to justify this outrageous situation.

In the past, various ministers have pleaded poverty, claiming it would cost too much for Israel to absorb so many immigrants all at once. In truth, it is not a lack of finances, but a lack of will that lies at the root of the problem. The Falash Mura, the Subbotniks and the Bnei Menashe may not come from affluent backgrounds, nor bring with them the resources available to other immigrant groups. But they are our brothers and sisters, our flesh and blood, and they long to return after an arduous and often painful journey in Exile.

The time has come for the government, together with world Jewry, to stop dilly-dallying and get to work. The time has come to bring our lost brethren home to the Jewish people and to the Jewish state.

Editor's note: While it is important to get these last 18,000 to Israel, there is also an urgent need for absorption expenses for the 110,000 Ethiopian Jews already in Israel. The North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ) is urging us all to give priority to these three programs:

***Adopt a college student for \$1080 a year
*Sponsor a high school student for \$350 a year
*Give a \$36 Chanukah gift, which will enable NACOEJ to provide two Ethiopian-Israeli children with a year's worth of books**

Send checks to: North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry, 132 Nassau Street, Suite 412, New York, NY 10038-2400

LETTERS TO KULANU

An American Diplomat's Family In Vietnam (excerpts)

The full moon of the autumnal equinox is the brightest of the year. In the West we call it the harvest moon. Here it's celebrated as a "little Tet," or Tet Trung Thu, the Tet of the Autumn Moon. Other names for it are the Mid-Autumn Festival, and the Moon-Watching Festival. It falls on the 14th or 15th day of the eighth lunar month. It used to be a religious festival, but nowadays it's a festival geared toward children, with lots of toys for sale on the streets, cotton candy, and games. People make and eat moon cakes--large round cakes with sweet bean paste inside, and sit and watch the full moon on the special night.

Rosh Hashana fell at the same time this year, and the round moon cakes echoed the traditional round challah. The more I learn about other cultures, the more similarities I find in our cultural practices. People are people, after all, and we all see the full moon on the same night.

On *erev* Rosh Hashana we attended a dinner at the home of the new ambassador from Israel. There were about 30 people there, some with small children, some couples, some singles.

Several Jewish men were there with their Vietnamese wives, and it was a little unusual to hear the Vietnamese wives (Jewish? don't think so) wish the ambassador "*L'shana tova!*" I lit the candles and the ambassador said Kiddush. For dinner, he had taught his local cook how to make gefilte fish (no horseradish, though) and we also enjoyed apples and honey, and pomegranates. The cook also made delicious round challot with raisins.

*Karen Lantner
Hanoi, Vietnam*

Guatemalan Converts

July 21, 2005, was a very special day for all of us. We could establish the legitimization of our Jewish practices. But it does not start here. Since the year 2000 we have been introducing ourselves to Judaism and we have had many experiences, some positive and other negative. It was like taking little parts, pieces of a whole, which we did not understand totally, but we treasured them because our souls knew that they were parts of an important totality.

At the beginning of this year, HaShem allowed me to have a book in my hands, sent to Guatemala, this little Central America country, by a good friend who lives in Canada. This book does not contain rabbinic teachings or special studies of Torah, or Midrash. It is about history. A very clear, very concise and at the same time, much extensive book. It opens our eyes, it gives us a concrete vision of the different thoughts that Judaism has and even contrasted with other religions. It says that the persons should be good, not necessarily Jews. But we cannot forget our genuine interest for this. Shabbat has become part of our hearts, the holidays, new moons, prayers... that have modified our way of living, our sight of reality. We must continue practicing what we have learned. Even when many others try to disappoint us, setting us like Noah's children to whom Judaic practice does not correspond, we persist. But reading the book, *HaMadrij: Guia del Judaismo* (Guide to Judaism), written by Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, gives us a new perspective. We contact him and he follows up, making documents and passing questionnaires, which ended with his visit in our country.

That is how, on July 21, Beit HaMadrij Hillel was born. We are confident in HaShem, B'H' that everything will go on well now.

Our purpose is to continue studying Torah and share it with all persons interested. For that, Rabbi Cukierkorn has given us his support. It would be nice if there were more rabbis like him.

Toda raba, Rabbi. We have thanked you in private, but on behalf of my family and the other Guatemalan converted families, I am making this public. Thank you, Rabbi, you have gave us a great incentive to go ahead. Now we know that all these five years of studies and perseverance was worth the effort. Soon there will be more!

*Alvaro (Eliyahu) Orantes
Guatemala City, Guatemala*

An Emerging Jewish Community In Mexico

We, the membership of the Comunidad Israelita de Mexicali, write this appeal as an emerging Jewish community asking for the help of our fellow Jewish communities and individuals.

Let us tell you briefly about our community. We are located in Mexicali, Mexico, which is located on the southwest border with the United States, two hours east of San Diego, California and one hour west of Yuma, Arizona.

There has been a Jewish and *Anousim* (Crypto-Jewish) presence in Mexicali throughout its history. High holiday services were held in the Masonic Lodge in the 1930's - 1940's, but there has not been an organized Jewish community since then. From that time to present, there have been Jews and *Anousim* scattered throughout the city and surrounding area, some in contact with each other, but for the most part not.

We started as a "virtual" internet community, and approximately two months ago we decided to transform our virtual community into a real active Jewish community. At this point the Comunidad Israelita de Mexicali is a small but diverse community with approximately 20 adult members and growing as rapidly as security, space and resources will permit. We are unaffiliated with any current within Judaism at this time.

As the members of this forum are well aware, there is a growing movement of *Bnai Anousim* (Crypto-Jews) who are seeking to reclaim their Judaism. Communities such as ours are emerging throughout Latin America.

Our community does not or will not proselytize, but we are accepting those who are seeking to reclaim their Judaism, as well as those that are seeking Judaism in their search for their proper truth.

Comunidad Israelita de Mexicali needs your help. We are not appealing to you for financial aid. What we need at this point are educational materials and basic necessities that any Jewish community and its membership should have. These books or CDs on any subject or area within Judaism, from basic to advanced, whether that be religious, interpretative, philosophic, symbolic or historically based.

Our membership is also in need of kipot, tallitot, tefillin (yes, our community has members who would like to wrap and are knowledgeable enough to do so). Our membership also needs objects such as Shabbat candlesticks, menorahs, seder plates, etc. We are asking for things that are not being utilized in your communities and homes and promise they will be put to good use.

Comunidad Israelita de Mexicali does not care if those materials are from Sephardi or Ashkenazi origins, nor is it important to us if they are from Reform, Conservative or Orthodox currents within Judaism. What is of the utmost importance to us is that these materials are not "messianic." We are NOT associated with, nor do we consider "messianic" in any matter, shape or form, or any other Christian movement disguised as Jewish. Therefore we will not accept any "messianic" or Christian materials, no matter how well or not well intentioned.

Of course, Spanish is the primary language of our membership, but many speak or can read in English and/or Hebrew, so please help us in any language possible whether that be in Spanish, English or Hebrew.

Maimonides said that the highest form of *tzedakah* is to make one

LETTERS

Growing a Central American Jewish Community (cont.)

self-sufficient. Our community is asking your community and you as fellow Jews for your help in making Comunidad Israelita de Mexicali exactly that, a self-sufficient Jewish community. We also promise you that any materials in excess of our community needs will be redistributed to other communities such as ours throughout Mexico and Latin America.

Please, we ask you as fellow Jews to box up what you can and help us. For security purposes we will not publish a mailing address here, but you can email us at Cisraelita.Mexicali@gmail.com for more details or questions.

Ron Cohen

Comunidad Israelita de Mexicali

(Continued from page 3)

agrees Marcelo Acesbrud, executive director of the Comunidad Judia Guatemalteca. "We may have different political and religious beliefs, but we are still one family. We celebrate together, we mourn together, everyone respects one another," he said. "We are very proud of Jewish projects, and we are lucky to have men with vision."

One such man with vision is Joey Habie, a businessman who is leading the construction of Har Carmel, which, if it were being built in the U.S., would be called a planned community.

"A trust fund was created by the Jewish community and 150 acres of real estate was purchased just 25 minutes outside of Guatemala City for \$1.25 million," Habie said. "We are building housing, a synagogue, a community center, soccer fields, a park . . . this will be a far-sighted project."

There will be 200 lots of 10,000 square feet each sold at \$25,000 per lot with five years to pay at no interest.

"We expect 250 people will live here – half the lots are already sold – some will be here full-time, some will have vacation homes. There will be senior housing so that seniors can live together in a Jewish environment," he said.

Talent from within the community will be evident in all aspects of this project, just as the community joins together to look after its members in other ways, such as employment and health issues, Acesbrud says.

Although their community is small, the Jews in Guatemala make a contribution in more ways than just as part of the economy. Jews have been elected to high-level positions in the government, such as the Guatemalan Congress, and they serve in many government offices.

"Jews are respected in Guatemala. We participate in the political and civic arenas," Acesbrud says. "There are four million evangelical Christians in Guatemala, but there is no problem with anti-Semitism. It's a very integrated society – everyone participates at every level."

Habie's community of Har Carmel will provide a hub for the Jewish population that is also a safe haven with state-of-the-art security linked to local law enforcement.

"These are normal precautions in today's world," says Habie. "Security is a world-wide issue."

Har Carmel is attracting American Jews who are building vacation homes, and Jews from Argentina who are fleeing the economic crisis in that country. It is beginning to look like the project will fulfill its goal to help build up the Jewish community in Guatemala.

With that prospect, Zelik Tenenbaum's four daughters will hopefully find husbands and settle down in their homeland to preserve the Jewish traditions and it will no longer feel, as their father says, "like we are the last of the Mohicans."

The First Abayudaya in Israel (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

settled in school. At a visit to the Kotel on September 4 for Rosh Chodesh services, Sizomu felt, "This was the most spiritual moment in my life."

Sizomu's rabbinic class will be studying at Machon Schecter, where classes are conducted in Hebrew.

In Israel briefly for a wedding and for Rosh Hashana, my husband Aron and I met with the Abayudaya family on October 10, less than six weeks after their arrival. They were all enthusiastic about their new surroundings and talked about the wonder of hearing people speaking Hebrew and hearing radios and televisions wishing everyone a "*Shana Tova*."

They cited as one of the special differences the custom of walking everywhere, lending an opportunity to meet people and get to know them. Tziporah exclaimed, "We are so happy and grateful to be here. If it had not been for Kulanu's historic visit in 1995, this never would have happened." (Kulanu's mission to Uganda in 1995 led to a series of educational programs and contacts that is still ongoing.)

Sizomu hopes his family's visit is the key that opens the door for other Abayudaya to come to Israel. When I asked whether he foresaw the Abayudaya community making aliyah, his answer suggested he had been thinking about this for some time:

"In the short term, I imagine Abayudaya traveling here for a visit to learn in kibbutzim – in order to build a stronger Jewish community in the heart of Africa. But in the future, if there are problems, I picture the whole community moving here. They should come here to contribute, not to be dependent. They should come as rabbis, doctors, and engineers."



On the Igbo, *Teshuvah*, and the Resiliency of the Jewish Spirit (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

known as Igboland. During my stay, I met and dialogued with Igbo leaders, taught Torah study classes in Judaic Igbo communities, led Shabbat services in Igbo synagogues, joined in their communal meetings and celebrations, and was made an honorary member of various Igbo clans.

My first undeniable impression of the Igbo's Judaic communities was their deep and palpable thirst for Jewish study and Jewish life. In truth, I cannot recall ever teaching students with such a profound yearning for Jewish learning and knowledge. Over the course of my visit, I came to realize that their thirst was a manifestation of a deeply felt desire to reconnect. To reclaim a heritage that has been denied them for so long.

We do not yet know enough about how many of these new Judaic Igbo communities exist in Nigeria. While much more research needs to be done, I think it is safe to say that the number of Igbo seeking to create a Jewish life in Nigeria is significant and growing.

As I traveled throughout this country so far removed from my own home, I was repeatedly received as a brother, as a member of the tribe, as it were. Even among the larger population of Igbo that does not practice Judaism, I sensed an almost universal feeling of affinity to the Jewish people.

During the period I spent in Igboland, I had the opportunity to meet and address large gatherings of various Igbo clans. Invariably, I would receive the strongest, loudest and most emotional reaction whenever I mentioned that meeting them was like discovering long lost family members that I didn't know I had. I was truly unprepared for the depth of their reaction to me, and I realized in large part they were reacting to what I represented to them: an authentic relationship to the outside Jewish world. **I have no doubt that their feelings of connection to the Jewish people are real and heartfelt – and that they have been kept alive and nurtured by the Igbo people for centuries.**

Are the Igbo, in fact, descended from the Lost Tribes of Israel? I don't know that there will ever be any way to prove this conclusively one way or the other. My good friend Remy has been researching this issue extensively, and I do believe there is a compelling case to be made in this regard. But as I see it, whether or not they are actually lost Israelites is rela-

tively moot in the face of the fact that the Igbo absolutely believe it to be true. And at the end of the day, can any Jew directly trace his/her lineage back to Biblical Israel? **It seems to me that the true power of Jewish identity and survival lies not in the veracity of our historical claims, but in the survival of our spirit – in the unique staying power of our collective *neshamah*.**

In the end, I returned from my sojourn in Nigeria with a renewed Jewish optimism. I use the word "renewed," because it is impossible in the Western Jewish community these days to avoid the profound angst about the future of our people. The official Jewish community commissions study after study invariably informing us that our numbers are shrinking, that assimilation is on the rise, that Jewish affiliation is on the decline. Doom and gloom prognosticating has become such a hallmark of our communal life that it is a major Jewish industry in its own right. **But my experiences with the Igbo of Nigeria have helped me to understand that perhaps the rumors of our demise have been greatly exaggerated. Perhaps the resiliency of the Jewish spirit is greater than we generally give it**

credit. Maybe we're just looking in the wrong places.

In the end, I believe our attitudes about our Jewish future are intimately tied up with our vision of who we are. **As I am coming to realize, much of the traditional Jewish self-image has been marked by a decidedly white, Eurocentric bias. In truth, however, from the very beginning of our existence, we Jews have always been an ethnically diverse people.**

In the book of Exodus, we are told that an "erev rav" – a mixed multitude of Israelites – went up out of Egypt. Since that time, Jews have lived amidst widely ranging cultures and nationalities, and our communities have always reflected this diversity.

The reality of these dispersed Jewish communities, however, sheds a profound new light on our status as a global people. As important organizations such as Kulanu help to demonstrate, it may well be that our global diversity transcends boundaries to a greater extent than we have ever imagined.

What should we make of this? Perhaps it means we should spend less time and money prognosticating our decline and refocus our energies and resources creatively toward new areas of Jewish potential. This might well include globally dispersed communities such as the Igbo: passionate, committed *neshamas* who seek greater connection with Jewish life and the Jewish world.



Rabbi Brant Rosen with Remy Ilona at Malchitzedek

PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE

← Historian **Stanley M. Hordes**, renowned expert on the history of Crypto-Judaism in the Southwestern US, has authored a book, published in August by Columbia University. *To The End of the Earth: A History of the Crypto-Jews of New Mexico* contains maps, photos, and 376 pages of text from primary sources, including interviews with New Mexican Hispanos, family histories, Inquisition records, and letters. He concludes with a discussion of the reemergence of Crypto-Judaic culture and the reclamation of Jewish ancestry within the Hispanic community in modern times.

← In her new book of poetry, *Saudades: The Jewish-Portuguese Connection*, **Ada Jill Schneider** “breathes life into the cold pages of history and puts faces and emotions to the fascinating stories of Portugal’s Jews and their descendents,” says David Gitlitz, author of *Secrecy and Deceit: The Religion of the Crypto-Jews*. Her poem, “Who Has Saudades?” is featured at <www.saudades.org>, Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum’s website on Portuguese Jewry.

Scrimshaw

Portuguese sailors
who settled Provincetown,
navigators and whalers
who went commercial
on the tail of Massachusetts!
How many of you were *cristãos novos*?
How many of you, under the banner
of Prince Henry’s school,
boarded ships at Sagres
while Jewish blood
still coursed hotly through your veins?
How many of you,
forcibly and freshly converted,
lit candles in closets on Friday nights
or hung, then hid, mezzuzahs
on right-hand doorposts of new homes?
How many of you chose one son
to carry the secret to the next generation?
Portuguese sailors
scrimshawed the globe
with Jewish roots.

(© 2005 Ada Jill Schneider
From *Saudades: The Jewish-Portuguese Connection*)

← *In Every Tongue -- The Racial & Ethnic Diversity of the Jewish People*, by **Gary Tobin, Diane Tobin, and Scott Rubin**, was published in paperback in September by the Institute for Jewish & Community Research. It is available at Amazon.com (251 pages, \$25).

← **Zion Ozeri**, an Israeli Jew of Yemenite origin and world-class photographer, has come out with a 159-page of photo-

graphs of Yemenite Jews, both in Israel and in Yemen. The book includes an essay on the author’s family history in both countries. Available at haggadahrus.com and amazon.com. Keter Books 2005.

← *Shaltiel: One Family’s Journey Through History*, by **Moshe Shaltiel-Gracian**, traces his family’s ancestry back to King David. The author found ancestors “from Babylonian rulers to cousins of Charlemagne, Annie Oakley’s husband, Holocaust survivors, an Israeli general and a deputy mayor of Chicago.” Academy Chicago Publishers 2005.

← The Tishri (October) edition of *Babaganewz*, a wonderful Jewish kids magazine, contains a CD with a track containing **Noam Katz** and **JJ Keki** singing “*Am Yisorel Chai*.”

← **Hilary Leila Krieger’s** October 11 *Jerusalem Post* article, “Reaching Out from the ‘Other’ Promised Land,” reports on Gershom Sizomu’s arrival in Israel.

← On October 1, **Barbara Cornell** reported in a Reuters feature, “Portugal’s Kosher Industry Finds Foreign Niche,” about kosher wine, sardines, meat, and olive oil industries near Covilha, Portugal.

← **Ezra HaLevi’s** article, “Sanhedrin Moves To Establish Council for Noahides,” published by Arutz 7 on September 28, reports on an action by the reestablished Sanhedrin in Jerusalem to ordain members of a council to assist the Bnei Noach in the observance of the seven Noahide commandments. (Several non-Jewish Bnei Noach communities around the world have undertaken to observe the laws delineated in the Torah’s *parashah Noach*.)

← An AP article of September 20, “Ethiopian Jews on Hunger Strike to Migrate,” by **Dagnachew Teklu**, reported on 1000 to 1800 people in Addis Ababa who were vowing to pray and refuse food and drink for 72 hours to protest the Israeli government’s delay in permitting the migration of 20,000 Ethiopian Falash Mura to Israel.

← The story of an Israeli beit din’s conversion of hundreds of Bnei Menashe in Aizawl, India, received good coverage. An article by **Peter Foster** appeared in *The Telegraph* of September 17, “India’s Lost Tribe Recognized as Jews after 2,700 Years.” **Baruch Gordon’s** article for Arutz Sheva on September 21, “200 Bnei Menashe in India Convert to Judaism,” also reports on the event. Likewise, a *Jerusalem Post* article on October 10 by **Linda Chhakchhuak**, “Bnei Menashe Rejoin the Tribe.”

← “Plain and Simple Faith,” by **Carol Cook**, is a September 4 *Haaretz* article. It reports on the Jewish community of Venta Prieta, Mexico, which is becoming Orthodox, although not with the agreement of the entire community.

← **Eli Ashkenazi’s** August 17 *Haaretz* article, “Bnei Menashe Families Move from Gaza Strip to Tribe’s Ancient Home,” describes the relocation of 13 Bnei Menashe families from Gush Katif to Gadish, located in part of the tribal area of Manasseh.

(Continued on page 12)

On the Igbo, *Teshuvah*, and the Resiliency of the Jewish Spirit (cont.)

(Continued from page 10)

I have every expectation that embracing our diversity will present its own set of challenges. Among other things, diversity challenges our very notion of who is a Jew, of our communal boundaries, of what kinds of Jewish behaviors and beliefs are considered “acceptable” and what are “beyond the pale.” I realize, for instance, that the Igbo would not be considered Jewish according to traditional halachic standards, but on the other hand, I can personally attest to their Jewish passion, their sense of Jewish belonging, their innate Jewish spirit.

While I realize these categories are not exactly quantifiable, I do believe we dismiss them at our peril. **A community that chronically bemoans its shrinking numbers should, at the very least, take note of a tribe of 40 million individuals that feels such a powerful sense of affinity with the Jewish People and Jewish life.** It would also behoove us to forge greater connections with the numerous other lost Jewish communities around the world who crave a greater connection with their Jewish brothers and sisters. We have only to challenge our biases and rethink our assumptions to see that there may well be potential for Jewish rebirth in the most unexpected of places.

This is not only a global issue – it has ramifications for us right here in America as well. Currently, the number of Jews of color in our country is growing considerably, due to increasing intermarriage, conversion and adoption in the Jewish community. This is certainly the case in our own congregation as well. I am proud indeed that my congregation, JRC, increasingly includes members who are African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and mixed race.

But I would also suggest we could and should be doing more to encourage diversity in our community. According to the Institute for Jewish & Community Research, at least 20 percent of the American Jewish population is racially and ethnically diverse. Their research also shows, however, while Jews of color often feel a strong affinity for Judaism and the Jewish people, they generally feel alienated from Jewish institutions.

Given the conventional Jewish community wisdom that Jewish = White, I have little difficulty understanding why this is so. But if to be American ultimately means to embrace diversity as a source of strength, and if we truly believe that Jewish life has always been enriched by the cultures in which Jews happen to live, then encouraging the diversity of our Jewish community may well be the key to our Jewish future.

Being Jewish has always defied easy definitions. The experience of being Jewish transcends ethnicity, race, nationality, behavior and belief. As complicated as all that sounds, the reality is rather straightforward: we are, quite simply, a people. As I often like to put it, to be Jewish means to be part of an extended family – a diverse, often cantankerous family, but family nonetheless. To be a family does not mean that we look alike, behave the same way, or believe the same things –

but it does mean that we are bound together by the common experience of belonging to the group.

My experiences in Africa gave me a new faith in the power of belonging. In a rural Ugandan village, so far away from home, we discovered a home after all. During my sojourn in Nigeria, I rediscovered long lost family members I didn't even know I had. It is, perhaps, the most quintessential of Jewish experiences. To quote from one of my favorite movies: “No matter where you go, there you are.”

And so I return to my original lesson: the profound resilience of the *neshama* – and how it invariably manages to take root even in the most unexpected of places. This is, in the end, a profoundly Jewish lesson. Though we Jews tend to have chronic angst about the prospects of our survival, we would do well to remind ourselves that our spirit is often much deeper and stronger than we realize. We would do well to remind ourselves that despite the myriad of challenges we have faced from time immemorial, we continue to affirm “*Am Yisrael Chai*” – the People Israel yet live.

Publications (cont.)

(Continued from page 11)

← **Alexandra Alter's** “Secret Jews of the Spanish Inquisition,” published in the *Herald* on August 6, discusses families assisted by George Albo, an activist with *Los Caminos de Israel*, an outreach organization in Miami that seeks to return Spanish-speaking Jews to their roots, partly through broadcasts on Jewish World Radio.

← “Family Meets Zimbabwe’s Lemba,” by **Debbie Levison**, appeared in the July 15 *Jewish Ledger*. It reports on a Connecticut family’s visit to a grandmother in Zimbabwe and included a visit with more distant Jewish cousins, the Lemba.

← **Ana Kurland's** “T’Shuva – A Story of Renewal and Return to Judaism,” was published in the summer 2005 issue of *Na’amat Woman*. As told to **Judy Priven**, the story discusses Kurland, a descendant of *Conversos* during the Inquisition, who “found herself” at a Jewish friend’s seder and went on to trace her family history and to encourage other descendants of *Anousim* to learn and return.

← **Dr. Steven Schram's** article, “Tefillin: An Ancient Acupuncture Point Prescription for Mental Clarity,” appeared in the October 2002 *Journal of Chinese Medicine*. After a detailed analysis, the author concluded, “Regardless of the belief system, it seems clear that putting on tefillin is a unique way of stimulating a very precise set of acupuncture points that appears designed to clear the mind and harmonise the spirit.” Although not current, the article can be found at <http://biurchametz.blogspot.com/2005/03/tefillin-mitzvah-and-acupuncture.html>.

From Falasha To Freedom (cont.)

(Continued from page 6)

not to be detected, and rested on the Sabbath. Along the route, they sought out Jews to act as guides. (One of these guides “set his eye and heart” on Berehti, Shmuel’s mother’s youngest sister whom the guide, Bahreh, later married in Israel). A dry lake upon which their guide had relied for water almost caused a disastrous end to their mission. But their little group--which in the meantime teamed up with another group of Jews making the same journey--reached the Sudan, where Feredeh made contact with them. From the border, they traveled to Khartoum as Christians. From Khartoum they were flown to Athens and then to Israel.

At Ben Gurion Airport, Shmuel saw only white people. He remembers being puzzled because he never knew that white people could be Jews.

At the beginning, experience with immigrant absorption was very painful. From the airport, they were taken to trailer homes in Ofakim. Local children shouted racial slurs. There was stone throwing and fights. He and other Ethiopian children were placed in religious schools where for the first time he wore a *kippah*. (Only Moslems in Ethiopia wore a head covering). In 1982, after two years in the Ofakim trailer park, his family acquired permanent accommodations in Beer-Sheva.

Despite this difficult beginning in Israel, Shmuel’s story is one of success, due in large part to his intelligence, perseverance, courage and devotion to his new country.

In 1987, he completed basic schooling with a full matriculation certificate (*Bagrut*). He received high grades in math and science and a maximum grade in *gemara*. After induction into the army, he volunteered for Israel’s elite Paratroop Regiment, where he became the second Ethiopian to win an officer’s epaulet. In recognition of his exemplary service, he won the Commander-in-Chief’s prize, which was presented to him by the Chief of Staff, Gen. Ehud Barak, in 1991. After leaving the army he received an MA degree in Educational Administration from Ben Gurion University and now leads a project to help Ethiopians and other new immigrants adjust to Israeli life. Yilma is married to Bella and has three children, Eiden, Shai and Ben. The family lives in Beer-Sheva.

The book continues with the first-hand histories of other Ethiopian Jews, their journeys to and their lives in

Israel. All came from villages totally isolated from world Jewry. All were surprised to see white Jews. All faced discrimination and hardship. All sought to integrate into Israeli society, and in order to do so they made an effort to perform “better than the locals.” Some expressed regret for the loss of status and authority of the *Kessot* (priests) and elders who found integration difficult. One of these writers noted that already in Ethiopia the younger men, like Meniher Feredeh, had seized the initiative from the *Kissim* and elders and asserted leadership.

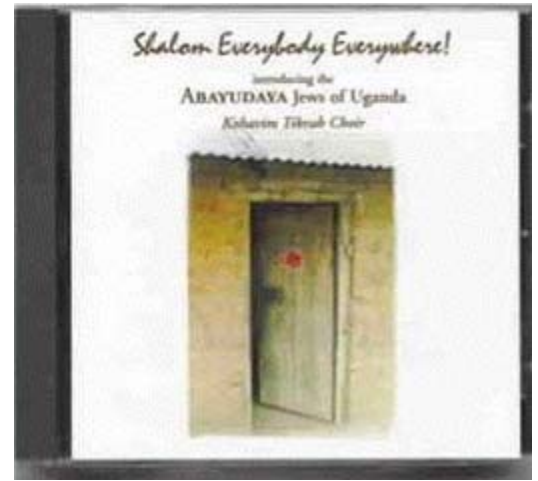
At this point, I wish to digress from the book and present a somewhat different picture of the Ethiopian experience in Israel. In an exceptional Israeli film, *Caravan 841*, a young Ethiopian boy, Moshe, about age 11 or 12, lives in the trailer camp from which the film takes its name. He longs for his mother, who is in Ethiopia, to join him in Israel. Two ways of life battle for his soul -- a religious life taught by a rabbi who has a deep affection for him, and a life free of rules and restrictions shown him by an American black musician living in Israel. While this contest is underway, Moshe learns that his mother will not be joining him because she is not considered a Jew by the Israeli authorities. The film ends before the conflict is played out. Nevertheless, it would be possible to surmise that Moshe will not excel in school, will not join the paratroops, will not go to college, and may even become involved with crime and drugs. The life of the Ethiopian immigrants to Israel is difficult and confusing even in good circumstances; in those which Moshe must navigate they may be overwhelming.

Yilma’s book ends with a return visit to Ethiopia in 1994. Shmuel’s home village of Adi-Worewa is now populated totally by Christians; only one Jewish family is living in a nearby village. Yilma’s birth home is so small that he cannot comprehend how it housed nine people. The synagogue is now a dwelling house for a Christian family, and all evidence that it was once a Jewish place of worship is gone. At first the town’s people were hostile, believing that Jews had returned to reclaim their homes, their land, their animals, and the wealth they had left behind. Then, slowly, they reminisce and embrace.

From Falasha To Freedom is a story that will excite a Jewish mind and warm a Jewish heart.



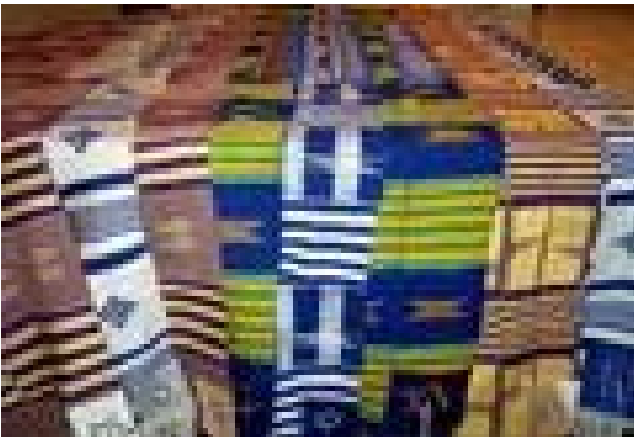
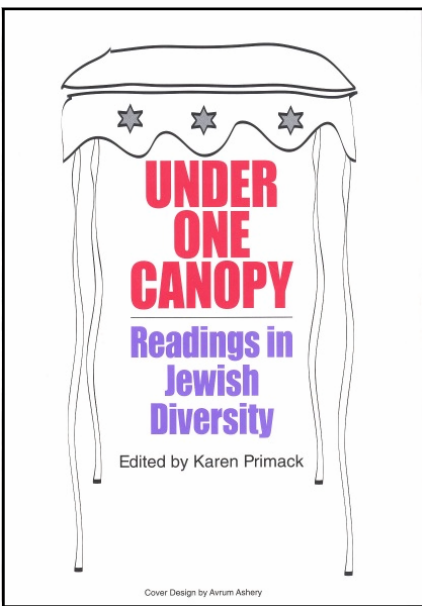
Map courtesy of NACOEJ.com



Chanukah begins at sundown on December 25. Here are some gift ideas from the Kulanu Boutique:

- Aish Chai lapel pins*
- Books*
- CDs*
- Challah Covers*
- Kippot*
- Tallitot*

All proceeds help Kulanu and the communities we serve. See page 15 for the order form or go to <www.kulanuboutique.com>



The Kulanu Boutique

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

Aish Chai Lapel Pin, sterling silver and gold plate. *Proceeds benefit descendants of Anousim.*

Under One Canopy: Readings in Jewish Diversity, a 162-page book of poems, essays, stories, and songs by Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, African, and Asian Jews. *Proceeds benefit Kulanu.*

Jews in Places You Never Thought Of, a 305-page hardback which includes descriptions of personal interactions with returning and emerging Jewish groups around the world; over 30 photographs. *Proceeds benefit Kulanu.*

Shalom Everybody Everywhere! acclaimed recording of the unique sounds of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda. Hear traditional Jewish liturgy and new compositions set to African melodies and rhythms, in English, Hebrew, Luganda, and Swahili. *Proceeds benefit Abayudaya.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

Make Joy Not War, Alula Tzadik's CD of Ethiopian and traditional Jewish songs with a World Beat. *Proceeds benefit Kulanu.*

Kente Cloth Ghanaian Tallitot, strip-woven by hand with embroidery. *Proceeds benefit the Jews of Sefwi Wiawso and Kulanu*

NAME _____ Tel # _____

ADDRESS _____

Email address, PLEASE _____

	Number	Cost Each	Shipping/handling	Total
<i>Aish Chai Lapel Pin</i>	_____	\$30.00	\$4 in US & Can. (\$2 each additional)	_____
<i>Under One Canopy: Readings in Jewish Diversity</i>	_____	\$15.00	\$4 in US & Can. (\$2 each additional)	_____
<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 SPECIAL SALE!!	_____	7.00		_____
<i>Hand-crocheted Kippot of the Abayudaya:</i> pillbox-shape various colors (sorry, no returns!)	_____	15.00	\$4 (ea. addl. \$1)	_____
NEW <i>Kente Cloth Ghanaian Tallit</i>	_____	\$180.00	\$5.00	_____
<i>Challah Covers from Ghana.</i> (for 12, \$25 each and \$15 shipping)	_____	30.00	\$4 (ea. addl. \$2)	_____
<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>Abayudaya: The Jews of Uganda (List price \$75)</i>	_____	52.50	\$7 in US and Canada (\$3 each additional)	_____
<i>Make Joy Not War CD</i>	_____	\$15.00	\$3 in US, \$4 in CA \$2 each additional	_____

Please add an additional \$15.00 shipping charge per order for international orders. _____

GRAND TOTAL _____

Make checks payable to "KULANU" — mail to Kulanu Boutique, 1834 Whitehall St., Allentown, PA 18104.
Please allow four weeks for delivery.

The Abayudaya Jews of Uganda and Shoebill Safaris Present:
Jewish Life in Uganda Mitzvah Tour & Wildlife Safari

Jan. 9—23, 2006

\$2550 (plus airfare)

15 days/14 nights

Limited flights: Book Early
For more details contact:
laura@laurawetzler.com
(413-634-5614)
www.shoebillsafaris.com
Tours@shoebillsafaris.com
Wholesale airfares: Michelle at
Travel Loft
888-843-5638 or your travel agent



- 14 nights in friendly hotels & safari lodges
- Hearty meals, air conditioned van
- Professionally guided, small group tour
- Inspiring visits to African Jewish families
- African Jewish music and dance festival
- Free time to volunteer your skills
- Fantastic national park safari adventure; sightings can include hippos, elephants, lions, giraffes, leopards, monkeys, Nile crocodiles, over 500 species of birds
- Riverboat cruise at Murchison Falls
- Mt. Elgon Volcano National Park
- Colorful African markets

Make a personal connection with our friends in this remarkable African Jewish community!
Your guide fees help support the Abayudaya. Bring your family and have a great time!
Just joining the tour is a *mitzvah*!

SUPPORTER APPLICATION

I/WE WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A SUPPORTER OF KULANU (MAIL TO KULANU, C/O BOGRAD, 165 WEST END AVE., 3R, NEW YORK, NY 10023)

NAME _____ DATE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE(S): () _____ EMAIL _____

INTERESTS AND AFFILIATIONS USEFUL TO KULANU'S WORK _____

\$25 SUPPORTER \$36 SPONSOR \$100 PATRON \$200 BENEFACTOR \$1000 LIFETIME SUPPORTER

Deadline for next issue: January 15, 2006

Recycled Paper

Edited by Karen Primack

Kulanu

Helping Lost Jewish Communities
c/o Harriet Bograd
165 West End Ave, 3R
New York, NY 10023

Nonprofit Org.
US Postage Paid
Suburban MD
Permit No. 05107

Address Service
Requested