



A Spring Break Mitzvah with the Huánuco Jewish Community

By Rabbi Peter Tarlow

(In September 2007, Rabbi Peter Tarlow, director of Texas A&M University Hillel, received an early morning call asking him if he would be willing to help people convert and establish a Jewish community in Peru. Because Tarlow is fluent in Spanish and has worked with Jewish communities around South America, he agreed to a site visit in December which if successful would become a Hillel adventure in March. The site visit proved to be a success; it was clear that all medical and security precautions were in place, and that the visit would be of great benefit to both the local Jewish community and to the Hillel students. In March of 2008, Rabbi Tarlow took five of his Hillel students, three men and two women, to Huánuco to help establish this community.)

Three separate groups of people compose the nascent Jewish community of Huánuco, Peru. Some of its members are descended from Jews who came to the Peruvian highlands in the mid-19th century illegally. (The government did not permit Jews to

live in these parts of Peru in the 19th century and registered all births as Catholics.) Due to their small numbers and pressure from the government, the general population soon absorbed these people and the 19th century community ceased to function.



US students with conversion candidates

Descendants from the Inquisition compose the second group. These people, like all Crypto-Jews, maintained some form of emotional ties to Judaism, but often knew little of their ancestral faith. People who had become disillusioned with their former faith and had discovered the joys of being Jewish comprise the third group. All three groups came together and sought a way to reestablish a Liberal Jewish community and to reenter Jewish life as “reformatives” Jews.

The Aggies Arrive

After my December visit, I asked students if they would accompany me to Peru. To avoid any bureaucratic problems the students and I decided to self-finance the journey through personal contributions and

(Continued on page 12)

RABBI GERSHOM SIZOMU

An Historic Evening

By Rabbi Scott Glass

(Rabbi Scott Glass, who had participated in the Beit Din in Uganda in 2002, had this to say to his congregation when he returned home to Ithaca, NY, from the ordination.)

Ordination, in general, is a moving occasion. Especially for a rabbi, to witness such a ceremony and, in ways to re-live one's own, is very emotional, very meaningful. But to witness what amounted to the formal recognition of a community, to see almost a century of striving and struggle, oppression and persecution, ridicule and denial end in that one moment was glorious. To see history being made was wonderful. And to see the various threads that make up this beautiful tapestry that is the story of the last 15 years' journey come together was amazing.

There were very few people at the pre-ordination dinner whom I knew. Among them were Aaron Kintu Moses and JJ Keki, who had come in from Uganda for the occasion. Of course, there was also Gershom's immediate family--his wife Tzipporah, his son Igaal, his daughters Dafna and Naavah. They told me how much it meant to them that I was there. Could they possibly know how much it meant to me?

But as I said, there were all of these other strands coming together--so many people who had a hand in the discovery, recognition and development of the Abayudaya, many of whom had never met one another. My colleague, Howard Gorin, who organized the first Beit

(Continued on page 9)

An Event To Remember

By Harriet Bograd

(On May 19, 2008, the first black African rabbi graduated from an American seminary. Gershom Sizomu, spiritual leader of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda for decades, was ordained a Conservative rabbi by the American Jewish University's Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies. The author attended the ceremony.)

Gershom confided to me that the moment Rabbi Richard P. Camas recommended him for ordination, and the moment that the rabbinic Beit Din took out the Torahs and blessed the new rabbis were really spiritual moments to him.

Gershom's proud wife, Tzipporah, was so elated when she saw the hundreds of people standing up and cheering for him, she said she lost herself and was blowing kisses to people all over the sanctuary (at Temple Sinai). But Gershom said he didn't see any of this because his eyes were closed and he felt like he was seeing heaven.

Matt Meyer, who first “discovered” the Abayudaya in the early 1990s and brought them to world attention, felt that Gershom was already a rabbi before he ever came to the U.S. But Gershom was very moved that this ordination was a ceremony that had been used since the times of the Talmud, and this connected him to all these generations. And the certificate he received said he was a “rabbi and teacher in Israel.” I commented that before, he was a rabbi in Uganda, but now he is a rabbi for the whole world.

(Continued on page 8)

Kulanu and Hospitality

By Harriet Bograd

This is an amazing time for me. I am so honored to have been chosen to serve Kulanu as your new president. And, while I am very grateful for all of the hard work for so many years done by my predecessor, Kulanu's President Emeritus Jack Zeller, I am truly humbled by the size of the shoes he has left me to fill.

I was sitting at services recently for Parashat Balak and was struck by the last prophecy of Balaam, from which we get the song *Mah Tov*. Balaam's words, "How goodly are your tents, O Jacob, your dwelling places, O Israel," reminded me of the ancient Jewish value of hospitality. How appropriate that value is for Kulanu.

One strong characteristic of the members of the Kulanu community is our commitment to welcoming visitors. With Kulanu's help, we in North America, and you on other continents, welcome visitors from all over the world—travelers hoping to experience Judaism far from home; Jews from large American cities and from small African communities; individuals eager to learn more about the Judaism that an ancestor may have been forced to leave; and volunteers eager to teach and learn in communities distant from their homes.

In the months to come, one of my goals as president is to increase the ways in which we can welcome each of you into active participation in the work of Kulanu. Expect to hear more about this in the next issue of this newsletter but, in the meantime, I would love to hear from you with ideas of how you would like to get involved. Please email me at harriet@kulanu.org.



Dr. Jack Zeller
(photo by A. Primack)



Harriet Bograd
(photo by Viviane Topp)

Calling All Supporters:

Have you donated in the last year?

Kulanu is a very small organization with very big dreams and we rely on our community—the "all of us" referred to in our name—to fund our activities.

We at Kulanu hope you enjoy receiving this quarterly newsletter and reading all the latest news and fascinating stories about our organization's work partnering with Jewish communities and Jews around the world – we certainly love sharing it with you!

Every three months, we mail nearly 2,000 newsletters, with copies going to our supporters, friends, and the communities we work with. Many of those newsletters are going to individuals who may have supported us in the past but have not made a contribution in recent years. Rising postage and other costs have forced a difficult decision on us—to limit our distribution list to current and lifetime supporters. Our overseas partner communities will continue to receive copies of the newsletters without the need to donate.

Your mailing label on this issue of our newsletter includes the date of the last gift we received from you. We hope that if that date is more than a year ago, you will consider making a generous gift at this time.

Jack Zeller is President Emeritus of Kulanu; Harriet Bograd Is New President

Dr. Jack Zeller, who founded Kulanu 14 years ago and has been its President ever since, stepped down from the position in June. The organization has grown during his remarkable tenure to include activity in over 20 lost, dispersed, or marginalized Jewish communities around the globe. He will continue on the Board as President Emeritus and will write a regular column in this newsletter, starting in the next issue.

Zeller, a graduate of Columbia University School of Medicine, worked as a pathologist at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Washington, DC, until his retirement several years ago. He has contributed his time and resources enormously over the decades, particularly in the cause of Ethiopian Jewry. He was co-founder of the former Washington Association of Ethiopian Jews and a past president of the American Association for Ethiopian Jewry.

It was this interest that propelled him to form Kulanu (originally Amishav USA, a counterpart of the Israeli organization Amishav—"my people return" -- founded by Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail). In its early years, the organization concentrated on the Bnei Menashe of Northeastern India and Anousim. As the organization widened its mission to include many more dispersed Jewish communities, it distanced itself from the original Israeli model and became Kulanu.

British anthropologist Tudor Parfitt has written: "One of the most vigorous of contemporary organizations working with marginal Jewish groups throughout the world is the American-based Kulanu." Under Zeller's tenure, the organization has truly thrived! Perhaps his philosophy is best summed up in this paragraph he wrote for the first Kulanu book:

Much of Jewish living has occurred in the Diaspora...Never before in Jewish history has it been easier to meet remote and virtually ignored or newly developing Jewish communities. We can do it by phone, fax, e-mail, and best of all, an in-person handshake. Many of us have done some or all of these. You shouldn't miss out!

The new President is Harriet Bograd, who has served as Treasurer for the past six years, has enhanced the organization's online profile, and has contributed her legal expertise in nonprofit ethics. She has served as Kulanu's coordinator for Ghana (helping develop their popular challah cover and kente cloth tallit business) and works closely with Laura Wetzler on the organization's projects in Uganda. The two part-time staff of Kulanu work under Bograd's supervision from her home office. She will also continue as Treasurer with the assistance of an accountant volunteer and a finance committee.

Bograd received her law degree from Yale Law School and a bachelor's degree in political science from Bryn Mawr College. Her professional experience has been largely in the nonprofit world and included teaching a curriculum in social problems and legal rights while serving as attorney for the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Health Center, Bronx, NY; as Project Director for the Children's Circle Planning Corporation in the Bronx, creating a comprehensive day care and child development center; helping create a Community Health Advocacy Department for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Health Center; and serving as Staff Attorney for New York Lawyers for the Public Interest.

Her volunteer responsibilities are equally impressive and include helping to found and serving as trustee for more than a decade of The Abraham Joshua Heschel School, an innovative, liberal Jewish day school in NYC; serving on the School Leadership Team and running a computer recycling program for the Crossroads School, NYC; serving as membership chair for five years, computer coordinator and trustee of her synagogue; and managing a listserv and web site on Nonprofit Cyber-Accountability.

Bograd is married to Ken Klein, also a Yale Law graduate, who is a tax attorney. They have two daughters—Margie Klein, a rabbinical student at Hebrew College in Boston who co-edited *Righteous Indignation: A Jewish Call for Justice*, published last November, and Sarah Klein, a talented photographer and scuba enthusiast who is studying multimedia design at Bond University in Australia.

Abayudaya Update

By Laura Wetzler

Part I

I am happy to report on my recent trip as Kulanu Coordinator for Uganda.

Kulanu-Abayudaya Eco-Tourism Success

“The Jewish Life in Uganda Wildlife Safari and Mitzvah Tour,” a Kulanu-Abayudaya eco-tourism economic development project, is now in its sixth year providing tourism training and vital employment.

The annual Abayudaya Music & Dance Festival performances, exclusive to the tour, were the best ever. This project serves an important cultural function as it brings performing groups from each of the Abayudaya villages in a 70 mile radius (a rare occasion due to transport costs), to share dance, songs, and stories together. It also raises substantial funds for the community.

On safari, we spotted many giraffes, hippos, Nile crocs and elephants and we had a delightful and thrilling encounter with a lion and her three cubs from the safety of the open-topped safari vehicle.

Custom tours can be arranged and I hope you will consider a Jewish heritage trip to visit the Abayudaya with your family or synagogue. Or join us on our next annual mitzvah tour in January 2009.

Wonderful Abayudaya Leaders

Mazal tov to Rabbi Gershom for being ordained by the Conservative Movement. What a great accomplishment and a dream come true. As usual, Abayudaya leaders Chairman Israel Siriri, Rabbi Gershom Sizomu, Headmaster Aaron Kintu Moses, master farmers JJ Keki and Ruth Nabaigwa, Women’s Association Chair Naume Sabano, Abayudaya Medical Officer Samson Wamani, Youth Counselor Rebecca Nantabo, SKHS Headmaster Seth Yonadav, and others are doing an outstanding job working for progress in their community.

I feel very privileged to be a Kulanu volunteer working with these amazing leaders. We do an average of three meetings a day together during my annual 4-5-week trip, consulting, and doing monitoring and evaluation of Kulanu Abayudaya projects. I met with the Abayudaya Executive Committee, the education board, farmers, the micro-finance, tourism, craft, public health and youth committees, women’s association, embassy and city officials, Ugandan business leaders, and more. We do lots of strategic planning, brainstorming, and troubleshooting together.

Building and Sustaining Two “Peace Schools”

Hadassah Primary School has had several major accomplishments this year. The first graduating seventh grade class to go through their entire primary education at the school took their national exams and passed well into high school. Mazal tov to Headmaster Aaron Kintu Moses, the teachers, and all the children and families! Not bad for a school that started seven years ago with one teacher and no money, under a tree! Thanks to the Estelle Friedman Gervis Family Foundation, a brand new dormitory has been completed at Hadassah Primary School to house the children from remote villages attending the only Shabbat-observant primary school in Uganda. Also completed is a new small primary school kitchen with sinks and running water (!), ventilated wood stove, and storage closet, thanks, again, to the enormous generosity of Estelle Friedman Gervis Family Foundation. This Foundation also funds our Child Hunger Program feeding 600 Jewish, Muslim and Christian children a day at both schools, our unique “Train the Trainer Public Health Education Program” out in the villages, and other school assistance. We cannot thank Barbara Gervis Lubran enough for these wonderful mitzvot.

Hadassah Primary School is not complete yet. To complete the

building of this school the children need several more classrooms, one more dorm, a library room, and a small dining enclosure so the kids do not have to eat in the rain.

For both the Hadassah Primary School and Semei Kakungulu High School, ongoing operating support is just as important as the buildings to enable the Abayudaya to pay the dedicated young teaching staff and buy books. As of now, government schools are paying higher salaries than Abayudaya can afford. Their schools are losing good staff. We need a volunteer to lead a capital campaign and help secure an endowment to ensure success into the future. We are working on strategic planning, possibly including a business that will help subsidize the meager tuitions paid by the economically impoverished families of our students, but we need your help now. Please consider making a commitment to adopt these special schools that serve African Jewish, Muslim, and Christian children studying together in peace.

USAID Grant to Kulanu- Abayudaya Coffee Project

I was most excited to see our years of effort at the US Embassy come to fruition with a \$32,000 grant from USAID to the Peace Kawomera Coffee Cooperative for construction of a small coffee pulping station. Pulping is one of several steps in coffee processing, washing the red pulpy fruit called the “cherry” from the parchment-covered “beans” which must be further dried and processed. The grant also

includes extensive organic training to help increase crop productivity and quality control.

In addition, the farmer development rebate from the retail sale of each bag from the Thanksgiving Coffee Company provided the funds that allowed the farmers to buy their first piece of cooperative land, upon which the pulping station was built. Thank you, Thanksgiving Coffee! It was great working with JJ Keki and USAID trainer Mark Woods and co-op farmers in many days of budget meetings and field assessments. In addition, I led a tour with Aaron Kintu Moses, Seth Jonadav, and Israel Siriri for the director of USAID operations in Uganda, Margot Ellis, at her request, sharing the progress of the two Abayudaya schools and 20 Kulanu-Abayudaya projects. I

also worked with JJ and cooperative coffee farmers on long-range planning.

In other coffee news, thanks to Rabbi Jeff Summit and Tufts University for honoring our ongoing interfaith coffee project with the Jean Mayer Global Citizens Award. It was wonderful to share this honor at the ceremony with co-creator JJ Keki and Delicious Peace Coffee Cooperative members visiting from Uganda, and our angels Paul and Joan Katzeff, Ben Corey Moran, and Holly Moskowitz of Thanksgiving Coffee. Please place your order at www.mirembekawomera.com for this fair trade, kosher, organic coffee now! Even better, form your own buying club and help us get it served in the synagogues, churches, and mosques in your area.

Anti-Poverty Agriculture Projects

In further farmer developments, we have been working on new poverty-fighting projects that will help those Abayudaya farmers living in the low lands of Busoga, 70 miles from Mbale, who cannot grow arabica coffee for our coffee project. Namutumba village is five miles off the main road and is the home to the most economically disadvantaged members of the Jewish community. We began with water catchment tanks, adult literacy projects, farmer development workshops, and highly successful pilot micro-finance small-business loan projects (that are sorely in need of additional funding.) This year we did several field trips and a workshop on the concept of “value adding” (fresh to dried fruit, fresh fruit to jam, peanuts to peanut butter, etc.) and sanitary food processing. We also toured professional processing

(Continued on page 11)



Hadassah students enjoying lunch

KULANU BRIEFS

New Board Members

Two new members have been added to Kulanu's Board – **Jacob Steinberg** and **Sonia Rosen**.

Steinberg, of Ontario, Canada, is a financial consultant and engineer who speaks several languages, including Hebrew and Dutch, and has been actively involved with the Jewish community of Suriname.

Rosen, an attorney with a background in international human rights, is active in organizing events for the Jewish Multiracial Network and the Sixth and I Historic Synagogue in Washington, DC. She has a particular interest in Guatemala, the birth country of her adopted son.

Other Board members remain the same: Harriet Bograd (President/Treasurer), Jack Zeller (President Emeritus), Aron Primack (Vice President), Karen Primack (Secretary), Andria Spindel, Barbara Vinick, and Rabbi Steve Leon.



Sonia Rosen

Multicultural Rosh Hashanah in DC

A Multicultural Rosh Hashanah morning service will be held at DC's Sixth & I Historic Synagogue on September 30 at 11am. The service will be lay-led, with a nondenominational liturgy compiled by Sabrina Sojourner. Sonia Rosen, who initiated this event, is seeking musicians, singers, and cantors to help lead. She plans to include as many people as possible in the service, including post bar/bat mitzvah youth to read Torah and Haftarah. Informal tutoring and rehearsals will begin on September 3. For information, contact Sonia at soniarosen@rcn.com.

While the service is free, there is a \$6 administrative fee for tickets which can be reserved on-line at: <http://www.sixthandi.org/HighHolidays.htm>.

A Jewish Tour of China

In 2002, Shi Lei studied in a one-year Jewish Studies Program in Bar-Ilan University, and then spent two years studying at a yeshiva in Jerusalem. The descendant of Kaifeng Jews returned to China and became a travel agent and national tour guide in 2004. In addition, he has been on lecture tours -- in Israel in 2005 and in the US in 2008 -- speaking about the Kaifeng Jewish Community of China.

Now Shi Lei's travel agency is organizing a 13-day Jewish tour of Beijing, Kaifeng, Xi'an, Shanghai, and Suzhou. He says the tour can start as soon as 10 people have signed up. The tour features all meals, all five-star hotels, and tours to the main sights of these cities, as well as the Jewish sites. Also included are perks such as the Peking Opera, a dance performance, a boat ride, and an acrobatics troupe. The cost is \$2963 per personal, double occupancy, including internal flights but not international flights. For more information and an itinerary, contact Shi Lei of China Comfort Travel Company, Kaifeng Branch, at qshilei68@yahoo.com.

Toronto's Jewish Mosaic Festival

Toronto's biennial Jewish Mosaic Festival took place on June 1 and included displays prepared by local Jews from over 30 countries. The Jewish Diversity and Inclusion Committee of Congregation Darchei Noam, with support from Kulanu, had a resource room at the festival displaying information, artifacts/crafts, videos, and slides on emerging and re-emerging Jewish communities.

Introducing ITIM.org

ITIM: The Jewish Life Information Center is an independent,

nonprofit organization dedicated to making Jewish life accessible to all. Its website, at www.itim.org, includes explanations of life-cycle events and rituals as well as a section on Conversion in Israel.

A Torah for Calabria

Rabbi Barbara Aiello has announced that, thanks to the dedication and generosity of Connie and David First of the Torah Museum and Torah Rescue Project, Synagogue Ner Tamid del Sud (The Eternal Light of the South) in Calabria, Italy, has been blessed with a very old and rare Torah scroll. According to David First, "This large, light-weight Torah is about 300 years old, of Ashkenazi style but full of special Sephardic-based Kabbalistic letters, most likely from the Northern Italian regions, and is extremely special. There are only a few of these surviving in the world today. It is a true collectors' antique Torah."

Romaniote Virtual Bookstore

The Romaniote congregation in New York City, Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum, maintains a virtual bookstore with a fascinating variety of books, videos, and CDs pertaining to Greek Jewry. Go to www.kkjsm.org and click on "Booklist."

Sheba Ethiopian Jewish Film Festival

The 5th Annual Sheba Film Festival took place on June 15 at the Manhattan JCC by celebrating the lives of Ethiopian Jews in Ethiopia and Israel through film. The films represented a diverse cross-spectrum of Jewish and Ethiopian life. The festival began with *Caravan 841*, directed by Zion Rubin, about Moshe, an 11 year-old Ethiopian boy who lives in the "Atidim" caravan site in the Western Galilee while he awaits the arrival of his mother from Ethiopia.

A Walk to Beautiful, directed by Mary Olive Smith, tells the stories of five Ethiopian women who suffer from devastating childbirth injuries and embark on a journey to reclaim their lost dignity. The film is a recipient of the Audience Award for Best Documentary at the San Francisco International Film Festival in 2007.

To conclude the evening, director Radu Mihaileanu showcased *Live and Become*, which celebrated its New York premiere in February 2008. The film is an epic story of an Ethiopian boy, Shlomo, who is airlifted from a Sudanese refugee camp to Israel in 1984 during Operation Moses. Shlomo is plagued by two big secrets: he is neither a Jew nor an orphan. Q&A with survivors of similar journeys followed.

New Media Award in Jewish Diversity

Robin Washington, the editorial page editor of Minnesota's *Duluth News Tribune* and a television producer and National Public Radio commentator, is the first recipient of the Be'chol Lashon Media Award established to honor excellence in coverage of the ethnic and racial diversity of world Jewry. The purpose is to give recognition to journalists and others covering the wide diversity of Jewish ethnicity.

The award was presented in San Francisco at the annual Be'chol Lashon International Think Tank, where Washington was cited in the award for "his journalistic excellence and passion in bringing the stories of Jews of color to mainstream American print and broadcast media over his thirty-year career."

Speakers Spread the Word

August 1-3, at the 5th Annual Sephardic Anousim Conference in El Paso, Texas, scheduled featured speakers were to be **Rabbi Nissan Ben-Avraham**, who was born in Majorca as a Catholic and now lives in Israel, **Andree Aelion Brooks**, author of *The Life and Time of Dona Gracia Nassi*, **Moshe Ortero**, a rabbinic student and former Christian

KULANU BRIEFS

minister, **Vanessa Paloma** on Sephardic music and traditions from Morocco, and Kulanu's **Jack Zeller** on Bringing Back the Lost Tribes.

On July 22, the Society for the Advancement of Judaism in NYC and the American Jewish Committee/ACCESS hosted a community conversation on Jewish identity. The evening featured excerpts from the film *We are All One: The Jews of Sefwi Wiawso* (2006) about Jews in Ghana whose ancestors have kept Judaic traditions and beliefs alive through practice, language, song, and law. The event also included **Adam McKinney** and **Dr. Daniel Banks** leading a dialogue on Jewish identity, global Judaism, and belonging. The two are co-founders of DNAworks, dedicated to furthering artistic expression and dialogue in the areas of identity, culture, class and heritage.

A four-part series about Jewish life in communities around the world was sponsored by Washington DC's Jewish Study Center in May. It included separate sessions on "The Baghdadi Jews of India" with **Ruth Cernea**, "The Jews of Morocco and Their Future at Home and Abroad" with **Chris Silver**, "Ethiopian Immigration and Absorption to Israel" with **Adam Angel**, and "The Jewish Experience in China" with **Jesse Karotkin**.

Guest speaker at the Jewish Multiracial Network's annual Retreat was **Dexter Jeffries**, author of *Triple Exposure—Black, Jewish and "Red" in the 1950's*. The retreat, which also featured artist-in-residence **Maya Escobar**, was held June 6-8 at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in Falls Village, Connecticut.

A May 23-24 Shabbaton at Bat-Tzion Hebrew Learning Center featured **Rabbi Yitzchak "Jimmy" Schwartz**. The Center is located in Ruidoso, New Mexico.

Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos, director of the Kehila Kedosha Janina Museum in NY, spoke about Greek Jewish history through the Holocaust, and the current status of the Greek Jewish community at an event titled "The Song of Life: A Unique Story of a Courageous Greek Community." The event, held June 24 at Ohr Kodesh in Chevy Chase, Maryland, included a viewing of the 65-minute film "The Song of Life" (*To Tragoudi tis Zois*). The film tells the moving story of the Jewish community on the island of Zakynthos (Zante), which was unique in Greece in that it did not lose a single member to the Nazis during the Holocaust, thanks to the defiance of Bishop Chrysostomos Demetriou, Mayor Loucas Karrer, and the Christian population of the island. The evening closed with a dinner and film discussion.

Marion Kaplan, Skirball Professor of Modern Jewish History at NYU, told the little-known but remarkable story of a small group of Jews fleeing from Nazi persecution who found a welcoming haven in the Dominican Republic. Author of *Dominican Haven: The Jewish Refugee Settlement in Sosua, 1940-1945*, Kaplan discussed Dominican motivations, the role of American Jewish philanthropies, the helpfulness of Dominican laborers and neighbors, the U.S. attitude towards this project, and the refugees' struggles and successes. The program was held at the Manhattan JCC on June 4.

Dr. Ephraim Isaac and **Dr. Yohannes Zeleke** led a panel discussion on "Ethiopia and Religion: Ethiopia and the Three Faiths of the Book" on June 22. The site was the Shonburg Center for Research in Black Culture at the NY Public Library in Harlem.

Madagascar Contact

Kudos to Rabbi Leo Abrami, who answered Kulanu's call and is communicating with Hery Raherimasoandro in Madagascar. The rabbi has sent French siddurim and offered to conduct regular teaching and discussion sessions on Skype if the group is interested.

Itunes Response

Late last year, Steven Corn offered to sell tracks from a Kulanu-

produced CD of Abayudaya music ("Shalom Everybody Everywhere!") on Itunes, donating the services of his company, BFM Digital. The response for the first quarter of 2008 was interesting: Of the 23 transactions, one came from Canada, three from Germany, three from Ireland, one from Japan, and the rest from the U.S. Word is getting around!



Mazal Tov!

Barbara Shair received a Community Service Award at the Center for Jewish Education for the work she does with converts at Be-comingajew.org and for establishing the Gerstein Scholarship Fund, which provides financial aid for those unable to pay for courses offered through the Melton Program. She mentioned her work with Kulanu in her acceptance speech.

Rachel Namudosi Keki graduated in May with a degree in Education from Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. She will teach at Hadassah Primary School and work as the Abayudaya Volunteer Coordinator, helping with the placement of volunteers to assure that they have a meaningful experience. To volunteer, contact Rachel at abayudayacommunity@gmail.com.



Rachel Namudosi

Condolences

To Rabbi Peter Tarlow on the passing of his father, **Irving Tarlow**, in July.

Todah Rabah to These Contributors!

\$1,000 to \$4,999

Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Inc., Temple Beth-El, Temple Emanu-El, Tenet Healthcare Foundation, Paul Trenk, Jack and Diane Zeller

\$500 to \$999 Herman Y. Efron, Jack and Pauline Freeman

Foundation, The Rabbinical Assembly Retired Rabbis Association, Mary L. Ramberg

\$101 to \$499 Harriet Bograd and Ken Klein, Stuart and Charna

Cohn, Sigma Coran, Lynne Elson, Sharon and Scott Glass, John Humleker, Lenore and Morris Levin, Shomrei Torah Synagogue, Jonathan Sills, Temple Beth-El

The \$100 Club Elaine B. Brichta, Hedy Cohen, Jay Davidson,

East End Temple Rabbi Discretionary Fund, Rachel C. Efron, Mehran H. Farahmandpour, Hope and Matthew Feldman, Lorna Penelope Hopf, Hava Kohl-Riggs, Zev Nathan, Bernard Rich, Arnold and Leah Rotter, Roberta and Lee Schwartz, Sherman and Rita Shapiro, Peter and Betty Silverglate, Gilbert and Rosalinda Strange, Jack S. and Stephanie J. Ventura, Barbara H. Vinick, Daniel G. Wein

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, and conversion information if requested. This newsletter is published quarterly by Kulanu, 165 West End Ave., 3R, New York, NY 10023.

The Surprising Discovery of Suriname's Jewish Community

By Jacob Steinberg

(The author is a new member of Kulanu's Board)

When I mentioned to some friends that I was going to work for two weeks in Suriname, I realized that they knew very little about the place. One friend asked me: "When are you going to Africa?" My doctor asked me: "When are you going to this island in the Philippines?" So let me start with a short description of where Suriname is.

Suriname (where Dutch is the official language) is located on the northeastern coast of South America. Its northern border is the Atlantic Ocean. The west side is bordered by the People's Republic of Guyana (an ex-British colony where English is the formal language), and the east side is bordered by French Guyana (a French territory where French is the official language). Brazil (a Portuguese-speaking country) is at the southern border, which runs through the mountains and hilly savannas of the Amazon region. Some 80 percent of Suriname is covered with dense tropical rainforest.

Before I left my home in Canada, I thought that the highlight of my trip would most probably be my work, deep in the jungle. Really, how many finance people do you know going to their office in the Amazon basin? I expected to see anaconda snakes, jaguars, and monkeys, but definitely not the descendants of King David.

In Paramaribo

I arrived at the capital Paramaribo on a Sunday and before heading to the jungle I went for a walk in downtown (without a street map) to see the white wooden colonial buildings that in 2002 were placed on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

It was impressive, and so was the heat, 40C (104 F) and humidity. All of a sudden I saw two magnificent buildings, one next to the other. The first was the old Neve Shalom Synagogue and the second was the new Grand Mosque of Paramaribo. The synagogue was closed. I decided that upon my return to the city, I'd come back on Saturday for a visit, which I did.

Early that Saturday morning I walked down to the synagogue; I hoped to be there by 9 AM for the morning service. But Paramaribo is not Toronto. Because of the tropical climate in Suriname, the service started at 8 AM and by the time I arrived, the service was almost over. The 20 worshippers were a mix of Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews and included blacks (ancestors of the West African slaves who worked in the sugar plantations), a few of Indian descent (known locally as Hindustanis), and a few of mixed race. Not a typical crowd of a Toronto shul! After the Kiddush, I was invited to come back on Monday morning so I could take photos and meet with Lilly, the synagogue vice president. I can describe my first impression of the Synagogue in one word: amazing.

On Monday morning, Lilly Duym, a middle aged lady, was waiting for me. I quickly realized that I had met a very special person. Lilly runs the shul administration, is a tour guide, and takes care of all the Jewish assets in town (two synagogues and four cemeteries). Since the community does not have many financial resources, every six months Lilly and the Hindustani housekeeper paint the entire synagogue wooden exterior, a huge task. Her passion and pride in her community's special Jewish heritage is reflected in all that she does. Clearly, she is the *Neshama* (soul) of the community.

Lilly and her extended family are descendants of one of the oldest and most distinguished Jewish Sephardic families -- the Abarvanel (also known as Abarbanel). They trace their origin from the biblical King David. One of the most famous members of the clan was Don Isaac Abarvanel, the last and greatest leader of Spanish Jewry prior to the Expulsion from Spain in 1492. He was a statesman, philosopher, Torah commentator, and financier. After the Expulsion, the Abarvanel settled in Holland, England, Turkey, and Greece. Lilly's family immigrated to Suriname from Holland.

Jewish History

The first European explorer to set foot on the Surinamese shore was

the legendary Spanish Conquistador Alonso de Ojeda, in 1499. Spain did not start to explore Suriname until 1593, but they didn't settle there. In 1629, the first group of Jews settled in the old capital of Suriname, Torarica (Portuguese for "rich or splendid Torah"). Jews of Portuguese descent, they came from Holland, arriving through Brazil, and started to lay out a number of sugar plantations on the west bank of the Suriname River. In 1652 the English also established sugar and tobacco plantations in the same area and began to establish a British territory. The first synagogue was soon built.

A second group of Jews arrived and settled on the savannah. This area is nowadays known as the "Jodensavanne" (the Jewish savanna or Jerusalem on the River). A third group of Jews arrived in 1664 and, together with the Jews of Torarica, moved and joined the Jodensavanne. The British colonial government granted several important privileges to the Jewish community, including freedom of religion and permission to build their own synagogues and schools.

In order to expand their plantations, in 1667 the Dutch traded New Amsterdam (present-day New York City) for the English territory of Suriname. The Jodensavanne developed rapidly. The Portuguese Sephardic Jews' knowledge of planting turned the place into a flourishing agricultural community. The Jodensavanne became the pillar of the entire colony of Suriname. In 1685, a second synagogue was built; it was called Beracha Ve Shalom (Blessing and Peace). In 1694, the Jewish community consisted of about 570 people, who owned about 40 sugar plantations. The community continued to flourish and in the early 1700s, the Jews owned 115 of the 400 plantations in the country. The Jodensavanne graveyard, with its marble gravestones imported from Europe, was considered to be one of the most beautiful in South America.

In 1712, the French Admiral Cassard and his pirates invaded Suriname. They demanded an enormous levy. The prosperous Jews had to pay the greater part of it in sugar, hard cash, entire sugar mills, and many slaves. The country never recovered completely from this event. In addition, with the decrease in value of sugar cane by the introduction of beet sugar in Europe; the refusal of the banks to finance the Jewish settlers in rebuilding some of their plantations that were burned by escaped slaves; and the development of the new capital, Paramaribo, many inhabitants of the Jodensavanne left to settle in the new capital.

They continued to return to celebrate the holidays in the Jodensavanne synagogue until 1832. That year, on September 10, a large fire raged through the village, reducing all the houses to ash, including the 147-year-old synagogue. Within a few years the dense jungle overgrew the remains of the Jodensavanne.

In 1719, the Ashkenazi Jews in Paramaribo built their Neve Shalom Synagogue. The Sephardic Jews built their own synagogue, Zedek ve Shalom (Justice and Peace), in 1735. After the Ashkenazi synagogue was destroyed by fire, the community rebuilt it in 1835.

Modern Times

When Suriname was granted independence in 1975, almost 35 percent of Suriname's population left the country, fearing a collapse of the new country's economy. Most of the wealthy members of the Jewish community were among them. When a brutal civil war erupted in the late 1980s, more members left the country.

Today the Jewish community has about 130 members. The two congregations, Sephardic and Ashkenazic, merged into one synagogue at Neve Shalom, which is larger and has a community hall and *mikve*. The second synagogue is rented to one of the members of the community and operates as a computer service shop. I visited the building and it is well maintained. All the furniture and art of the old Sephardic synagogue was loaned to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. They were restored and are currently exhibited to the public.

A very unique characteristic of the Neve Shalom Synagogue is that it has a sandy floor, which is a reminder of the Hebrews' 40

(Continued on page 12)

American Friends of Tebeka-Israel Debuts

By Karen Primack

The Israeli organization Tebeka was founded in 2000 by Itzik Dessie, the first Ethiopian in Israel to attend law school. Tebeka (Amharic for "Justice") works on behalf of Ethiopian Israelis to gain equal opportunity and to assist in the integration of Ethiopian Israelis into the mainstream of Israeli society.

A group of Americans impressed with Tebeka's legal and social-action work incorporated the Washington, DC-based nonprofit American Friends of Tebeka-Israel in June. This organization aims to advocate on behalf of Ethiopian Israelis to gain equal employment and appropriate treatment; to assist in the integration process of Ethiopian Israelis into the mainstream of Israeli society; and to raise funds to support these goals. It has plans for a law student exchange program and legal internships in the U.S. for Ethiopian-Israeli law students.

The new organization debuted on June 26 at a DC-JCC event, "Pursuing the Dream: The Aliyah of the Ethiopian Jews and a Celebration of Israel at Sixty." Amid the speakers, Ethiopian food, and music,

board member Doron Krakow announced to the crowd of about 200 that American Friends of Tebeka-Israel had filed its incorporation papers that very day. Coordinator of the gala event was Dr. Yohanne Zeleke.

Keynote speaker Shlomo Molla, a Member of the Israeli Knesset, was born in rural Ethiopia and made Aliyah to Israel in 1984 from Sudan in "Operation Moses." He holds degrees in law and social work and is one of two Ethiopian-Israeli Members of this Knesset, and is the second Ethiopian-Israeli to ever hold this position. Molla has long served as an active board member of Tebeka and spoke optimistically about the

new American counterpart. Molla traveled from Israel for the occasion.

Other speakers included Ambassador Fisiel Aliyi of Ethiopia, Martin Peled-Flax of the Embassy of Israel, and attorney Itzik Dessie, who is currently executive director of Tebeka Israel.

The discussions concluded with questions from the audience and a reception with traditional Ethiopian performances.



Itzik Dessie

Eyewitness Account:

'A Great Assembly Shall Return Here'

By Michael Freund

(This article appeared in The Jerusalem Post on May 21, 2008)

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia - It is nearly 11 p.m. one night last week in Addis Ababa, and large parts of the Ethiopian capital are bathed in darkness, the result of increasingly frequent power shortages in recent months. Soldiers and policemen stand guard on the road in front of the Israeli Embassy, as Kalashnikov rifles hang precariously across their chests. As they adamantly turn away traffic from both directions, a large bus pulls up and is waved through, before parking on the dusty thoroughfare.

While its noisy engine takes a much-needed rest, Israeli officials review an assortment of paperwork as they prepare the vehicle's prospective passengers for the short ride to the airport. It is from there that they will board an Ethiopian Airlines flight to complete the millennial-old journey home to the land of their ancestors, the Land of Israel.

(Continued on page 11)

Visiting the Falash Mura of Ethiopia

© By Irwin M. Berg

In Gondar, a city in northern Ethiopia, there exists a compound for Falash Mura, Jews who converted to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity at the end of the 19th century. My wife Elaine and I visited the Falash Mura compound for a week in September 2007, during which we attended a weekday morning (*Shacharit*) service, New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*) services and Friday evening Sabbath (*Kabalat Shabbat*) service. The Falash Mura wait in Gondar for the time when Israel will allow them to enter the Holy Land as Jews. In the meantime, they learn to pray, observe and believe as Jews.

Some History

A majority of the population of Ethiopia are members of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Christian Church. To these Christians, the Jews were known as Falasha. The origin of the word is uncertain; it has variously been translated as "foreigner," "wanderer," and "landless persons." In any event, it was a pejorative term, and the Jews of Ethiopia have rejected it, calling themselves "Beta Israel" (House of Israel).

Toward the end of the 19th century large numbers of Beta Israel converted to Christianity, and the converts became known as "Falash Mura." The origin of this term is also uncertain. One explanation is that the term means a "Falasha who converted." Various reasons have been given for their flight from Judaism -- from force, to economic duress, to convenience. Largely forgotten is the Great Famine of 1889-1892, known as the *kifu guen*. Because of their economic role as artisans and tenant farmers, the Beta Israel were particularly hard-hit, and the Great Famine resulted in widespread abandonment of religious observances and of the laws against sharing food with Christians. In the opinion of Steven Kaplan in *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia*, the Great Famine started a "substantial movement" to the Ethiopian Church among the Beta Israel. It would not be unreasonable to assume that many of the Falash Mura who now proclaim their desire to return to Judaism can trace their Jewish ancestry to the time of the Great Famine or to the breakdown that followed it.

The Falash Mura were ostracized in Ethiopia by both the Jews and the Christians. It is generally conceded that this ostracism limited intermarriage between Falash Mura and Christians. This is partly why Israel's Chief Rabbinate decided to apply to the Falash Mura the rule that "a Jew, even though he has sinned, is still a Jew." Thus, Falash Mura could lay claim to being Jews as long as they could prove that the female ancestral line descended from a Jew.

Beginning in 1974, Israel began a program to rescue the Jews of Ethiopia and to bring them to Israel. A short time thereafter, the Falash Mura started to abandon their homes and farms to await their turn on the next air-lift. They collected in compounds in the capital of Addis Ababa; and after the Addis compounds were closed, close to 20,000 gathered around a compound in Gondar. Fewer than 300 a month have been permitted to emigrate by the Israel government. Many have been in Gondar for more than 10 years waiting to be taken to Israel.

The compound for the Falash Mura in Gondar is supported by the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ) and administered by its local representative, Getu Zemane. The compound contains a synagogue, a huge, partly-open space with benches sufficient for 3,000 people. The compound houses a ritualarium (mikvah) where rain water is mixed with well water. Three covered spaces are used as classrooms, one for women, one for men, and one for children.

(Continued on page 10)

LETTERS

Congregation in Kobe, Japan

I have recently returned to my native New Jersey after being an active member of the Ohel Shelomo synagogue in Kobe, Japan, for the past five years. The synagogue is officially an Orthodox Sephardic synagogue and is open to any Jew from any walk of life anywhere in the world. Many Jewish visitors from all over the world have come to Ohel Shelomo, as this is the ONLY synagogue in Central Japan. Some famous Jewish people have come to this congregation over the years, such as Alan Dershowitz and Yitzchak Rabin.

The Jewish community has a long history that goes back to the 1890s when Iraqi Jewish businessmen first established a Sephardic Congregation in Kobe. Many visitors from all over the USA have come to the congregation. Kobe is very close to Osaka, home of Universal Studios, and many Jewish people involved in the entertainment industry, as well as journalists, have visited our congregation.

Our web site is at www.jckobe.org. There was also recently a book printed about the Jews of Kobe by George Sidline. I hope that you can visit Japan and possibly spend a Shabbat there, as it is valuable to maintain contacts with Jews all over the world as well as see a unique Jewish community just waiting to be explored.

Andy Robnick
West Caldwell, NJ

Graduates Wear Abayudaya Kippot

Our graduating class at The Leo Baeck Day School wore the kippot we purchased from Kulanu at their graduation on Monday, June 23, 2008. It was quite a moving ceremony, especially as our valedictorian spoke of our study of the Abayudaya and the understanding we all gained of their community. I hope this picture will find its way to the community that made them, so they will know how important it was to all of us at Leo Baeck Day School.

Ted Liss
Toronto, Ontario, Canada



HAPPY
NEW
YEAR

Event To Remember (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

Lee Malkus, a former Kulanu volunteer in Uganda, contributed this comment: "The event was a very moving recognition of Gershom's determination and dedication to his community and to Judaism, and a validation of the commitment and support of all those who helped him along the way. The dedication of Tziporah and the children – Igaal, Dafna, and Naavah – should also be recognized."

Many individuals and institutions helped to make this moment happen. Rabbi Camras's congregation in nearby West Hills, Shomrei Torah, gave Gershom a paid internship that helped cover living expenses for his family of five. As a reward for his outstanding performance at the pre-registration Ulpan, the American Jewish University gave him and his family free housing. And film-maker and friend Debra Vinik found a donor who gave him a car. But the event would not have been possible without the generosity of Gary and Diane Tobin and their Institute for Jewish Community and Research, who raised the money for Gershom's tuition, airfares, and other expenses for the family, who returned to Uganda each summer.

At the dinner before the ordination, I congratulated Diane and Gary Tobin for taking the lead on arranging for Gershom and his family to come to the University. I also congratulated Rabbi Richard Camras and his congregants at Congregation Shomrei Torah, who had embraced the entire family. The Tobins and Rabbi Camras similarly congratulated Kulanu on all that we had done to help. What a wonderful evening!

PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE

✍ **Dr. Edith Bruder's** book *he Black Jews of Africa - History, Religion, Identity* was published in May by Oxford University Press.

"This book presents, one by one, the different groups of Black Jews in western, central, eastern, and southern Africa and the ways in which they have used and imagined their oral history and traditional customs to construct a distinct Jewish identity."

✍ *History of a Tragedy: The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain*, by **Joseph Perez**, was published by the University of Illinois Press in 2007. According to a reviewer, the book debunks the myth of a golden age of peace in Spain among Jews, Moslems, and Christians. There was a tense balance of economic and security interests. Other misconceptions are also exposed.

✍ There has been interesting coverage of the Falashmura issue in *Ha'aretz*: **Anshel Pfeffer's** "Ethiopian-Israeli Lawmakers Split over Continuing Falashmura Immigration" on June 19 notes that MK Mazar Bahyna (Shas) argues that there are more than 300,000 Jews in Ethiopia who are entitled to immigrate to Israel, while MK Shlomo Molla (Kadima) thinks the immigration from Ethiopia should be ended. "No Remnant Left Behind?" by **Don Futterman** on June 26 argues that Israeli Interior Minister Meir Sheetrit has arbitrarily decided that the Ethiopian Aliyah is over, even though there are 8700 "relatively helpless Ethiopian Jews" who have left their villages years ago awaiting Aliyah. Like the "Marranos" in Spain, these "Falashmura" are descendants of converts to Christianity, and their return to Judaism has been accepted by Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar and his predecessor Rabbi Ovadia Yosef. The author concludes, "When the interior minister accorded himself the authority to override the chief rabbis and world Jewry in deciding who is a Jew, he overreached both politically and morally." **Anshel Pfeffer's** "Jewish Agency: All Falashmura Eligible for Aliyah Already Here," on July 1 cited the contents of a

(Continued on page 14)

Ghana and Uganda To Form a Bond

By Michael Ramberg

One year ago, my partner Ali and I wrote to ask our friends and family for support with a trip to teach Hebrew and Judaica in the Tiferet Israel Jewish community of Sefwi Wiaswo, Ghana. This support helped to make possible a fantastic experience for everyone involved. The members of the community and Ali and I learned an incredible amount and formed deep connections. Our work together was the subject of a story in this year's Reconstructionist Rabbinical College annual report.

Since our return to the US, Tiferet Israel community leaders have been applying what they learned to services and to the classes they teach for adults and youth. What I want to share with you now is a new, thrilling development for the community. No, Ali and I are not returning to Ghana in the immediate future, although we would like nothing better. What will happen next is, in fact, much more promising for the community's long range development.

At the beginning of July, Tiferet Israel's spiritual leader, Alex Armah, travelled to the Abayudaya Jewish community of Uganda. to live and learn with the Abayudaya for at least four months, through the High Holy Days, Sukkot, and Simhat Torah. I am certain that this experience will be transformative for Alex and his entire community. Just a few days after reaching Uganda, Alex formally affirmed his Judaism (or converted) under a *beit din* of Conservative rabbis. This major step is made possible by everything Alex has learned from visiting teachers and his independent studies. Alex appreciates this opportunity because it will legitimate his Jewish status in the eyes of many more people.

Then Alex will start to learn, and our work together last summer made it absolutely clear to me that he is ready. Alex is very smart and deeply, deeply motivated. It is his dream to learn more about Judaism so that he can share his knowledge with his community.

In his time with the Abayudaya, Alex will not only learn from people with advanced Jewish studies, but he will live as part of a larger community that has been devoted to a Jewish way of life for many generations. This increasingly famous community of more than 800 people has been practicing Judaism for 90 years in rural Uganda. In 2002, more than 300 members of the community formally affirmed

their Judaism under a *beit din* of Conservative rabbis. In addition, one of the Abayudaya leaders, Rabbi Gershom Sizomu, this year became the first African rabbi ordained by a liberal American rabbinical school, at American Jewish University in Los Angeles. Alex's Tiferet Israel community is much younger and smaller.

The Abayudaya's Rabbi Sizomu envisions the creation of an African Judaism. There are certain values and experiences that unify Africans and that should find expression in a way of being Jewish which is a better fit for Africans than any Western Jewish movement. This is what is most promising about Alex learning with the Abayudaya: the teachers and the student will have so much in common. Like the Ghanaian Jews, the Abayudaya know the feeling of relying on farming to make a living. They live in large extended families. They rely less on Western technology. They are used to negotiating relations with practitioners of Christianity and traditional African religions. They have faced the challenges of managing an unprecedented influx of money from sales of their Judaica and from North American donors.

I cannot imagine all that Alex will learn and subsequently teach his community, but I am deeply moved by the unlimited potential. (In addition, there is of course much Alex can contribute to the Abayudaya, from his own experience, Jewish learning and spirit, not to mention his skills as an electrical contractor!)

The elders of the Tiferet Israel community are so committed to this project that they have decided to support it with proceeds from the sales of their beautiful tallitot and challah covers (see www.KulanuBoutique.com).

I count on your generous support, both for this four-month period of study and for future follow-up efforts. We will be contributing to a thrilling development for our friends in the Tiferet Israel Jewish community, for African Judaism, and, by extension, for the entire Jewish people.

(editor's note: Donations to Kulanu can be earmarked for the Tiferet Israel community. Please donate online at www.kulanu.org, or mail a check, payable to "Kulanu" to: Kulanu, c/o Harriet Bograd, 165 West End Ave., Apt. 3R, New York, NY 10023. Please write "Tiferet Israel" in the online comments field or in the memo field of your check.)

An Historic Evening (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

Din to go to Uganda; the people from Kulanu who made that trip possible and have helped to continue to support and sustain efforts on the community's behalf; the California people who have been of such great assistance to Gershom and his family both in terms of making his study at the Ziegler school possible and in providing Gershom with opportunities to grow and expand his horizons through an internship, and in embracing his family and creating a home away from home for them.

While I was thrilled to see my friends and to celebrate with Gershom and his family, perhaps the person I was most excited to meet was Matthew Meyer, who first met Gershom in a synagogue in Nairobi on the High Holidays in the early 1990s. It was Matt who initiated support in America for the Abayudaya. It was he who got people interested in the Ugandan Jews in the first place. He started the ball rolling. And by the end of the evening, I had



Rabbi Gershom Sizomu reading Torah
(photo from American Jewish University)

met at least 30 people who had a hand in making this dream become a reality. And when Gershom was called to the Bimah with his sponsor, hundreds of people who had come to witness the moment cheered and screamed and whooped and hollered and cried.

It is one thing to serve as a community's rabbi, which Gershom has been doing for about a decade. It is another to gain the recognition of the normative Jewish world and have one's position confirmed and endorsed.

It was an historic evening made even more significant by the presence of so many of the people who helped to make it happen. And it meant so much to me to be there to see that after generations of walking in the ways of the Divine, a community has a leader who will continue to guide them along those paths so that they grow and prosper and reap the benefits of faith and a connection to Klal Yisrael, all of Israel.

Visiting the Falash Mura of Ethiopia (cont.)

(Continued from page 7)

There is a kitchen of sorts which employs 64 workers to feed daily 3,000 children and 400 pregnant or nursing women and to supply each family with 1 kilo of maize. The cost is borne by NACOEJ, the United Jewish Communities, and the Jewish Federations. Neither the State of Israel nor the Jewish Agency provides any support.

The feeding function of the compound is necessary in order for the 15,000 to 20,000 Falash Mura who still remain in Gondar to survive. In the belief that it was necessary for them to do so in order to go to Israel, Falash Mura from villages near and far have sold or abandoned their farms, their farm animals, and their homes to live in or around the compound. They live in squalid conditions even by Ethiopian standards. There is little work in Gondar available for the men, and such work as they may obtain consists of unskilled construction labor. The other function of the compound is to allow the Falash Mura to pray in a Jewish synagogue and to teach them about Judaism. In the four days before, during, and after Rosh Hashanah that we spent with the Falash Mura, we had an opportunity to witness the manner in which this is being done.

Some Observations

On the morning before the commencement of Rosh Hashanah, we met Getu Zemene at the synagogue in the compound. I have never before seen more than 1,000 men and 1,000 women praying together at 7 A.M. on an ordinary weekday. A few of the men wore *tefillin*, and those who did knew the ritual in donning and removing them. Most wore a locally woven tallit which they wrapped around their heads when saying the blessing. The men and women were separated by a barrier (*mehitzta*) consisting of blankets hung from a rope the length of the space used as a synagogue. At the front of the synagogue was a platform (*bimah*), with an ark holding two torahs, a light (*ner tamid*) and a sign containing the Ten Commandments in Amharic.

After the services, Zemene took us around the compound. He showed us the space -- barely a kitchen -- where the food was prepared and the mikveh, which was then in the process of being cleaned. We then visited each of the classrooms. There were at least 75 men being taught about Rosh Hashanah. The instruction was in Amharic, but we knew the topic was Rosh Hashanah from the multitude of times "Rosh Hashanah" was mentioned. In a separate room about 50 women were also being taught. Lastly, we were taken into a room where there were about 50 children, ages 6 to 12. With great pride Zemene lifted a potato and the children recited the blessing over a vegetable (*boray perih ha'admah*) and then lifted an orange and the children recited the blessing for a fruit (*boray perih ha'etz*).

Zemene then introduced us to Rabbi Shai Avraham and Getenet Awoka. Both had come from Israel at the invitation of Zemene and NACOEJ to preside over the services for Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot.

Rabbi Avraham is a Beta Israel who left Ethiopia in 1984 for the Holy Land via a land route through the Sudan. This was before arrangements were made to fly Jews from Ethiopia to Israel. Although dressed as Moslems, he and his family were immediately identified as Jews and severely harassed. Many Beta Israel who took this route died or were killed, and a memorial has been erected for them in an abandoned synagogue in the Ethiopian village of Ambover. Some of those who perished en route have been interred in a Jewish cemetery on the outskirts of Gondar. Rabbi Avraham is a duly ordained rabbi with a congregation of 100 families in Arad, Israel. The congregation consists of a mixture of Beta Israel and some former Falash Mura -- all of whom, he told us, keep the laws of the Shabbat and kashrut. Rabbi Avraham is also a reserve officer in the Israeli army -- a position of which he is very proud. He also works as an emergency technician, responding to acts of terrorism.

Getenet Awoka was a Falash Mura who several years ago left Gondar for Israel. He is now an Orthodox Jew and has the respect of the Gondar community.

In addition to being a rabbi, Rabbi Avraham is also a ritual slaughterer (*shochat*). We have known Orthodox Jews who, when traveling abroad in places where they are unable to purchase kosher food, only eat food which they bring with them. Rabbi Avraham and Getenet ate lamb slaughtered by the rabbi and cooked in pots and with utensils which he brought with him from Israel. In this manner, he used his special skills to remain kosher.

Rosh Hashanah began on the evening of Wednesday, September 12. Before the start of prayers, a young woman came forward to light two candles on behalf of the community. She said two blessings over the candles in Hebrew -- one for the New Year and one for having reached this time safely (*sh'hechianu*). On September 14, before the start of Friday evening prayer, another young woman came forward to light Sabbath candles saying the Sabbath blessing in Hebrew.

The morning services during Rosh Hashanah were attended by approximately 3,000 men and women, and the numbers for the evening services ranged between 1,500 and 2,000 people. The number of men and women appeared approximately equal. Most of the practices would be familiar to an Orthodox Jew anywhere in the world, but some would not. Men who donned a tallit would wrap it around their heads when saying the blessing. Two Torahs were brought out of the ark on each day of Rosh Hashanah, and the appropriate portions were read from the Torah scrolls by Rabbi Avraham, who also read the portions from the prophets (*haftorah*). Men were called to the bimah to recite the blessings in Hebrew before and after the reading of the Torah, and Rabbi Avraham said the blessings customarily read before and after the *haftorah*. Upon Getenet's singing the Hebrew notes (*Tekeya, Shevarim, Teruah*), Rabbi Avraham blew a shofar in the familiar manner.

Few in the congregation know any Hebrew. They are also mainly illiterate. Thus, the service is conducted in Amharic by readers who read from an Amharic-Hebrew prayer book printed in Israel. The Amharic prayer book closely followed the one for Rosh Hashanah which we brought with us to Ethiopia (our *Machzor*).

The congregation is mainly passive except that it stands and sits when directed and says "amen" on cue. Only the *Shema* (Hear Oh Israel) and the *V'Ahava*, (the prayer following the *Shema*) are said in Hebrew when the congregation repeats each word in Hebrew after it is said by the reader. Every service concludes with the vigorous singing of thousands of voices of *Am Yisreal Chai* (the People of Israel live) and *Od Avinu Chai* (Our father still lives).

Certain other features of the services peculiar to the women are noteworthy. The women are all dressed in white. At least 20 percent of them have a baby strapped to their backs. The only noises that one hears during the services are that of babies crying and cows in the adjoining fields mooing. When the two Torahs were taken out of the ark, the women ululated. Some of the women -- it appeared to us mostly older women -- bowed before the ark when walking in front of the *bimah*. Was this a reflexive move from the days when as Christians they genuflected before a cross? Also, as is common among the Ethiopian Christians, some of the Falush Mura women had a cross tattooed into their foreheads. As these tattoos are permanent, it is an uncomfortable and unmistakable reminder of their lives before coming to the compound.

These Falash Mura are in an untenable position. They have left their villages, abandoning their homes, farms and cattle. Now their only sources of support -- the margin between survival and starvation or disease -- are American Jewish organizations. At the same time, the government of Israel has announced that it will discontinue taking Falash Mura into Israel before the end of 2008, thus abandoning 15,000 to 20,000 men, women, and children.

'A Great Assembly Shall Return Here' (cont.)

(Continued from page 7)

Meanwhile, inside a neighboring compound, 42 Falash Mura (descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity in the 19th century) sit quietly and patiently on wooden benches, waiting to board the bus. Their features betray a silent dignity, but little else. There is no trace of excitement or exhaustion on their faces.

Only Yossi, a charming three-year old with an infectious grin, dares to beam with enthusiasm, as though he can sense the momentous nature of what they are about to undertake.

Ten days ago, Yossi and the others arrived in Addis Ababa after a two-day bus journey from Gondar in the north. After recuperating from the arduous trip, they were put through an intensive mini-seminar by Israeli officials to familiarize them with the ins and outs of aliya.

This group, which numbers 38 adults, two children and two babies, is among the last batch of Falash Mura that the Israeli government plans to bring to the Jewish state. According to embassy officials, another 300 or so Falash Mura will be brought to Israel by the end of June, and then the operation will be complete.

Embassy staff have already begun seeking employment elsewhere, as rumors of impending cuts in personnel make the rounds. It is the end of an era, one official says, proudly adding that the ancient community of Ethiopian Jewry has at last found its way home.

Activists in Israel and the United States disagree, saying that there are at least 8,700 Falash Mura in the Gondar region whose eligibility for aliya has not even been reviewed by the Israeli government, which they accuse of wanting to shut down the process in haste. And they vow to press on until every last member of the Falash Mura who wishes to return to Judaism and the Jewish people is allowed to do so.

But such disputes seem far from the minds of everyone present, as the group of would-be Falash Mura immigrants noiselessly makes its way to the bus after getting the go-ahead from the organizers.

Even the most cynical of observers cannot help but be moved by their solemnity and poise, as they leave behind everything they know and head off in Abrahamic fashion into the uncertain.

Upon reaching the airport, they disembark from the bus, calmly helping one another. A mother carries a baby, gently rocking her to and fro as she settles into a peaceful slumber. An elderly woman, barely able to see or walk, is escorted across the parking lot by two young men as she determinedly makes her way to the terminal.

Behind her, a man on crutches struggles along, keeping up with the group, each tedious step bringing him closer to his goal of reaching Jerusalem.

Watching the scene unfold, the verse from Jeremiah (Chapter 31) quickly came to mind: "and I shall gather them from the farthest parts of the earth, and with them the blind and the lame, the woman with child; a great assembly shall return here."

Indeed, it is easy to imagine that this is how the Exodus from Egypt must have appeared, as these remnants of Ethiopian Jewry walk out of the pages of history, and head to the Promised Land.

There are those who see the Falash Mura as economic migrants, or even hitchhikers taking advantage of the Zionist dream. After all, say the critics, their motivation is simply to improve their lives and escape to the West. But all the cynicism in the world can't take away from the fact that these precious souls, these "lost Jews," are at last returning to their people and their land.

It is surely a cliché, but what other country would go to such efforts? At a time when America is clamping down on Mexican migration, and France and Spain battle to contain a flood of North Africans, little Israel reaches out across kilometers of desert and centuries of travail to bring thousands of black Africans in as equal citizens.

As they make their way through Ethiopian airport security, with their meager belongings in hand, one cannot help but see in the fulfillment of their dreams that of ours, too.

Abayudaya Update (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

plants in Uganda, following up on last year's solar dried fruit field experiments on wooden drying trays purchased through a farmer development grant from Kulanu.

Over the past year, with the help of Kulanu, farmers created a business they call the Abayudaya Food Company, with a goal of growing, dry processing, packaging, and exporting the abundantly delicious pineapples, mangos, sweet bananas, and jack fruit grown in Uganda. This project will prepare dried fruit both for market, and for use in emergencies in economic hard times to provide family food security in the majority of Ugandan farmer homes without electricity and refrigeration.

On this trip we created an exciting strategic partnership with African Organics of Kampala, an experienced African-owned, certified-organic dried fruit company currently processing, packaging, and exporting organic dried fruits and vegetables to Europe, and Kopali Organics of the US, a business lead sent to me by Kulanu supporter Ellen Tacher. African Organics was particularly impressed with the first efforts of Namutumba village farmer Ruth Nabaigwa's dried pineapple field samples, which were delicious and fared very well in all important moisture content tests. An added benefit of this new relationship is that African Organics will be also be working with master farmer JJ Keki on a specialty vanilla business.

With these new partnerships with African Organics and Kopali Organics as organic trainers and fruit buyers, we are hopeful that struggling low-land farmers can get the all-important and expensive international organic certifications for their delicious fruit and realize the same success as the coffee project. In addition, I have negotiated a 5 percent sales commission on the gross of every current sale by African Organics to the US client we acquired for them, Kopali Organics, to go directly to the Abayudaya farmers to help start up their new business. This small sum is a start, but it is not enough. Farmers have developed a five-year business plan. They hope to get training from their new partners, put their plants in the ground, rent a small storage warehouse, get international organic certifications that will help them earn top dollar in the market, and hire transport to get their fruit to a waiting Ugandan and US market. Down the road, they dream big: they hope to do their own "value adding" by building their own modern processing (drying) and packaging facilities to facilitate export. They will begin by becoming organic producers for African Organics.

These very poor Jewish farmers need your help by way of a new Kulanu Farmer Development Grant or by way of donations to our existing village micro-finance projects. If any of you have an interest in small business development as the way out of poverty, please contact me. These Jewish farmers are the poorest of the poor with a great opportunity. We have inquiry orders for over a ton already-- the international organic dried fruit market is huge. The farmers lack capital. Abayudaya farmers are hard workers blessed with fertile soils. Help them make use of this great opportunity. It could really change their families' lives for the better out in these remote African villages. We have a track record of success. The coffee project is getting worldwide press. Won't you be part of this historic new Kulanu-Abayudaya anti-poverty project?

Food Crisis

Which brings us to our most difficult challenges this year. As well as being a tragedy for Kenya, the terrible election crises which caused deaths and rioting, border and road closures in Kenya, are wreaking economic havoc in Uganda. All gasoline and many products come into Uganda solely through Kenya. Within four weeks in January, gasoline, building materials, food, and medicines tripled in cost, creating enormous hardship for Ugandans. Just as we began construction on the new SK High School girls' dorm (so girls from far off Jewish villages can attend the school), building material costs shot up and

(Continued on page 14)

Suriname (cont.)

(Continued from page 6)

years in the desert after the exodus from Egypt and the days of the Marranos, whose ancestors during the Spanish Inquisition were forced to convert to Christianity but who secretly continued to practice their Judaism. Since practicing Judaism was punishable by death, they met in cellars with sand covering the floor to muffle their sounds. The sand was probably added after the Sephardic synagogue merged with the Ashkenazic Neve Shalom.

A few years ago the community changed from Orthodox to Liberal. However, as a result of the lack of financial resources, the community cannot afford a rabbi, which is so desperately needed. As a result, conversions cannot take place for members with a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother. The *Aron Kodesh* (Ark) is full of beautiful Torahs hundreds of years old. Only two are used, as the others need repairs that the community can't afford.

The community faces several other challenges. The *chazan* (cantor) who runs the services is self-taught; the youth do not have the opportunity to interact with other South American Jewish kids; the mikveh is in need of repairs; and gravestones need to be cleaned. Services are held one week on Friday night and the next week on Saturday morning.

After weeks of hard work in the 1990s, the jungle in the Jodensavanne was cleared. About 450 graves were uncovered and the ruins of the synagogue have been preserved. With the help of the Suriname Government, it is now possible to reach the Jodensavanne by car and ferry boat. Thanks to these initiatives, one of the oldest historic monuments in Suriname and South America has been preserved for future generations.

I left this wonderful community with the wish that I could find a volunteer organization that would be able to help in providing basic religious services to isolated Jewish communities such as Neve Shalom. A few weeks later I was introduced to Kulanu and the response was above and beyond my initial expectations. Sarah Goldenstein, a University of North Carolina at Asheville student, had recently arrived in Suriname for six weeks to provide the community with Jewish education. This initiative is due to the generosity of Kulanu.

Immediately Sarah began an extremely busy program of Hebrew and Judaic lessons for adults, children ages 6 to 13, and children ages 3 to 5. For the children, the lessons included learning the alphabet and Hebrew reading, stories from the Tanach, Hebrew singing, dancing, and arts and crafts such as making challah covers and Kiddush cups. The adults' classes were focused on basic Hebrew reading, writing, and comprehension for one group and conversational Hebrew for another group. On the weekends Sarah organized activities such as Talmud study, Jewish history, learning Hebrew while baking cakes, Hebrew/Jewish lessons at the zoo, and nature lessons. For such a small community that does not have a rabbi or an educator, Sarah's energy and enthusiasm were an amazingly positive experience. Unfortunately, by the end of June, Sarah headed to Brazil as an exchange student at Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná. Sarah deserves our gratitude for her great work. We hope that there will be a continuation of the educational program begun by Sarah.

Currently Suriname is not a popular tourist destination; in my opinion, it is one of the best kept secrets. The potential for Eco-tourism is unlimited, with the undisturbed dense tropical rainforest, rivers and waterfalls, rare species such as the blue poison dart frog, and many birds and flowers unique to this part of the world. It is just a question of time before small cruise ships will start visiting, resorts will be developed, and tourism will become the major industry of Suriname. That will help the country's economy and hopefully will end the isolation of this unique but forgotten Jewish community.

(The next newsletter will feature a dispatch from Shai Fierst, a Jewish Peace Corps Volunteer in the Suriname rainforest.)

Huánuco Jews (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

private donations. The Huánuco soon-to-be-community provided additional support, which demonstrated a commitment on their part.

Due to funding necessities, only five of the eight students who applied to go on the journey were able to accompany me. These five students studied the history of Peruvian Jewish life and the culture of Peru prior to going. During the Texas A&M University Spring Break of 2008 these students set out for Peru via Panama. After landing in Lima and being met by numerous members of the about-to-be-born Jewish community, the "Aggies" (students at Texas A&M are called "Aggies") went to the northern city of Trujillo, where they visited the remote pre-Inca ruins of Chan-chan and the "Huanaca de Luna" archeological site. After a 23-hour trip from Trujillo to Huánuco, the Aggies arrived at their final destination. Accompanied by a doctor, the Hillel students and I crossed some of the highest points on earth, reaching an altitude of almost 5,000 meters during our journey from Trujillo to Huánuco.

The area's major rain storms and mud slides helped our group to decide that each perspective "convert" or "reentry candidate" would be examined by an Aggie beit din and then, once the weather cleared, would go to mountains for the mikveh ceremony. All the male candidates had already undergone circumcision and were aware that they would have to undergo the ceremony of *tipat dam*.

The beit-din interview was rigorous and lasted the entire day. In fact the beit din asked four perspective converts to continue to study for another year. Each member of the 5-person Beit Din, in succession, questioned the candidate, testing the person's knowledge of Jewish holidays and understanding of Jewish theology, from kashrut to Zionism. I translated all questions and answers.

The next day the rain cleared and the entire group traveled for over an hour on mud roads to a secluded spot in the Andes where they built a mikveh and permitted each person to undergo the immersion ceremony in the cold Andean waters. The *tipat dam* was done on the day of the mikveh, by a doctor along with me and witnessed by Jewish male A&M students.

After the mikveh, the Hillel students witnessed a formal conversion and/or reentry ceremony and heard a testimony from each of the 12 new members of the Peruvian branch of the people of Israel.

Although some of the students did not speak Spanish, they were still able to feel the depth of emotion expressed. Friday provided still another emotional experience, the formal acceptance by the Peruvian government of the Huánuco Jewish community and its inscription in the national records. That afternoon the two Aggie female students worked with the Huánuco women in the preparation of challah, and all prepared to greet the first legal Sabbath to be held in that part of Peru.

At Erev Shabbat services all present could feel history in the making. One young man had traveled 12 days through the jungle to become part of the Jewish community. Another person traveled over 14 hours of rough mountain and jungle terrain to reunite with the people whom he now called his. This was also a lesson on the concept of the oneness and unity of the Jewish people. Although many of the students did not understand the Spanish portion of the services or my sermons, all could follow the Hebrew parts and realized that wherever there is Hebrew spoken and Jews who care, then they too are at home. After spending a wonderful Sabbath with their new co-religionists and friends, the Texas A&M Hillel group left Peru on Sunday morning, March 16, and arrived back in college that night.

I will return to Peru on a yearly basis. If I can obtain sufficient funding, I hope to bring at least ten students with me next year. If you are interested in sponsoring a student for the 2009 Peru mitzvah trip please contact Rabbi Peter Tarlow at Texas A&M Hillel, 800 George Bush Dr., College Station, Texas, 77840, USA or via email at Hillel@tamuhillel.org

Jewish Sightseeing in South Italy

By Karen Primack

(continued from the last newsletter)

Our primary purpose in visiting South Italy in April had been to attend two seders led by Rabbi Barbara Aiello, founder of the Italian Jewish Cultural Center of Calabria, which serves *Anousim* returning to Judaism after 500 years. The seders, reported on in the last newsletter, were the highlight of our trip, but there were other memorable moments as well.

Before we left for Italy, Aiello and our own research had made us aware of several sites of Jewish interest in the Southern provinces of Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, and Sicily. We visited some of these before the first seder and some after, with only partial success.

Our first such stop was **Trani**, an exquisite medieval town on the Adriatic coast, where the 13th century Scolanova Synagogue was reconsecrated in 2005. Located on Via Sinagoga, it had been a synagogue prior to the 14th century, when the Jews of Puglia were expelled. It was used as a church until 50 years ago, when it was abandoned. We were shown the modest but beautiful ancient space by Avram Zeliko, who davens there, and whose family has lived and owned property in the synagogue area for centuries. His family came from Palestine during Roman times. The shul is recognized by the Orthodox Italian Rabbinic Council and the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, although many of its members are not observant and some are intermarried. Others were officially converted in Milan.

The town of **Oria**, once a major Jewish center, has a city gate known as *Porta Giudea* (Jewish Gate) or *Porta dei Ebrei* (Gate of the Jews), and one-quarter of the old city is labeled as the Jewish Quarter (*Rione Giudea*) on street signs. The owner of a restaurant in the quarter helped us find an unlabeled house that was formerly a synagogue, and we excitedly photographed it. There is a large, old-looking metal menorah outside the old city, near the *Porta Giudea*, but we could find no explanation for it.

We walked around the old area of the town of **Lecce** and came across a street named after Abramo Baldes. We wanted to know more, but no one knew anything about Jews living in that quarter many years ago.

In the scenic town of **Gallipoli** we noticed the word "*Giudecca*" on a map, and set about to look for that Jewish quarter. There was no trace of the old area any more -- just modern buildings. However, people were aware of the old *Giudecca* and pointed out where it used to be. We had better luck in **Manduria**, which has an intact Jewish quarter along the *Vico Ebrei* (Jews Alley). A privately owned museum was carved out in one of the tiny buildings with a menorah on a table, indicating that the place was probably a synagogue. We walked through the old city of **Taranto** looking for a sign of Jews (we had read that there were "significant traces" of a former medieval *Giudecca* there). We scoured the area looking for a telltale street sign, but many were unlabeled. The people we asked had never heard of Jews being there.

Venosa, where Jews settled in Roman times, was a highlight. Not only did we see ancient, Roman-style Jewish tombstones in the castle's archeological museum, and fragments of 9th century Jewish (and other) tombstones built into the walls of an incomplete 13th century church, but we also saw the famous Jewish catacombs.

Led by restoration director Savarese, we toured the Jewish part of the catacombs at the La Madalena hill (there is an adjoining Christian complex). The complex we saw contained 108 tombs and featured special non-thermal lighting and a sophisticated computer system to monitor geophysical occurrences that might destabilize the catacombs. The complexes have been closed to the public since 1960 to safeguard the structures. Visitors can obtain prior permission by contacting Soprintendente della Basilicata, c/o Soprintendenza Archaeologica, Via Serrao, 85100 Potenza, Italy (tel. 0971 21 719), and requesting "*autorizzazione visitare catacombe ebraiche di Venosa.*"

The tombstones were written in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, and some were inscribed with images of a menorah, shofar, or lulav and etrog. Impressive as it was to see the web of (now empty) openings that held tombs in the 4th century, it is even more so to become aware of what those tombstones (available to the public only in pamphlets) tell us. For instance, the tombstone of an adolescent girl named Faustina reveals that her funeral ceremony was attended by the whole city, including Jews, Christians, and Pagans. Markers also tell of the existence of *apostuli*, emissaries from Palestine collecting taxes from Diaspora Jews. Others describe the important position the departed held -- city official, rabbi, physician, member of a council of elders, et al.

We stopped briefly in **Castrovillari** to search for a synagogue mentioned in one source. A knowledgeable man told us where

the *Giudecca* used to be (it is not labeled), but he said the synagogue no longer exists.

Abruptly moving up to the 20th century, we saw, in **Ferramonti di Tarsia**, the former concentration camp where foreign and Italian Jews were interred. The Italian guards, who hated the Nazis, saved the 3000 Jews; there were only four deaths there, all of natural causes. When the Nazis came south to organize a deportation, the Italians hoisted the yellow typhus flag and the Nazis fled each time. The camp housed synagogues, two schools, and a hospital, and today it has a Museum of Tolerance. We viewed the camp through a fence since no official was available to open the gate on what was election day for a new prime minister.

In **Santa Severina** we were unable to find the Jewish quarter until we were advised by one man that it was the former Greek quarter. We photographed a street in the old Greek quarter, just in case. In **Bova Marina**, where a Roman synagogue was excavated by Enrico Tromba, we viewed the synagogue's mosaic floor, which has been relocated to the *Municipio* building. It is in only fair condition, but we could make out a menorah, a shofar, and a so-called "Solomon's Knot," a design of interconnecting ovals with which we were not familiar.

Reggio di Calabria was our most urban stop. The city boasted a long, steep, and prominent *Via Giudecca*, now totally modern, with an escalator being installed down the middle! We had read, in a booklet by Enrico Tromba, about certain Jewish artifacts being located in Reggio's national museum. We looked carefully for them in the museum, without success. We showed the booklet's pictures of these artifacts to museum officials, who said they were housed on an upper floor that was closed for the day due to problems with restoration employees. Despite repeated appeals, they were adamant. Finally, when we asked

(Continued on page 14)



4th Century Jewish Catacombs at Venosa

Jewish Sightseeing in Italy (cont.)

(Continued from page 13)

to see the director of the museum, they found a way to admit us to the closed area. We were delighted to see a 4th century C.E. marble inscription in Greek saying “Synagogue of the Jews,” a North African oil lamp with a menorah design, and 5th century bronze coins with a menorah design found near the Bova Marina synagogue

Sicily was particularly important in Italian Jewish history, for by the end of the 13th century Jews had fled forced conversions in the other parts of Southern Italy. They were safe in Sicily until the Spanish edict of expulsion in 1492, which also applied to Sicily, then under Spanish domination. At that time there were 100,000 Jews in Sicily, and 40 percent of Siracusa was Jewish. The state issued particularly harsh economic sanctions against Jews, resulting in over half of Sicily’s Jews converting.

The beautiful old part of **Siracusa** is known as **Ortigia**, and in it lies a *Giudecca* with five streets specifically named for the Jews living there -- Via Giudecca, Vicolo Giudecca I, II, III, and IV. The best Jewish site there is a perfectly intact mikveh dating from the 6th century. It is located in a palazzo that has been skillfully renovated into the Alla Giudecca Residence Hotel, which provides guided tours of the mikveh in English and Italian. To find out when tours are scheduled, call 39 0931 22255. The hotel has a website at www.allagiudecca.it.

In **Palermo**, the Jewish quarter is delineated by street names in Italian, Hebrew, and Arabic. We also discovered a building on Vicolo Meschita that we were confident was a synagogue, and a neighboring businessman confirmed this.

Summing Up

It is difficult to imagine the rich Jewish life that existed in South Italy from Roman times to 1300 (1500 in Sicily). Jewish communities flourished throughout Sicily and in Bari, Oria, Capua, Otranto, Taranto, and Venosa. Thriving in these communities were painters, physicians, actors, poets, tradesmen, and peddlers. During the 9th century, schools of Hebrew poetry emerged, and 100 years later Venosa, Bari, Otranto, and Oria had Talmudic academies. It is sobering to realize that today the number of Jews in South Italy is probably fewer than 100.

In addition to establishing Ner Tamid del Sud, the first new synagogue in the region in over 500 years, and the Italian Jewish Cultural Center of Calabria, Rabbi Barbara Aiello has led Tu B’Shevat and Purim festivals, Shabbaton study weekends, Chanukah workshops, and Hebrew classes.

There are undoubtedly many thousands of Italians with Jewish blood in the South. Time will tell how many of them will discover and take an interest in this heritage. Rabbi Aiello is certainly doing her part to bring awareness to them.

Abayudaya Update (cont.)

(Continued from page 11)

our budget took a hit due to uncontrollable region-wide circumstances. We’ve got the building constructed with a roof but we have had to halt construction on the inside walls, doors, windows, and wiring until more funds become available through donations. Our food budgets are also short for our child hunger program due to skyrocketing food costs. This situation is hitting Ugandan families very hard, making our school food program all the more vital. All our projects are affected in one way or another and are in need of additional support.

The Abayudaya are a vulnerable 700-member Jewish minority in a country of 23 million in a region facing instability. Please talk to your friends about Kulanu’s work. Spread the word. Kulanu needs the help of individuals and family foundations, anyone who can help us help others.

(In the next newsletter, Part II will address adult literacy, deaf education, an Abayudaya women’s conference, micro-finance in Uganda, and youth counseling.)

PUBLICATIONS (cont.)

(Continued from page 8)

report presented by the Jewish Agency to the Prime Minister’s Office. Some Jewish organizations have objected, indicating another 8700 people waiting in Gondar who have been ignored. In “Ongoing Battle Over the ‘Lost Jews,’” **Steven Klein** notes on July 4: “(Sheetrit) is just the latest in a long list of interior ministers who have tried to stem the tide of Falashmura/Beta Israel and, like them, he is destined ultimately to fail.”

✍ **Gershon Sizomu’s** ordination and return to Uganda received wide press coverage. Here are some of the articles: “Ugandan Gershon Sizomu Ordained as First Black Sub-Saharan Rabbi, by **Brad A. Greenberg**, in the May 21 *Jewish Journal*; “Ugandan Jews’ Hopes Rise with New Chief Rabbi, by **Jordan Namerow** in the July 17 *Forward*; “Freshly-ordained Ugandan Rabbi Gets Ball Rolling on Returning Home,” by **Roberto Loiederman**, in the July 16 *Jewish Journal*; “Jews’ Faith Journey Leads from Uganda to L.A. and Back,” by **Sandy Banks** in the June 10 *Los Angeles Times*; “Judaist Leader Installed in Mbale,” by Daniel Edyegu, appeared in the July 13 *The New Vision* (of Uganda)

✍ **Catherine Hickely’s** May 8 article on *Ethiopia.com* is titled “Queen of Sheba’s Palace Discovered in Ethiopia, University Says.” She reports that University of Hamburg archaeologists have discovered this 10th Century BCE palace in Axum, complete with an altar that may have once held the Ark of the Covenant; debris from sacrifices was found at the site. Another palace was built over the ruins by a later Christian king.

✍ **Rebecca Spence’s** May 8 article in *Forward* was titled “Think Tank Aims To Infuse Jewish Mainstream with Dashes of Color.” It describes a meeting convened by Be’Chol Lashon International Think

(Continued on page 16)

Visiting the Falash Mura (cont.)

(Continued from page 10)

The government’s contentions are many, and the supporters of the Falash Mura challenge all of them. I am not expert enough to judge the contentions or the refutations, but one contention of the Israeli government conflicts with my own observation: it is that the Falash Mura are not committed to Judaism but wish only to escape from their miserable lives in Ethiopia for a better place in Israel. Both Elaine and I felt that the desire of the Falash Mura to return to Judaism was sincere and deep.

The Kulanu Boutique

Proceeds from these items benefit Kulanu and the communities that they represent.

Order by mail or online at www.kulanuboutique.com

BOOKS/MUSIC

NEW! Always an Olivia Charming children's book retelling the family saga of one Jew of African descent

NEW! A Short Story from African Israel. Story told by Remy Ilona, an Igbo researcher in Nigeria

Abayudaya: The Jews of Uganda Photojournalist Richard Sobol and Rabbi Jeffrey Summit take a fascinating look at the Jewish community of Uganda **(includes CD)**

Make Joy Not War CD Alula Tzadik's CD of Ethiopian and traditional Jewish songs with a world beat

Jews in Places You Never Thought Of Articles about Jewish communities around the world; ed. K. Primack

Shalom Everybody, Everywhere! CD Recording of the unique sounds of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda

The Igbos: Jews in Africa? Remy Ilona's fascinating research into the Jewish ancestry of the Igbos of Nigeria

Under One Canopy: Readings in Jewish Diversity Our latest book, edited by Karen Primack, of reflections, essays, and poems by Jews worldwide

JUDAICA/JEWELRY

Abayudaya Kippot Hand crocheted pillbox-style skullcap (assorted colors; let us choose one for you)

Aish Chai Jewelry Lapel pin and tallit clips fashioned of sterling silver with gold plate, depicting in Hebrew letters *Chai* (life) coming out of *Aish* (fire), recalling the return of Bnai Anousim

Challah Covers Colorful, embroidered challah covers from Ghana. **LIMITED INVENTORY AVAILABLE!**

Four-Strip Kente Cloth Tallitot Magnificent Jewish prayer shawls from Ghana. **LIMITED INVENTORY !**

	#	Cost	Total
A Short Story from African Israel		\$10.00	
Abayudaya Kippah		\$15.00	
Abayudaya: The Jews of Uganda		\$52.00	
Aish Chai Lapel Pin		\$34.00	
Aish Chai Tallit Clips		\$86.00	
Always an Olivia		\$18.00	
Challah Cover		\$36.00	
Four-Strip Kente Cloth Tallit		\$190.00	
Make Joy Not War CD		\$15.00	
Jews in Places You've Never Heard Of		\$29.50	
Shalom Everybody Everywhere! CD		\$15.00	
The Igbos: Jews in Africa?		\$15.00	
Under One Canopy: Readings in Jewish Diversity		\$15.00	
		TOTAL	\$

U.S. Shipping Costs:
 \$0.00-\$15.00 add \$6
 \$15.01-\$49.99 add \$9
 \$50.00-\$99.99 add \$13
 \$100.00-179.99 add \$16
 \$180.00 or more add \$24
International orders:
 Add an additional \$15 per order (\$5 for Canada)

Shipping _____

Grand Total _____

Name _____
 Address _____
 City/State/Zip _____
 Telephone _____
 Email (please) _____

**MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO "KULANU"
 MAIL FORM AND CHECK TO:
 KULANU BOUTIQUE
 C/O HARRIET BOGRAD
 165 WEST END AVENUE, APT 3R
 NEW YORK, NY 10023**

**PLEASE ALLOW FOUR WEEKS
 FOR DELIVERY**

PUBLICATIONS (cont.)

(Continued from page 14)

Tank that attracted 80 Jewish leaders from 31 countries. **Sue Fishkoff's** May 6 JTA article, "Far-flung Communities Seek Place in Jewish World," also covered the Be'chol Lashon conference.

✍ "Jewish Life in the Tropics," by **Soriya Daniels**, appeared in *The Jerusalem Post* on May 15. It describes the congregations in St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands. There is a Chabad of the Virgin Islands, founded by Rabbi Asher Federman, and the St. Thomas Synagogue, originally erected in 1796 and rebuilt after fires in 1833; Rabbi Arthur Starr has been a full-time rabbi there since 2002. Famous for its sand floors, the synagogue receives 10,000 visitors per year.

✍ "Work in Uganda Proves Life-Changing," by **Julie Levin**, appeared in the May 18 *Miami Herald*. It reports on Elana Kieffer, who volunteered to teach Hebrew to the Abayudaya for two months in March. This 24-year-old daughter of a rabbi, who earned a degree in international relations, found the experience life-changing.

✍ "Tiny Jewish Enclave Thrives, Witnesses a Rebirth in Cuba," by **Mike Williams**, appeared in *The Boston Globe* on May 18. It describes a restored Cuban synagogue attracting large numbers of descendants of Jews flocking there to learn more about Judaism. There

is a 200-member Jewish youth organization, and rabbis from other Spanish-speaking countries visit frequently. There are now about 1500 Jews in Cuba (several dozen have converted), with three synagogues and a community center.

✍ "Bahrain Names Jewish Ambassador" was announced by *BBC News* on May 29. Houda Nonoo, probably the Arab world's first Jewish ambassador, will serve in Washington, DC. She has served as a legislator and head of the Bahrain Human Rights Watch. Bahrain's 50-member Jewish community once numbered 1500.

✍ "Baghdad Jews Have Become a Fearful Few," by **Stephen Farrell**, appeared in *The New York Times* on June 1. It reports that just over 50 years ago, the 2500-year-old Jewish community of Baghdad numbered more than 130,000, but now it is estimated at 7 or 8. The Meir Tweig synagogue, the last to remain open in the city, closed in 2003 because it became too dangerous to gather openly.

✍ "Three Countries Share Limelight at Israel Expo," by **Julie Anne Ines**, appeared in the June 1 *Orange County Register*. It covers a Jewish festival in Irvine, Calif., that celebrated the 60th anniversaries of Israel, India, and South Korea. Performers included Abayudaya singers from Uganda.

SUPPORTER APPLICATION

I/WE SUPPORT KULANU'S WORK. (DONATE ONLINE AT KULANU.ORG OR MAIL CHECK WITH THIS FORM 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 _____

___ \$36 ___ \$72 ___ \$100 ___ \$500 ___ \$1000 ___ OTHER \$ _____

Deadline for next issue: October 15, 2008

Recycled Paper

Edited by Karen Primack

Kulanu

Helping Lost Jewish Communities

C/o Harriet Bograd
165 West End Ave, 3R
New York, NY 10023

Address Service
Requested

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