



## French Black Jews

*By Cynthia Weisfield*

I'm going to share some memories with you. One took place in 1968, one in 1974; both were in different cities, but both involved a request by a black Jew to take part in synagogue-sponsored activities: services and a social event. In both cases, there was much discussion before he was let in. Women clutched their purses a little closer to their bodies. Men stiffened. The black man generally sat alone. Full disclosure: I did try to make conversation at the social event, but the gentleman was as nervous as I. In each instance, when the man left, there was an audible sigh of relief. My emotions were mixed, but they circled around feeling unsettled.

The above should not really be surprising. We all thought then of Jews as being white Ashkenazi, right? Or maybe white Sephardic. Perhaps we'd give a thought to the Moroccan or Yemeni Jews who were air-lifted into Israel in the 'forties and 'fifties. But *black Jews*?

All of that was about B.K.E., Before Kulanu Era. Now we -- that is, Jews everywhere -- know that there are black Jews, Indian Jews, Chinese Jews, Jews around the world of all stripes and nationalities. We embrace them. Or do we?

French black Jews would say otherwise. They speak about feeling the discomfort in French mainstream synagogues. Of seeing astonishment, sometimes incomprehension on the faces of their white co-religionists. Sometimes there's a feeling of rejection, of "mockery."

Enter Nduwa Guershon of Paris. Nduwa was a Congolese who converted to Judaism at age 28. He is the leader of a group of black Jews, the FJN, *Fraternité Judéo-Noir* or Jewish-Black Fraternity, which he founded in 2007. FJN was formed not as a statement of separation but to become another component of Judaism along with Sephardic and Ashkenazic Jews.

Theirs is a group where all Jews are welcome. To emphasize the point, this is a committed group of Orthodox Jews who are seeking full meshing with the "customary" Ashkenazic/Sephardic communities while maintaining their own presence. In that sense, they are just participating in the time-honored Jewish practice of forming synagogues, for whatever reason. They do have rabbis coming from Israel and London to assist.

Sidney Davis, a Master's Degree student in Jewish Studies at Hebrew College in Newton Center, MA, and a black Jew, has corresponded with Nduwa. Davis puts the case eloquently.

*Nduwa Edouard Guershon seeks to raise the consciousness as well as the conscience of the broader Jewish community to the plight of the black Jewish community in France and the pan African Jewish community at large. He seeks to do this within the context of Judaism's ethical ideal of social justice by forging alliances with Jews of goodwill everywhere in addressing racism and anti-Semitism. His organizing effort connected with the Fraternité Judéo Noire is an effort to bring African Jews out of the religious and social isolation that they have experienced historically as the result of their perception as the "ultimate other" and to present them along side the rest of the diverse Jewish community as one people.*

There are now 170-250 FJN members of whom 50 are children; there is no Sunday school as yet. Although some members still attend established synagogues, the group typically meets at members' homes.

It is interesting to take a moment to consider why there is a certain prejudice against blacks in Judaism. Guershon reasons that much

*(Continued on page 5)*

## Endings and Beginnings In Uganda

*By Lorne Mallin*

Endings and beginnings. The Jewish world recently celebrated Simchat Torah, when we mark the end of the yearly cycle of Torah reading by chanting the last few verses of the scroll and then beginning anew with the first few verses of Genesis. I joined the Abayudaya community at services in drumming, dancing and singing our hearts out.

My time at Nabugoya Hill is coming to an end. I will miss the beauty of the land and the Abayudaya. There are many threads to weave together in the next few days from my volunteer work over the past six months. On Shabbat I'm sponsoring a Kiddush lunch of rice, beans, goat and eggplant (including a token contribution from what survived in my garden). On Sunday, I'm going to Entebbe airport with JJ Keki, who is flying to Amsterdam with me before we separate -- JJ to New York to begin his Kulanu-Abayudaya speaking tour ([www.kulanu.org](http://www.kulanu.org)), and me back to Canada....

And then a new beginning. God willing, I'll return to Uganda around Dec. 1 to get settled in my new home in Kampala and begin working Dec. 15 as manager of publications and material development for the Uganda office of BRAC, the world's largest antipoverty group ([www.brac.net](http://www.brac.net)). A great fringe benefit of the job is that with BRAC being Bangladesh-based, the lunch room serves yummy curries.

In Kampala, I've rented a brand-new three-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment for \$383 Canadian a month (far more than most Ugandans earn in a month). It's a 10-minute walk from my new office, which is about five kilometres south of downtown Kampala. In the ritzier sections of the city it would easily cost three times as much.



*Noah, Alex, Isaac and the author wear kanzu robes for the High Holy Days*

There are cattle, chickens and vegetable plots along the dirt road to my place. Unfurnished here means no fridge or stove. With no legislated tenant protection, landlords have free rein -- six months' rent in advance plus a month's security deposit.

The High Holy Days were very high here in Nabugoya with almost 300 people, many dressed in white, jamming the Moses Synagogue. Services were a combination of Abayudaya practices developed over the 90 years since their community began, and more familiar Conservative songs and prayers from Rabbi Gershon Sizomu's train-

*(Continued on page 6)*

# A Unique Ner Tamid

American-Israeli artist Gabriel Bass has installed a solar-powered *Ner Tamid* (eternal light) and a menorah in the Moses Synagogue of the Abayudaya Jewish community in Uganda.

"I have been receiving more and more exciting commissions recently, but this one for sure has helped me to continue to develop both my spirit and hands," said Bass, a Seattle native who has lived in Israel since 2004.

The work consists of two pieces made from a single Israeli cypress tree that had been carefully seasoned for three years in his studio. Bass lathed and carved the *Ner Tamid* into a hollow wooden mould.

He blew glass into the mould to shape it, then opened it on the opposite side. The *Ner Tamid* is in red, black, and yellow, the colors of the Ugandan flag.

The menorah includes glass fittings throughout the work and oil lamps on the top.

Members of the Abayudaya community were eager to help him unpack and install the work. The *Ner Tamid* is lit 24 hours a day by solar power. Many commented on how well the work flows with the surroundings of its destined home.

Bass's introduction to the Abayudaya community began several months ago when he was contacted by Jill and Steven Edwards of Los Angeles, supporters of many projects at the Abayudaya community, to commission the *Ner Tamid*.



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## 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.

**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.**

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KULANU (“ALL OF US”), a tax-exempt organization of Jews of varied backgrounds and practices, networks with dispersed and emerging remnants of the Jewish people and raises awareness of and support for emerging communities through education, research, and publications about their histories and traditions. This newsletter is published quarterly by Kulanu, 165 West End Ave., 3R, New York, NY 10023, [database@kulanu.org](mailto:database@kulanu.org). See [www.kulanu.org/about-kulanu](http://www.kulanu.org/about-kulanu)

## An Editor's Farewell

This is the final newsletter that I will be editing. As of press time, we have not found a successor. Thus, this organ may be replaced with more modern modes of communication – Kulanu Updates sent by email, discussions on Facebook, and the Kulanu blog. We'll see. Your comments are welcome. **A volunteer editor would be welcome, too!**

After 15 years, I'm retiring from the newsletter to pursue other interests, but I am not leaving Kulanu, this remarkable organization I've seen develop since it began in 1994. Throughout this period I have been inspired by Kulanu's founder, Jack Zeller, a saintly person with deep feelings about human rights around the globe, including the right to practice a religion in an isolated place. He has generously donated resources, time, and energy to Kulanu.

This newsletter could not have been published without the help of my husband, Aron Primack, whose long hours on layout, photos, and other technical matters have been essential with every issue.

There are certainly hundreds of others who have given generously, but the devotion of Harriet Bograd, our president/treasurer, must be mentioned above all.

I'm looking at my first Kulanu newsletter, with a dateline of Spring 1994. On page one, Jack Zeller issues a “Welcome to Kulanu!” piece in which he writes about the new organization's goal: “To extend a hand of friendship to those around the globe who are of Jewish origin and to help those who wish to return to Judaism.” I hope the newsletter has helped deliver that goal.

Meanwhile, to receive Kulanu Updates, contact [database@kulanu.org](mailto:database@kulanu.org). To view the Kulanu blog, go to our website ([www.kulanu.org](http://www.kulanu.org)) and click on Kulanu Blog. Send articles or book reviews to [articles@kulanu.org](mailto:articles@kulanu.org). For general news, join the Kulanu List at [kulanu-list@yahoogroups.com](mailto:kulanu-list@yahoogroups.com). Stay in Touch!

-- Karen Primack

## Kaifeng Descendent To Tour U.S.

Kulanu is pleased to announce the possible lecture tour by Shi Lei, a descendant of the ancient Jewish community of Kaifeng, China. No one knows for sure when Jews first came to Kaifeng; but from the records that we have, we think that Jews probably first arrived in Kaifeng from Persia sometime between 960 CE and 1127 CE. At about 1368 CE, as a result of the internal situation in China, they were cut off from contact with Jews of the Middle East. Their isolation ended when they were discovered fortuitously by a Jesuit priest in 1605 CE. Today there are about 200 known descendants of this ancient Jewish community living in Kaifeng.

Shi Lei is a descendant of one of the original Jewish families that were given Chinese names by an Emperor of the Northern Song Dynasty (960 CE - 1127 CE). He studied at Bar-Ilan University from 2001 to 2002, and then at a yeshiva in Israel for two years. Since coming back to Kaifeng in 2004, he has been working as a tour guide leading Jewish tours of China. In his spare time he teaches other Jewish descendants Jewish history and traditions in addition to Hebrew and English, two languages in which he is fluent. There has been a marked revival of interest in this community about their Jewish origins.

This possible lecture tour would probably take place in the spring of 2010. We will send out Kulanu Updates as soon as we know more. (Please be sure that we have your email address if you would like to receive Kulanu Updates.)

If your organization, synagogue, or school is potentially interested in having Shi Lei speak, please contact [speaker2010@kulanu.org](mailto:speaker2010@kulanu.org).

# What I Did On My Summer Vacation

By Janis Colton

Over the past few years, I had glimpses of the world of Sephardic Jewish history that streamed from the period of the Inquisition, but no real knowledge about these Jewish ancestors.



The author on vacation

Finally, this past summer (July 2009), my husband Bob, another couple and I signed up for an Elderhostel trip in New Mexico to learn the Converso/Crypto-Jewish story. In my most enthusiastic expectations I could not have imagined what an extraordinary and deeply emotional experience awaited me. My three travelling companions were just as moved and surprised.

We arrived in Albuquerque on a Sunday afternoon, emerging into the heat and dust of the arid climate. The scenery was, to my surprised eyes, bleak and uninviting, not the exciting vista others had described

to me. For the next five days I listened to the surprising story, to envisage in amazement how the Converso families who fled there managed to not only survive in such a hostile climate, but to deal with the everyday tensions defending their *Converso* status.

Two women led our group of 14; Norma Libman was the lecturer/teacher. Her scholarly depth of knowledge, dedication, and enthusiasm for the subject sparked similar feelings in all of us. Karen Long, our group leader, provided, with similar enthusiasm, not only a perfectly planned and executed schedule, but knowledge about New Mexico, the Native Indian and Spanish heritages, and even the climate, flora and fauna, and current social and demographic background.

I'm sure the people who read the Kulanu newsletter know much more about the *Converso/Crypto* experience than I could absorb in five days. So, I will resist telling you the whole story as it unfolded for us, the significant place of Jews in the history both of Spain and of early Mexico and the United States.

In the interest of emphasizing the novelty of the subject for us, I will list some "factual" items that some of my companions told me

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## Primack Tribute

From the beginning of Kulanu's journey as an organization to assist isolated and emerging Jewish communities worldwide, Karen and Aron Primack have been at the forefront with Kulanu founder Jack Zeller. There is no way to calculate the number of hours they have contributed to building and strengthening the organization and the depth of their emotional commitment to the causes for which Kulanu stands. They have given of themselves in countless ways, providing leadership, visiting communities abroad, editing two books and the newsletter, donating funds and hosting countless visitors from around the world. Their generosity is legendary.

As they step down from their 15 years as editor (Karen) and layout/technical director (Aron) of the newsletter, Kulanu would like to take this opportunity to honor them for their unique contributions. Through the newsletter, they have enriched our knowledge of dispersed communities, fostered interest and support for Jews in isolated circumstances and created a lasting legacy for current and future generations.

Please join us in honoring these two special people by contributing to an on-line ad journal to support Kulanu's important work. The journal will be sent on-line to more than 1,500 Kulanu supporters around the world. Individuals and organizations may join together in purchasing space in the journal or go it alone. You may donate by mail or on-line. The deadline for contributions is January 31, 2010.

\*To donate by mail, mail the form below with your contribution to: Harriet Bograd, President, Kulanu, 165 West End Ave., 3R, New York, NY 10023

\*To donate on line, go to [www.kulanu.org/tribute](http://www.kulanu.org/tribute). In the comment field, please write "Primack Tribute" followed by the text of your ad (limit 50 words). If you have any questions, or to send any images for your ad, write to: [primacktribute@kulanu.org](mailto:primacktribute@kulanu.org)

I am pleased to honor Karen and Aron Primack for their outstanding work on behalf of the Kulanu newsletter and isolated and emerging Jewish communities around the world. Enclosed is my contribution in the amount of:

\_\_ \$5,000 – gold page    \_\_ \$2,500 – silver page    \_\_ \$1,200 – bronze page    \_\_ \$600 – full page    \_\_ \$250 – half page

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# KULANU BRIEFS

## Kaifeng Descendants Arrive in Israel

A remnant of Kaifeng's historic Jewish community is returning to its roots. In October, a group of seven descendants of that community arrived in Israel, where they will live at a kibbutz, study Hebrew at an ulpan there, and prepare for conversion.

"We received special permits from the Interior Ministry to bring them here for a year, during which time they will prepare for conversion. They will then receive Israeli citizenship and be considered new olim," *Shavei Israel* chairman Michael Freund said in an interview. *Shavei Israel* pushed for the permits for two years.

There are reportedly still hundreds of people in Kaifeng who cling to their identity as descendants of the Jewish community. In recent years, a growing number have begun to express an interest in studying Jewish history and culture.

## Holocaust Films Aired in India

Dr. Navras Jaat Aafreedi organized "The First Ever Holocaust Films Retrospective in South Asia," held September 14-18 in Pune, India. Twenty-two award winning films from different countries were aired free of charge, and discussions were held after each screening. None of the films had ever been seen in India before. Held by Open Space and the Department of Mass Communication and Journalism, all films were aired at Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar University. A poster exhibit on Yad Vashem was also included.

## Return Ceremony for Portuguese Anous

Bruno Amaral, a 26-year-old descendant of a crypto-Jewish family in Lisbon, had his long awaited Return Ceremony (conversion) on October 5 at Temple Emanu-El, in NYC. Performed by Rabbi David M. Posner, this was the fourth such ceremony for an *Anous* living in Portugal. Yaacov Gladstone assisted in the arrangements.

## New Journal Announced

The annual *Journal of Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian Crypto Jews* has begun publication by Florida International University, Miami, as an academic journal "to disseminate research and developments in the study of crypto Jews and their descendants in past and present manifestations," reports Dr. Abraham D. Lavender, Founding Editor-in-Chief, and Professor of Sociology and Sephardic Studies at FIU. Founding Editor is Dolores Sloan, author of *The Sephardic Jews of Spain and Portugal* and Managing Editor is Arthur Benveniste, past president of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies.

The journal contains peer reviewed papers, articles, reports, media reviews and news. Information about submission of manuscripts and books for review, subscriptions and sales is available from Dr. Lavender at lavender@fiu.edu.

## New Book by Cukierkorn

Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, who led Kulanu's first mission to Uganda in 1995, is the coauthor of a new book, *They Were Just People: Stories of Rescue in Poland During the Holocaust*. His coauthor is former *Kansas City Star* columnist Bill Tammeus, a Christian. Published by the University of Missouri, the press release indicates that the book relates "remarkable and uplifting stories of Polish Jews who lived through the Holocaust and the non-Jews who helped them. The stories are based on interviews -- in the United States and in Poland -- with both survivors and members of the families who helped to save them."

Cukierkorn is also the author of *Accessible Judaism: A Concise Guide, Hamadrij: la Guia*. He has been working actively with *Anousim* communities in Guatemala, Mexico, Venezuela and Ecuador.

## Condolences

Kulanu sends condolences to Kulanu activist **Loretta Vitale Saks** on the death of her mother, **Giorgina Miriam DeLeon Vitale**. And to **Yohannes Zeleke** on the death of his grandmother, **Measelech Seyoum**, in Ethiopia. And to **Cynthia Weisfield** on the death of her mother, **Dorothy Lent Sfarti**.

## Mazal Tov

To **Judy Manelis** on the adoption of grandson **Ezra** by her daughter **Aliza Kaplan** and her husband **Sean Coyne**.

## Todah Rabah!

- o To **Ben Delbick** of West Hills, CA, for donating \$400 as part of his Bar Mitzvah Tzedakah Project
- o To **Peter Svarzbein**, photographer, for his extraordinary album of photos of the Yakov Gladstone award ceremony, available at [kulanu.phanfare.com](http://kulanu.phanfare.com) under "2009 Albums." Peter Svarzbein's web site, [mongovision.com](http://mongovision.com), also includes an album of photos of Crypto-Jews from the American Southwest.
- o To **Letitia Gomez** of Washington, DC, who asked for donations to Kulanu in lieu of gifts for her adult bat mitzvah at Bet Mishpachah in July.
- o To **James Dugan** of Cincinnati for contributing to Kulanu generously and regularly over the years.
- o To **Brian Primack**, who has designated Kulanu as one of three charities to receive the proceeds from his course on Jewish music for 0-4 year-olds in Pittsburgh. Primack is a musician, educator, and physician.
- o To **Matthew and Hope Feldman** of Philadelphia for their ongoing financial support and for Matt's time and energy helping Kulanu with social marketing, publicity, fundraising, and so much more!
- o To **the 51 congregations, schools and other organizations** hosting JJ Keki during his five-week speaking tour through the United States and Canada.

And Todah Rabah to these generous donors:

\$2,000+: **Woodlands Community Temple** (White Plains, NY)  
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\$500-999: **Lynne Elson, National Center to Encourage Judaism** on behalf of **Gloria & Ash Gerecht, Edward Rensin**  
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**HAPPY CHANUKAH**

**December 12- 19, 2009**

**Shop for gifts at**

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# Finding Jewish Diversity

© 2009 by Leah Diaz Oben

Jewish diversity goes beyond ethnicity, customs, nation or age. As a congregation together seeks to build its vision, it grows its identity. Rabbi Matusom, whom I met in 2004, headed Ahavath Chesed in Jacksonville, an ode to compassion. Sons of Israel in S.

Augustine is made of old men and women who live to the fullest, who are fiesty and vigorous. At their annual Hanukkah "Latke Party" they smile as little children come to recite the story and lead them in song.

Temple Beth Shalom in Miami Beach is a United Nations of a synagogue, who sing united to their cantor's rich baritone, "Yerushalayim" and "Sim Shalom," clapping their hands and ending resonantly. Temple Israel of Greater Miami, a group dedicated to studying Torah insightfully and meticulously, was not only intellectually stimulating to me; I became part of their mitzvah to read the works of the sages regarding Torah, to make the words real and current to our lives.

B'nai Zion on United Street in Key West is modern, promotes creativity and, like the island, has a rich Caribbean history. Its rabbi will not let *Halacha* be stretched beyond its capacity, which IS an admirable goal in that Bohemian isle.

*(Editor's note: Born in Cuba, the author for five years has been "experiencing Jewish education, the beauty of Sephardic culture and the mitzvah of assisting those returning to Judaism." This piece is an excerpt from a larger work about her travels).*

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## Black Jews of Paris (cont.)

*(Continued from page 1)*

of this prejudice stems from the story of Ham, who saw his father, Noah, naked. The descendants of Ham were said to be black because of their sins -- in reality, the sin of their father.

Laurence Thomas, a member of FJN who flies between his homes in Paris and Syracuse, NY, where he is a professor at Syracuse University, has found anti-black biases in religious texts. Yet as he points out in his article "Social Justice and Jews" on the FJN Web site: "The Torah does not designate skin color as even a remote indication of who counts as a Jew. It is time that we stop doing so."



*Rabbi Hiben Daniel (Synagogue of Tel Aviv), Ferdinand (the son of Guershon), Sev Lesaved (Synagogue of London), Guerson Nduwa (Paris) and another member of the Synagogue of London at an FJN concert in Paris*

There is no absolute theory about why blacks are not fully accepted as Jews. The Torah tells us that Moses married an Ethiopian or Kushite woman. That has been interpreted by Nduwa as Hashem frowning on discrimination. We also remember that the Queen of Sheba was

black and well regarded by King Solomon.

The French have a longstanding history of anti-Semitism which, although quiescent for many years, is never far from the surface. They are still debating the Dreyfus Affair. The anti-Semitic "comic" Dieu-donné has a large following. An increase in Muslim population and influence has cracked the quiet, as it has throughout Europe. The

*(Continued on page 6)*

# LETTERS

## Remembering Measelech Seyoum

One recent night after having a lovely and friendly meeting with Kulanu members, I returned home to a call from my uncle in Ethiopia informing me that my grandmother, Measelech Seyoum, had passed away at the age of 92. I am saddened and grieving. My grandmother was the only daughter of her parents, but she was blessed to have 11 children.

But since 1974, she has had a sad and terrible life due to the Ethiopian revolution, with the execution of my father, and then of my older brother Abraham Zeleke as a counter-revolutionary. In 1977, my grandfather (her husband), Grazmach Woubetu Reta, was tortured and killed. He was a former High Court judge, a veteran of the Second World War (with Italy), and the most decorated patriot of Ethiopia. What makes my grandmother special is that, despite the family tragedies, she took the responsibility and the leadership of the family and aided her children and grandchildren, keeping us together and helping us to go to school and be successful in life.

My young widowed mother, responsible for eight of my brothers and sisters, would not have survived the tragedy of that time without the help of my grandmother. And without her, the family's Jewish heritage never would have continued.

My grandmother was always dreaming to be in Jerusalem, and I hope that now her soul is there.

She is survived by eight of her children, 38 grandchildren, 53 great grandchildren and great, great grandchildren.

*Yohannes Zeleke, Washington, DC*

## Academic and Spiritual Growth

I am grateful to Jacob Steinberg and Kulanu for all of the help you have given me. In this new year, I can't help but reflect on the past year and a half and look at how far I have come mentally, academically, and spiritually. I am so grateful for all of the experiences that I have had in Surinam and Brazil because of Kulanu and how I have grown from each of them, which has ultimately led me to my undergraduate research.

*Sarah Goldenstein, Durham, North Carolina*

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## News of Indian Jews

*Compiled by Sam and Erna Daniel*

\*Directed by Jonas Pariente and Mathias Mangin, the 75-minute documentary "Next Year in Bombay" focuses on Sharon and Sharona Galsulkar, the last educators of their Bene Israel community of Bombay. The community, which has been residing in the Bombay region for 2000 years, is now disappearing. Genuine Zionists concerned for their daughters' future, they are also committed to their community's needs. Whose education will they sacrifice?

\*A new website has been launched to benefit the Jews in India. Indianjudaica.com was created by a Jerusalem-based rabbi to expose Jews in India to books and *halachic* issues.

\**Being Indian, Being Israeli*, by Maina Chawla Singh, was recently published in New Delhi by Manohar. It examines the Indian Jews' absorption experience, focusing on both the immigrants' stories and Israel's successes and failures. The author, who teaches at the University of Delhi, was a Hadassah-Brandeis Scholar and a Schusterman Fellow at Brandeis University.

\*A new Indian Jewish Community Center (*Shaare Rahamim*) has been founded on the southern outskirts of Haifa. Already registered with Israel's Ministry of Interior, it will house a permanent museum displaying Indian Judaica and historic documents. Construction is underway and donors are being sought. For more information, contact [ruthgihc@yahoo.com](mailto:ruthgihc@yahoo.com).

## Black Jews of Paris (cont.)

(Continued from page 5)

American Jewish Congress has reported an increase in attacks on Jews. Shirli Sitbon, who writes in the *Paris-Chronicler*, reports on a rising tide of gang warfare against Jews in mixed ethnic neighborhoods. Young men such as Rudy Haddad and Mathieu Roumi were beaten and tortured; Ilan Halimi died after his torture of three weeks' duration. French Jews are worried. Indeed, my husband and I spoke with a Parisian couple who said that they figured they would have to emigrate to the United States at some point.

In this French cultural context, FJN efforts are courageous. Not only are they reaching out to mainstream Jews, who themselves may be afraid, but they are vocal in their various activities. A recent fundraising concert was held at l'Espace Rachi, a major venue in Paris. They have a vibrant Web site ([fjn-123.fr](http://fjn-123.fr)) that also has an English section) where they speak out vociferously on all manner of topics related to Judaism. They participate actively in demonstrations related to Israel, such as demanding the release of Gilad Shalit.

Despite the obstacles, Nduwa has great hopes. "We think...that we are in a favorable juncture where one can reconstruct a certain united community around important points such as questions linked to the Torah, study and life together," he said. He realizes that it's a long road, but he is committed to the journey of making all Jews comfortable with each other.

The community would welcome any religious materials, including texts in Hebrew or Hebrew/French for worship, or children's education. Yarmulkes, taleisim, menorahs and other ritual objects are also needed. The address is: M. Nduwa Edouard, 20 rue Cadet, 75009, Paris, France.

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## Summer Vacation (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

were new to them. "I didn't know about Crypto Jews at all!" "I didn't know that Jews were ever noted as sailors or navigators, let alone dominated the field in the 14 and 15 hundreds." "I didn't know these Jews were so numerous in the settlement of New Mexico and other areas of the southwestern United States." "I didn't know that at the time of the Inquisition *Conversos* accounted for 40% of the Spanish colonization of the area now known as New Mexico." "I didn't know the Inquisition was active in Mexico and even in the then Spanish held parts of America." "I didn't know the Office of the Inquisition in Spain was not closed until the 1900's and then only in response to Spain's desire to have the Olympics held there." And so on!

As a fairly literate Jew, I have read and heard much history. How could such a dramatic part of Jewish and American history have been omitted from my education? We Ashkenazic Jews rightfully hold the Holocaust as the loss of a significant portion not only of our population, but also of our culture and heritage. So, too, was the loss of that cultured and large community wiped out by the Inquisition. Its tattered remnant also fled to our shores and deserves to have its proud tale enrich our study of history. Perhaps the parallels between these two events are too ominous to integrate into our thinking.

The new scholarship being done on our Southwestern Jewish history is quite amazing. (I thoroughly recommend *New Mexico's Crypto-Jews: Image and Memory*, Cary Herz's wonderful book of photographs, interviews, and essays. And I learned much from Stanley Hordes' *To the End of the Earth: A History of the Crypto-Jews of New Mexico*.) As more and more unfolds, it will be fascinating to see if any Crypto-Jewish community survives as such or if it is absorbed into the existing community. Either way, we can all be grateful to have the opportunity to learn about these courageous people.

We are very grateful to the Elderhostel for providing this course.

## End and Begin (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

ing in that movement. I walked late into *mincha* (afternoon) services on Rosh Hashanah to hear something for the first time – *Shirat Hayam*, the Song of the Sea (of reeds), translated into Luganda by the founder of the Abayudaya, Semei Kakungulu. The rhythm he composed was steady, almost plodding, and the melody simple and repetitive, evoking the songs of Canadian First Nations peoples. For many years, this was the centerpiece of Abayudaya worship and everyone memorized it.

Another first was offering the *Birkat Hacohanim* (Priestly Blessing) by myself. I'm usually one of a number of descendants of the priestly tribe in the congregation. One Israeli visitor on Rosh Hashanah happened to be a Levi and helped me with the ritual hand-washing. I also enjoyed being the *Baal Tekiah*, blowing the shofar that punctuates the services, and reading Torah on Yom Kippur. Friends and I felt very elevated in our full-length, white *kanzu* robes. The Yom Kippur fast went quite easily, except for when the sun's beating down on the metal roof turned the synagogue into a steambath. We all broke the fast with cups of steaming porridge from a large vat.

After returning to Uganda, I'm planning to visit the Abayudaya one Shabbat a month. There's no synagogue in Kampala. Almost all the 200 or so Israelis there are secular. There are some non-Israeli Jewish expatriates and a handful of Abayudaya students going to university. I love Shabbat and hope to create some kind of prayer/chant/communal opportunity.

I leave here with a sense of some accomplishments and some loose ends. Great news: A \$5,000 US grant for cervical cancer screening for the Abayudaya women and their neighbors has been approved with the very real prospect of saving lives. The poultry project is back on track with the chicken coop virtually complete and day-old chicks ordered. Aaron Kintu Moses, headmaster of Hadassah Primary School and my best friend here, took back the project from the contractor, who had only worked two days in six weeks. I'm invited every Shabbat morning to lead my teacher Rabbi Shefa Gold's chant for *Nishmat Kol Chai* with the English part translated into Luganda.

The Mbale Spelling Challenge was a success even though MTN, the telecom giant, failed at the last minute to provide major sponsorship. But they did give us T-shirts that the students love. In the end, Mbale Secondary School won the trophy with 17 points, Hamdan Girls' High School (a Muslim boarding school) earned 13 and our team racked up six. Still, our students came home in high spirits. They had enjoyed a special day with lunch at the guest house, transportation in a minivan taxi, the thrill of competition, plus the shirts and Certificates of Participation as rewards. Now the schools know how to conduct a spelling contest and everyone wants them to continue. MTN is talking about a 15-school competition next year but I don't know whether that's more than talk.

The Abayudaya Jewish Cookbook project now has a good body of recipes and photographs from several villages. It has been a wonderful and often tasty experience to work with the women and get a glimpse into their lives. In the coming months, I intend to test the recipes in my own kitchen and turn the research into a book proposal to attract an agent who will interest a publisher. All profits will go to the Abayudaya Women's Association.

(Editor's note: Lorne Mallin is a journalist and chant leader who volunteered for six months in Uganda, teaching writing to 11th-graders, coaching a spelling team, launching an orphans' lunch program, coaching teachers, working to bring cervical cancer screening there and to neighboring towns, putting together a cookbook of Abayudaya recipes, et al.)



Lorne Mallin

# Publications of Note

By Morton Simon

✍️ “*Far From Zion: In Search of a Global Jewish Community*” by **Charles London**, HarperCollins Publishers (2009). A young man with ambivalent feelings about Zion stumbles upon a community in Bosnia where Jews work hand in hand with Muslims and Christians. This kindles a reawakening of his Jewish identity and he seeks out and writes of many disparate communities of the Diaspora, many who are content to stay where they are and practice their colloquial Judaism.

✍️ “Adopting Forebears’ Faith and Leaving Peru for Israel” by **Simon Romero**, published in *The New York Times*, June 21, 2009. Ronald Reátegui Levy’s dream is to persuade all the descendants of Sephardic merchants who settled in a remote corner of the Amazon basin more than a century ago to reaffirm their ties to Judaism and emigrate from Peru to Israel. However, since nearly all the Jews who originally settled here were men, their descendants cannot attest to having Jewish mothers, ruling them out as being Jewish according to strict interpretations of Jewish law. More than 400 descendants of the Jewish pioneers have formally converted to Judaism this decade, including about 160 members of Levy’s immediate and extended family. Nearly all of them now live in Israel. Levy moved in 2005 with his wife and six children to Ramla, a dusty city southeast of Tel Aviv. But despite dreaming for decades of such a move, he said he had trouble adjusting to Israeli life and returned to Iquitos alone. [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/22/world/americas/22peru.html?\\_r=2&scp=2&sq=peru&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/22/world/americas/22peru.html?_r=2&scp=2&sq=peru&st=cse)

✍️ “Israel begins verification for 3,000 more Ethiopians” by **Uriel Heilman**, published in *JTA, the Global News Service of the Jewish People*, July 15, 2009. There are perhaps 8,700 Ethiopians, the so-called Falash Mura, living in the northern Ethiopian city of Gondar awaiting a chance to move to Israel. This group claims to be descended from Jews who converted to Christianity generations ago and now wish to embrace their heritage and make aliyah. They remained distinct these many years from the Ethiopian Jews who retained their Jewish identity and observances over hundreds of years, and immigrated to Israel during Operation Moses in the 1980s and Operation Solomon in 1991. The purpose of the new Interior Ministry effort is to give those who never petitioned for aliyah a chance to do so, if they A) have a relative already in Israel who will petition for them and B) can demonstrate Jewish maternal links. Spouses of such people are also eligible. Many Israeli officials believe that the 8,700 Ethiopians for which the advocates are pushing are mostly Christian Ethiopians deceptively claiming Jewish links and adopting Jewish observances in a bid to escape Africa’s desperate poverty for the relative comfort of the Jewish state. In a May 12 decision the Interior Ministry announced its plan to check approximately 3,000 individuals and then organized immigration to Israel from Ethiopia would cease. <http://jta.org/news/article/2009/07/15/1006569/does-the-return-of-israeli-immigration-officials-return-to-ethiopia>

✍️ “Private Motive for Egypt’s Public Embrace of a Jewish Past” by **Michael Slackman**, published in *The New York Times*, September 6, 2009. In a place once called the Alley of the Jews in Old Cairo, the Egyptian government is busy renovating an abandoned, dilapidated synagogue. In fact, the government is publicly embracing its Jewish past. Generally, Egyptians do not make any distinction between Jewish people and Israelis; yet Egypt has slowly, quietly been working to restore its synagogues for several years. It has completed two projects and plans to restore about eight more. Rhetorically, **Slackman** asks

why this sudden public display of affection for Egypt’s Jewish past. Politics he posits, global politics. Egypt’s minister of culture, Farouk Hosny, wants to be the next director general of UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The synagogue is a historic one, actually, named after Rabbi Moses Ben Maimon, a physician and philosopher who is considered among the most important rabbinic scholars in Jewish history. He was born in Córdoba, Spain, in 1135, moved to Alexandria and eventually to Cairo. Known in the West as Maimonides, he worked and studied in the synagogue until his death. It was last used in 1960 and then was allowed to crumble, even as a new mosque was built right next door. It is unclear whether these projects will help Mr. Hosny in his bid for the UNESCO position and they may cause many residents to attack the government for spending money on them. Even so, the effort has already inspired some to see beyond the Arab-Israeli conflict, which for so many has defined faith, culture and heritage. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/07/world/middleeast/07cairo.html>

✍️ “Sukkat Shalom: From Uganda to U.S. and Back” by **Amy Klein**, published in *The Jewish Journal*, September 30, 2009. **Amy Klein** visits Rabbi Gershom Sizomu erev Sukkoth in his home village Nabugoye Hill, Uganda. She writes, “Many of the 3,000 Abayudaya were killed or converted during Idi Amin’s rule, and it is only in the last two decades that they have started to rebuild the community.” In May 2008, after five years of study at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies at American Jewish University in Los Angeles (four in Los Angeles and one in Israel), Sizomu was ordained, then returned home with his family. Since his return, he has been made chief rabbi of Uganda, completed 250 conversions, opened a yeshiva in Nabugoye Hill, fed nearby villages suffering from starvation and welcomed hundreds of Jewish guests from around the world in a modern guesthouse (with electricity and running water) that was funded by American Jews. **Klein** disperses bits of conversation with Sizomu revealing his philosophies, his dreams, problems, commentaries and his needs. “We need volunteers,” Sizomu says. “We have three schools, and we would like experts to come teach our children, people to come work in the health center, rabbis to come and teach and bring knowledge and skills from the outside.” **Klein** interviews others who tell us even more about Sizomu Maimonides. [http://www.jewishjournal.com/cover\\_story/article/sukkat\\_shalom\\_from\\_uganda\\_to\\_us\\_and\\_back\\_20090930/](http://www.jewishjournal.com/cover_story/article/sukkat_shalom_from_uganda_to_us_and_back_20090930/)

✍️ “The Ibos of Nigeria: Members of the Tribe? Part of a Trend in Sub-Saharan Africa To Claim Jewish Ancestry” by **Marc Perelman**, published in *The Jewish Daily Forward*, published October 2, 2008, issue of October 10, 2008. In 1999, a member of a Pentecostal messianic congregation in southeastern Nigeria traveled to Israel. Upon his return he convinced his whole congregation to embrace Judaism, claiming that they, the Ibos, were descendent of the Biblical Jews. Since that date Efraim Uba has founded the Association of Jewish Faith in Nigeria, an organization with some 20 congregations; the Jews in Nigeria are estimated to be 30,000 in number. Unlike the Abayudaya who underwent Conservative conversion, the Ibo Benei-Yisrael, as they sometimes call themselves, are reluctant to follow this approach as they claim to be Jewish by ancestry. Howard Gorin, the Conservative rabbi of the Tikvat Israel Congregation in Rockville, MD has been working with the Ibos since 2004, offering them advice on how best to earn official recognition. <http://www.forward.com/articles/14317/>

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