

KULANU

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Kulanu Global Teaching Fellows: Reflections from Ghana

By Loren Berman, Kulanu Teaching Fellow from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, New York City
Photos by Loren Berman and Joseph Nippah

Editor's Note: For one month this past summer, Kulanu sent five highly talented rabbinical students to five isolated and emerging Jewish communities around the world which have been seeking to deepen their Jewish literacy. These communities have few educational resources and were thrilled to host and learn from their volunteer rabbinical students. In this issue of Kulanu, we bring you stories from Ghana and Guatemala by two of those rabbinical students.



Loren Berman, Kulanu Teaching Fellow, with the elementary and middle school children in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana, taking a break while practicing the Aleph-Bet

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I received many questions pertaining to Jewish law during my time in Ghana—about birth, death, and everything in between. I could have answered these questions with a “yes” or a “no,” or a “well, it depends who you ask.” But I did not see that deciding what would be best for their community or what was or wasn’t in accordance with Jewish law as my role in working with the Ghanaian community. I went to Ghana with one goal in mind: to bring a new side of the Torah to life by exposing the community to rabbinic literature.

When I got to Sefwi Wiawso, I noticed that everyone knew the Hebrew Bible better than most, but none had ever studied its

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 accompanying rabbinic commentary. Thousands of years of rabbinic tradition were missing, and to be connected to the wider Jewish world, learning about this heritage would be critical. However, I was afraid that introducing the Talmud and



In Loren's words: This is Cynthia. I think she is six. She doesn't know any English, and I don't know if she can read in Twi or Sefwi, the local languages. But she's now pretty darn good at identifying the first ten letters of the Hebrew alphabet. This photo was not posed, but most likely captures a moment where she's looking closely at a letter that looks an awful lot like another one, guesses the letter "vet" and noticing I wait a split second longer than usual to go onto the next letter, she looks up at me with a huge smile, and shouts, "bet! bet! bet!"...I let that one slide because during those moments, she might just be the cutest tiny person in the world.



Joseph Nippah, community leader and Loren's guide, in his hometown. They were there for a Jewish community member's funeral.

Midrash would be seen as just another New Testament, something they rejected years ago. So, I had to do some research and personal soul-searching to understand why one might be more compelling for this community than the other.

After reviewing some of the very real gaps that exist in the Torah, which the rabbis try to fill in with interpretation and imagination, and the importance of commentary rooted in the original Hebrew language, the community and I agreed that an additional voice of harmony was needed to complement the Torah's baseline. For the next 5 weeks, we studied in chevruta (partner study) and as a wider group some of the fundamental Talmudic texts that outline the rabbinic project and which underlie many Jewish values. They were excited to notice, for example, that the opening words of the Torah are actually quite difficult to translate—and that understanding

the Midrash on this very point has profound theological implications. Or what to make of the different language used in the Ten Commandments throughout the Torah, which may ultimately



These 11 and 12-year-olds enjoy learning conversational Hebrew phrases and practicing reading Hebrew.



Loren teaching Hebrew to the elementary and middle school children

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Taking a break from learning Hebrew songs and games with the elementary and middle school children

affect their priorities in observing Shabbat. Or on what basis Jews have lit Shabbat candles for generations, which may add more meaning to this weekly practice.

Looking back on my time in Ghana, I admit that the community may not have gotten the Jewish legal advice they sought from me (okay, I indulged



Loren and the Mintah brothers eating Foo-Foo, a traditional Ghanaian food, in their home. The brothers grew up in Sefwi Wiawso and now all live together in Accra.

at times) but they did learn previously inaccessible texts and new perspectives through which to view Jewish tradition and their own place in the global Jewish community. Ultimately, I hope they come to see themselves not just as readers and followers of the Written Word, but as partners with, and unique creators of, Torah as well. *

Teaching Fellows: Reflections from Guatemala

By Margo Hughes-Robins, Kulanu Teaching Fellow from Jewish Theological Seminary, New York City
Photos by Margo Hughes-Robins

This past summer, I had the distinct privilege of serving as part of the inaugural cohort of the Kulanu Global Teaching Fellows. I spent the month of July teaching in Guatemala City with Congregation Adat Israel, a 35-person community associated with the Reform movement. For such a small community, it is surprisingly diverse: members include not only native Guatemalans, but also people who have moved from Mexico, Nicaragua, and Colombia. Congregants cite different reasons for seeking out a Reform Jewish community rather than attempt to join the more-established Orthodox synagogues in the city. Ethnic and economic discrimination has certainly played a large role in Adat Israel's genesis, but community members also spoke excitedly about embracing a Jewish way of life that celebrated equal ritual roles for people of all genders, LGBT

inclusion, and avenues to remain connected to wider Guatemalan culture. "We have to live in both worlds: We have to have space to live in the Guatemalan society and the Jewish society," says cantorial soloist Rebeca Orantes.

While Adat Israel is served long-term by volunteer Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, a Canada-based Reform rabbi, my four-week stay was the longest

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Las Mamas: The mothers of Adat Israel stand together on Shabbat morning after receiving a group Aliyah to the Torah

Kulanu Teaching Fellows: *continued from previous page*
visit from a rabbi or rabbinical student in Adat Israel's history. While almost all congregants work full-time, every other evening we held classes at the synagogue on subjects ranging from *Nevi'im* (Prophets) text study and Spanish-Portuguese Torah trope to liberal Jewish theology. Additionally, congregants stay at the synagogue Shabbaton-style each weekend, going home between Kabbalat Shabbat and Shacharit but praying, learning, and schmoozing together until Havdalah.

The community's enthusiasm for Torah is deep, rich, and hard-won: every member of Adat Israel has either undergone or is in the midst of the Jewish conversion process. As a Jew-by-choice myself, I felt blessed to spend my first congregational experience as a student-rabbi within a community where my own Jewish journey was a source of connection with everyone in the synagogue. We could share together the excitement of discovering ritual preference in the absence of *minhag avoteinu* (custom of our fathers)—although several members of Adat Israel trace their ancestry to *conversos* who came to Guatemala in the Colonial Period—and in the struggle of straddling the divide between one's home culture and Jewish faith-culture, and of identity recognition by the wider Jewish community. The latter has proved particularly painful. "There are so few Jews in the world, and anti-Semitism is unfortunately still an issue," congregants point out. "So why wouldn't Jewish people and communities want to stand together? Why wouldn't they recognize us as their



Community members of all ages gather in the synagogue to read Spanish *Nevi'im* texts in chevra study as part of a weekly evening class on the Hebrew prophets.

brothers and sisters?" It's a question I, too, have asked and found most answers lacking.

But the community presses on with impressive commitment. Some families at Adat Israel have begun to raise children Jewishly while still waiting for that recognition and acceptance, years into their own conversion study. One family has waited over ten years for a Beit Din, while others have struggled for recognition and legitimacy after finding themselves entrapped by invalid conversion courts, a problem in many places in Latin America. While cognizant of my privilege as a white person who sought conversion in the United States, I appreciated the resonance between the thirst for Torah and for Jewish life at Adat Israel, and my own hunger for Judaism that pushed me towards conversion over a decade ago. I'm grateful to Kulanu's Global Fellows program for the opportunity to have further discerned my own future rabbinate in a community different from my own, but so kindred in *ruach* (spirit). *



Community members—including synagogue board officers, long-time congregants, and conversion candidates—pose for a group photo after Margo's last Havdalah.



Margo Hughes-Robinson with synagogue officers Raudit Polo and her husband Santiago. Their infant granddaughter Saori was one of the first Jews-by-birth born in the community.

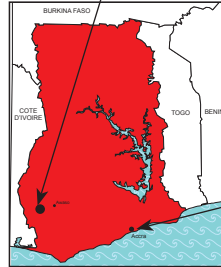
Where in the World is Kulanu in this Issue?

Kulanu is in touch with dozens of communities around the world. When we are contacted, we learn what their needs are and do our best to find ways in which to help them further their study and practice of Judaism and build their communities. You can see on this map where the communities featured in this issue of Kulanu are located.

Sefwi Wiawso, home of the Jewish community

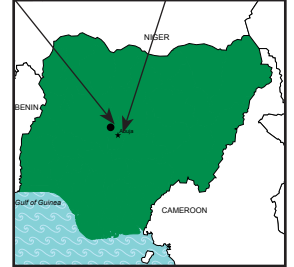
Kubwa, home of the Tikvat Israel Synagogue

Abuja, the capital

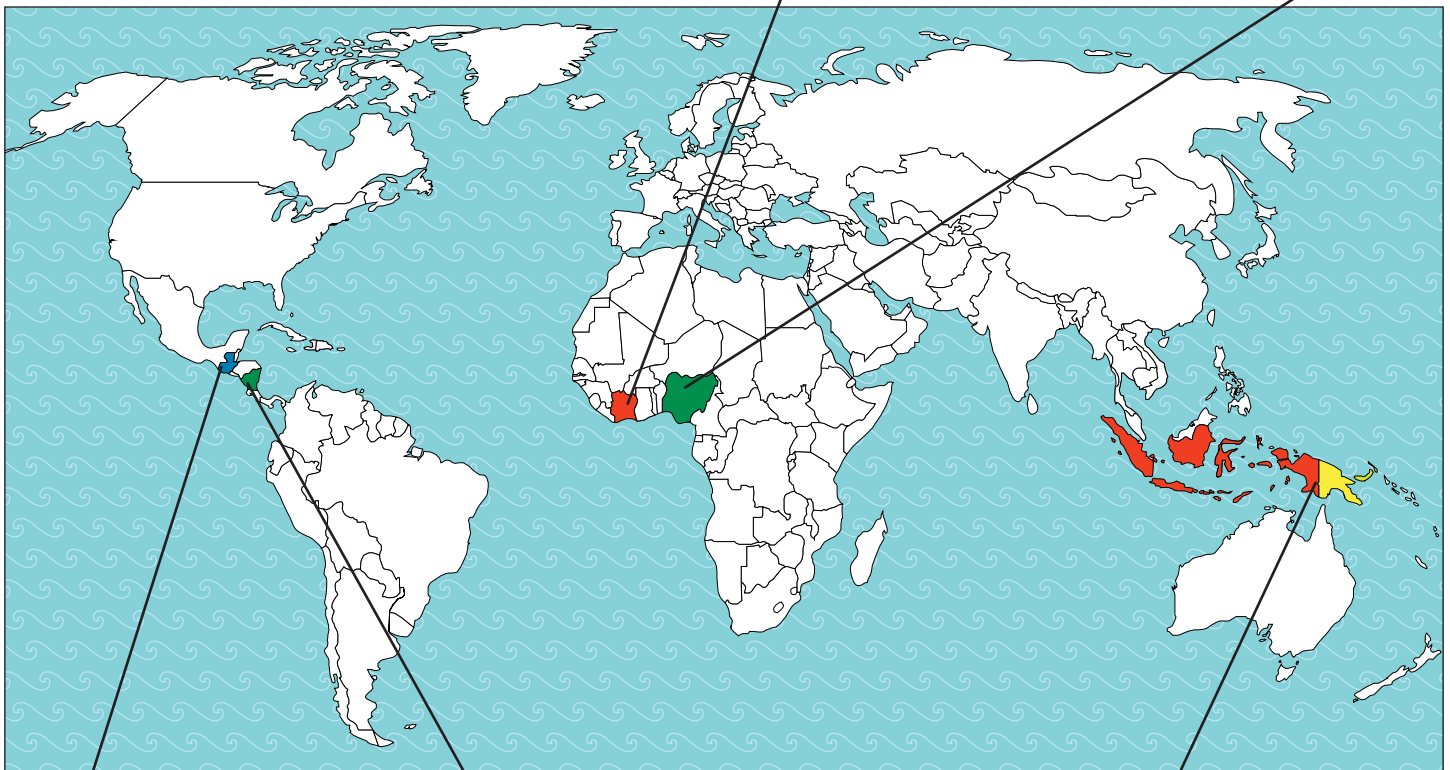


Accra, the capital

Ghana, p1



Nigeria, p6



Guatemala, p3, p18



Guatemala City, capital and home of Adat Israel

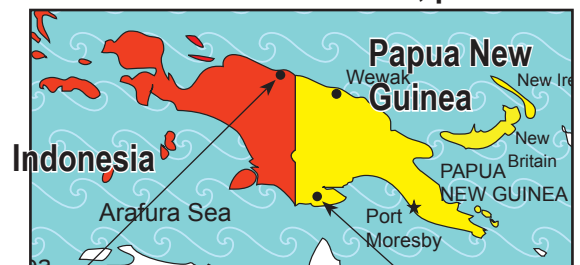
Nicaragua, p11, p24



Granada, home of Congregacion Israelita de Nicaragua

Managua, capital, home of Comunidad Judía Sefaradí en Nicaragua where the conversions and weddings were held, and home to Beit Avraham de Nicaragua

Island of New Guinea, p14



Jayapura, home of the Kehilat Yehudim Torat Chaim community

Balimo, home of the Gogodala

Yom Kippur in Nigeria, 5778 / 2017

by Lucy Steinitz

Photos by and courtesy of Lucy Steinitz

Editor's note: Lucy Steinitz became a lifetime member of Kulanu following her participation in the first Kulanu trip to the Abayudaya community in Uganda in 1995. She has since been active in Kulanu in many ways, which are outlined in the Volunteer Spotlight article on page 10, immediately following this article. She continues to travel widely for her work with Catholic Relief Services as the Senior Technical Advisor. This is what brought her to Nigeria, just prior to Yom Kippur.

My work took me to Nigeria immediately after Rosh HaShanah and I stayed through Yom Kippur, thanks to a wonderful reception I received at the Tikvat Israel Synagogue in Kubwa, a forty-five minute drive outside Nigeria's capital city of Abuja.

My preparations started weeks before when a fifty-pound box of machzorim (High Holiday prayer books) landed on our Baltimore doorstep, courtesy of Kulanu, a wonderful



Future guest rooms on the Tikvat Israel Synagogue compound

organization that supports re-emerging Jewish communities in unlikely places around the world. I repacked the books into two second-hand suitcases to leave with my hosts and added several metal mezuzot in my hand-luggage as additional gifts, not realizing that these would cause havoc with all the airport security monitors en route. Fortunately, once I explained what they were, I was allowed to "let God's word pass through," as one of the agents described it.

After arriving in Abuja (initially to lead a three-day workshop), I contacted Sar Habakkuk, leader of the Tikvat Israel Synagogue and Kulanu's main liaison to the Nigeria Jewish Federation. When Habakkuk told me that the Federation has 56 synagogue members and he knew of 8 other communities that are emerging, I was amazed. Even though each congregation is very small, almost all are reportedly growing. All consist of members from the Igbo ethnic group who believe themselves to be among the ten lost tribes of Israel. While most Igbo practice Christianity, many have observed some Jewish customs as far back as anyone can remember, such as keeping Saturday as the Sabbath day of rest.

The Tikvat Israel Synagogue lies among several unfinished buildings (envisioned as

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Lucy, the author, presenting Sar Habakkuk and fellow congregants in Kubwa, Nigeria with a donation of machzors from Kulanu

Yom Kippur in Nigeria: *continued from previous page*

guest rooms) and a small internet café with one working computer on the compound where Sar Habakkuk lives with his immediate family. Most significantly, this includes his son Hezekiah (aka Moshe Hezekiah) who ably serves as the congregation's main tutor and *sheliach tsibur* (leader of prayers), and studies Judaism intently over the internet or through books whenever he can. As yet, Nigeria has no ordained rabbi—though Hezekiah dreams of becoming the first one. Notably, there are only a few *Sifrei Torah* (Torah scrolls) in the country, so these rotate among the faithful. Kosher slaughterers are even rarer than Torahs, so all the Jews I met stick to fish, grains, and vegetables.

The Nigeria Jewish Federation has 56 synagogue members and at least 8 other emerging communities. Almost all of the congregations are growing.

Two days before Yom Kippur, I met with Hezekiah and his friend Japhet Echegwo at my hotel. Afterwards, I arranged for transport to and from the synagogue via my office. The directions weren't clear so we had to ask people in Kubwa town for the synagogue—and, when they didn't understand, we asked for the “Jewish church” and even the “Sabbath-worshippers,” but none of these designations brought a flicker of recognition. Finally, someone asked if we meant the “bearded prayer house.” That proved successful and its accuracy caused great mirth at the synagogue. When I asked Habakkuk afterwards why there are no signboards on the street identifying Tikvat Israel for visitors, he answered that while that the community is not worried about their safety they also don't want to give the impression that they proselytize.

I arrived at the synagogue on Friday afternoon. Like most events in Nigeria, things ran late so we were pushing twilight by the time

Mincha services ended and we could break for some spicy fish soup just prior to the Yom Kippur fast. The electricity had gone off but miraculously, just as the Kol Nidre prayer began (post-candlelighting, so I did not take any more photographs), all of the lights suddenly turned back on. As you can imagine, everyone present (15 men and 4 women) took this as a good sign.

The services are all in Hebrew. Many melodies were unfamiliar to me, but I could tell that their “Lecha Dodi” prayer had a distinctly Ugandan ring to it, probably stemming from the time that Hezekiah spent with the Abayudaya Jews in Uganda under the tutelage of Rabbi Gershom Sizomu. Hezekiah's voice resonated strongly through the various services. The congregation's members stood barefoot on a thin carpet for virtually all the prayers, having removed all the chairs from the sanctuary prior to the holiday. (Women sit separately and, since in the women's area there was no carpet, I insisted on retaining a chair.)



The women's section at Tikvat Israel Synagogue in Kubwa, Nigeria

Saturday morning services started quite early, before it got hot. Early in the afternoon, Habakkuk called for a two-hour break and members sprawled all over the floor or on nearby benches. Initially I heard the men talk about world politics but then, as the temperature pushed higher and sweat dripped off our

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Yom Kippur in Nigeria: *continued from previous page*

foreheads, all I heard was snoring. When we gathered again for prayers, the wind suddenly picked up and a deafening rainstorm crashed against the synagogue's tin roof and open windows. Worshipers had to huddle together during the Ne'ilah prayers, pitting their voices to be heard above the storm. Happily, the rain stopped just as the holiday ended so we could venture outside once more.

The congregation welcomed me warmly in every way they could, even though it quickly became obvious that my own style of Jewish practice differed from theirs. Nevertheless, I was asked to give a d'var Torah (biblical teaching) on Saturday afternoon, so I drew my inspiration from the Book of Jonah, whose hero initially ran away from God's call and landed in a big fish where he lived in darkness, without food or water, for three days and three nights. I was a bit nervous about my open-ended non-Orthodox approach, but after the services were over several people said I made them think and they liked it.

Who are the members? I didn't get the chance to speak to most of the women (whose English was very limited), nevertheless some trends came through. Given that almost all the members were raised in Christian families, I wanted to know how they had changed. Several described



Young boy lighting the candle during havdalah

a spiritual journey that first took them to a Messianic church (retaining the belief in Jesus as the messiah, but with Jewish practices), and then to Tikvat Israel. For example, Sar Habakkuk transitioned from Christian to Messianic in 1994 and then decided to become "wholly Jewish" ten years later.

When I asked what is most difficult thing about being Jewish in Nigeria, the answer I received had to do with employment: the men, most of whom are university educated, can't find jobs that allow them to take off Friday afternoons and Saturdays. As a result, there is a strong culture of self-employment at the synagogue, in occupations, for example, in computer technology (Japhet's) or construction (Okwuya's).

Difficulties in finding a spouse also came up: several young men in their mid-thirties said they are still looking for a wife, either someone who is already Jewish or else a Christian Igbo who would be willing to change her practice. (For example, Japhet spoke of his fiancée's father breaking off the engagement when he transitioned from Messianic to Jewish. Presumably for Jewish women this problem is even harder, as Igbo custom does not allow them to initiate a relationship.) When I asked Japhet if he ever regretted his choice, having given up a salaried



Inside the Tikvat Israel Synagogue in Kubwa, Nigeria

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Yom Kippur in Nigeria: *continued from previous page*



Lucy with some members of the congregation after Yom Kippur

job and a fiancé in order to become Jewish, he answered confidently, “I don’t regret it at all. Now I study Judaism on the internet and I am learning Hebrew... I know that this is

what HaShem wants me to do with my life.”

It was interesting to me that the number one problem that the Beit Avraham of Ethiopia used to mention is not a problem

here at all: In Ethiopia, there is neither a non-denominational cemetery nor a Jewish one, so community elders maintain a veneer of Christianity just so that they will qualify for burial. But in Nigeria, virtually all Igbo have ties to land someplace in the southeast (or wherever they originally came from) and the tradition is to bury relatives within the original family homestead.

Worldwide, there are up to 50 million Igbo. Add these to emerging Jewish groups of Lemba Jews (Zimbabwe and South Africa), Ethiopian Jews and descendants of the Abayudaya in Uganda, and gradually the face of Judaism may change forever. Intriguing, don’t you think? *



Havdalah



Sar Habbakuk in front of his home

Kulanu’s support for the Jewish communities in Nigeria has been ongoing. Hezekiah and Solomon’s two months in Uganda were sponsored and arranged by Kulanu, and the laptop computer and the internet access were provided by Kulanu as well. A Torah was donated by Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun in New York City. David Tobis, with Kulanu’s assistance, raised funds for a sofer to kasher the Torah. The Torah was transported by Rabbi Barry Dolinger, who taught for a week in Abuja with support from Kulanu.

Volunteer Spotlight: Lucy Steinitz

By Lucy Y. Steinitz, Ph.D.

Editor's Note: *Kulanu is fortunate to have many people from around the world who are committed to our mission and who volunteer their time in Kulanu communities abroad. Lucy Steinitz is one of our wonderful volunteers. Here Lucy shares with our readers how she became part of Kulanu. You can read the story of her most recent adventure starting on page 6.*



Kulanu volunteer Lucy and friends dancing, Kenya 2015

My Jewish background was shaped by the fact that I grew up as the only child of Holocaust survivors. After getting my doctorate in social work, I served as the Executive Director of Jewish Family Services in Central Maryland for almost fifteen years (1981-1996). Given that my husband was born in Germany and our two children born in Guatemala, it seemed perfectly natural that I would be interested in the diversity of Jewish communities worldwide. After getting to know Aron and Karen Primack as we volunteered together (with our children) in Zimbabwe for the American Jewish World Service in 1994, the Primacks invited me to join them for the first Kulanu trip to the Abayudaya in Uganda. Of course, I jumped at the chance. That was in 1995 and I got so excited by what I saw that I became a lifetime Kulanu member!

The next summer I returned to the Abayudaya, this time with my husband and children (then, ages 10 and 8). My husband had the additional honor of bringing the Abayudaya their first Sefer Torah, initially as a long-term loan because the community had not yet officially converted to Judaism. When we arrived after dark at the synagogue at Nabugoye Hill, their only light came from a car battery that powered a blank TV screen, but the energy from everyone singing and dancing lit up the whole village. We stayed almost

a week and had a wonderful time making friends and partaking in village life.

I mean, who couldn't get hooked after all that? By comparison, life in the United States was feeling predictable and boring and by year's end I had a full-fledged mid-life crisis. Consequently, six months later, we ended up back in Africa once again with the whole family. This time we went to Namibia, ostensibly for a one-year adventure but liked it so much that we ended up staying 13 years—with me working mostly on issues related to HIV & AIDS and my husband teaching at the local technical university.

After our years in Namibia, we traveled around the world for a year and found ourselves in Ethiopia where I got another job. This is where I got involved on behalf of Kulanu with the Beit Avraham Jewish community that is based in the Kechene neighborhood of Addis Ababa (a breakaway branch from the bulk of Ethiopian Jews who stem from the Gondar area of the country). Some Kulanu readers may remember the article in a previous newsletter about the album of Jewish music from that community that we put together—still on sale via Amazon at bit.ly/temesgen.

Since 2014, my husband and I have been back in the USA but I still travel a lot, mostly for my current work as Senior Technical Advisor with Catholic Relief Services. In addition to the longer time we spent in Namibia and Ethiopia, over the years I have been fortunate to visit Jewish communities in India, Zimbabwe, the Congo, Ecuador, Cambodia, Kenya, Uganda and most recently, Nigeria.

Kulanu has been such a source of knowledge and support for many Jewish communities around the world, and I am honored to be a part of an organization that seeks to serve others and to help these communities become stronger in their Judaism. *

Memories from Nicaragua

By Bonita Nathan Sussman

I recently returned from Nicaragua where I helped organize the conversion of 114 people. About half of the people claim descentance from Anousim (Jews forced to convert after the Inquisition); the other half had been Christians who may or may not have Jewish ancestry and are now following Chassidic traditions. One man is the son of a Holocaust survivor. A few experiences stand out in my mind.



This elderly woman is ill and wants to die a Jew. She is so grateful for the conversion Kulanu helped organize. She is pictured with her health aide. Photo by Judi Klover

One elderly woman was especially memorable. She was ill and wanted to die as a Jew. As conversions in Nicaragua are impossible to come by, this was her only chance. After the required interview, she asked the Bet Din (members of the rabbinical court) if they would allow her to convert and go to the mikveh, the ritual bath that concludes conversion. After discussion, they agreed. The next day the elderly woman appeared with her home health attendant, clean and ready to immerse. She was put at the head of the line. I asked to serve this one time as the “mikveh lady,” the attendant who witnesses the immersion, testifies to the Bet Din that it occurred properly, and recites the blessings for the convert to repeat.

The woman entered the mikveh area with her home health attendant. The aide helped her

undress on the side of the mikveh. I watched her frail, naked body slowly descend the steps into the water. She had very long hair and I tried to explain how to hold it down under the water and then let go of it. The first time she tried, her head didn't go under. The aide, who was previously coached on the rules of immersion, understood that she had to do it again. The woman tried for the second time; this time the aide pushed her down. “Kosher,” I screamed so the Bet Din could hear me. She recited the blessing after me and immersed a second time. By this time, I was farklemt, choked up. I began the Shehecheyanu blessing for her to repeat and messed it up. Oy! I finally got it right, and she repeated it. Coming out of the mikveh after her third immersion, the woman gave me a high five. Her face glowed. It reminded me of the prayer during the Avodah section of the Yom Kippur service. When the High Priest exited the Holy of Holies, it says, “His face shone like a groom coming out of his chuppah (wedding canopy).”

Another memorable event concerns the 24 Jewish weddings that took place after the conversions.

Before I left for Nicaragua, I went shopping. On one of my shopping trips for all kinds of paraphernalia, including pens, paper clips, Shabbat candles, and plastic wine glasses, I saw



Brides adorning each other with earrings. Photo by Boni Sussman

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Memories from Nicaragua: *continued from previous page*
a pack of fake diamond earrings that cost 99 cents for 20 pairs. I bought the pack and threw it into my baggage, hoping to remember it. As it turned out, I did remember.

While the brides were waiting, I noticed that some had no earrings. I took out the pack and began to pass the earrings around. There were smiles on their faces when the brides put them in each other's ears, and big smiles when they looked at themselves and felt more

beautiful than before. It was a small gesture that made all the hard work and months of planning worthwhile.

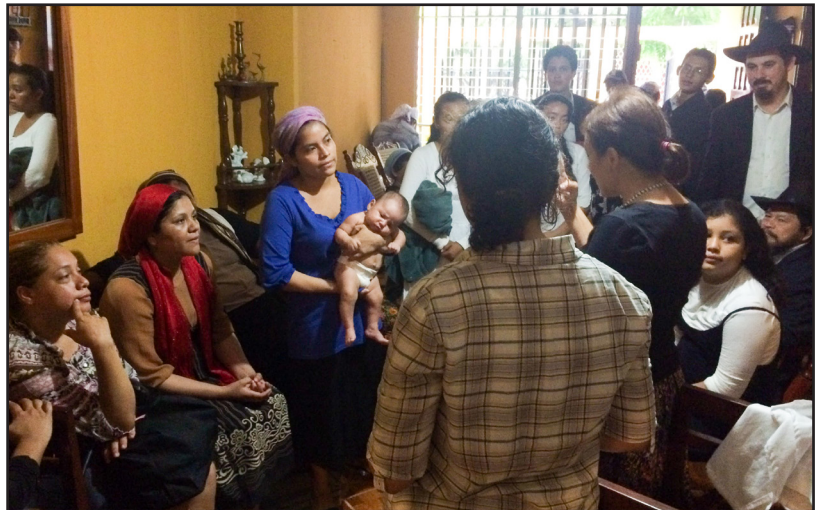
In the last 100 years, Jews have endured the Holocaust, the destruction of old Jewish communities in Arab lands, and the rebuilding of a Jewish homeland. I believe we are entering a new era of rebuilding the Jewish people. Today, the vital interest in Judaism lies in Africa, South America, and India. For Jews, this is an invitation to become part of this exciting new development. *

Nicaraguan Simcha 2017

Photos by Judi Kloper, Boni Sussman, Moshé Henriquez



Above, a tired but eager group arriving in Nicaragua with a gift of a Torah (center front, wrapped up)! From left to right: Rabbi Mark Kunis and wife Cheryl of Georgia; Rabbi Bonita Sussman and husband Rabbi Gerry Sussman of New York; Rabbi Marc Philippe of Florida; Dr. Marla Brettschneider of Massachusetts.



Above, Cheryl Kunis (in black with her back to us) instructs the women who are waiting for immersion in the mikveh

Below, left to right, Rabbis Mark Kunis, Andy Eichenholz of Israel, and Marc Philippe, along with Even Centeno who helped translate.



Right, the Beit Din meets with each family and learns about their path to Judaism. Photo by Joshua Kristal



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Nicaraguan Simcha: continued from previous page



Above, Moshé Henriquez and his wife, Yehudit Alvarado, look on as Rabbi Andy completes the *Ketubbah*, the traditional Jewish marriage contract.



Above, these brides are waiting for the procession to start down the stairs into the main hall where their grooms and guests are waiting.

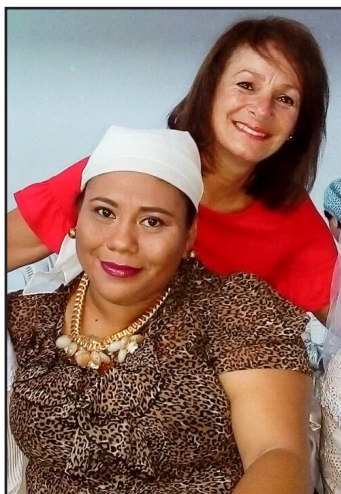


Left, Kulanu Magazine editor and board member Judi Kloper with some of Moshé's family members



Right, Moshé Henriquez with his father, Aharon Kadosh, who, along with their whole family, became Jews

Previous page, bottom right: Finally, after all the conversions and weddings, there were enough men for a minyan! It was held outside the wedding hall. Rabbi Marc Philippe and Even are reading Hebrew prayers on a phone.



Left, Alissa Adara (seated) and Cheryl Kunis had a lot to be happy about!



Right, Dassi Kloper-Owens (daughter of Judi Kloper) enjoyed volunteering so much and getting to know everyone, including Bitia Gadit (left) and Ashira Slija (right).

Two Stories from the Island of New Guinea

Editor's Note: The following two articles are written by Kulanu volunteer and board member Ari Greenspan. Ari is a mohel and shochet, and in his free time works as a dentist in Jerusalem. He is married with 3 daughters and has lived in Israel for 30 years. For close to 40 years, his hobby has been the nexus of Jewish history and tradition, Jewish communities, and Jewish law. He was able to travel to many Jewish communities around the world, including in Ethiopia and Russia, before he made aliyah to Israel. Kulanu and Ari have crossed paths over the years, and when he read about an emerging Jewish community that Kulanu was involved with in Papua New Guinea (the Gogodala), he decided to visit. While on the island of New Guinea, he visited Indonesia on the western side of the island, a Muslim country, and met Crypto-Jews who only recently have publicly announced their connection as well as their intention to be part of the Jewish nation. We are so happy to have Ari on our board. Ari was joined on this trip to both sides of the island of New Guinea by Ari Zivotofsky.



The island of New Guinea lies north of Australia. Its western half is a part of Indonesia, where Ari met the Kehilat Yehudim Torat Chaim community in his first story. Its eastern half is Papua New Guinea, home of the Gogodala tribe in the second story. See map page 5 for more detail.

Anousim in Indonesia: A New Kulanu Community

by Ari Greenspan

Photos by Ari Greenspan

On the western half of the island of New Guinea, in the Indonesian town of Jayapura, live 150 people who are part of a vibrant Jewish community called Kehilat Yehudim Torat Chaim. One thing that makes this community unique is that they are a proud and open Jewish community in the world's most populous Muslim-majority country. They are proud of their heritage and openly fly the Israeli flag and declare themselves as Jews.

We were met at the border of Papua New Guinea and Indonesia by members of

this community and we immediately drove to Jayapura, Indonesia, the provincial capital, where the synagogue is in the house of Aharon Sharon, the community's leader. We were welcomed by passionate singing—with dancing and jumping—for close to 30 minutes. This is a community of all ages, including many young people and kids. Everyone works; most of them work in the world's largest gold mine for 2 weeks on and then two weeks off. They explained that they arranged not to work on Shabbat when they are at the mine.



Jayapura, Papua Indonesia: Fascinated children watching the author, Ari G., downloading photos from one of the community member's camera. Photo by Ari Zivotofsky



A vibrant and passionate welcome in Jayapura, Indonesia! The author spent 4 hours talking with the entire community.

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Anousim in Indonesia: *continued from previous page*

Aharon shared this story about his family's history: his ancestors fled to Peru during the Inquisition. When the Inquisition followed them to Peru, the community sent some young people in a boat westward to a place their ancestors called the "Blue Mountain." After a sojourn in Japan, where Aharon's unique last name comes from, they landed in Jayapura. They kept Shabbat and Jewish customs. When Indonesia required all residents to declare membership in one of the five official religions in the country, they chose to be called Christians. Yet they did not go to church. The missionaries caused them to dilute their beliefs and practice. When asked about their customs and traditions, Aharon related how they were sung a lullaby with the words, "Once you were 12 brothers, now you are none." Discussing his ancestors, he did not remember first names as they would not call an elder by his or her first name. "However," he explained,, "we have a word we used to call the elders. That word is *melamdim*." He did not understand the word, nor did he know it was the Hebrew word meaning teachers.

There were 3 different communities represented. The one from Timika, about 2 hours by plane, had an interesting story. They actually had

a Torah that they brought with them. Around the turn of the 20th century, the missionaries took it and burnt their books. They, too, have now reemerged as Jews and have a synagogue as well. It is hard for the groups to get together as a community because the flights are expensive. One thing that bodes well for them is the interesting American-born Orthodox rabbi who lives in Jakarta. Rabbi Tuvia Singer, who is well-known as the director of a counter-missionary organization, moved to Jakarta and helps and supports the Timika community. I hope that with Kulanu's assistance one or two people will be able to travel there for a month. The community also desires to have a Sefer Torah.

Time will tell where this story goes. *



Aharon Sharon demonstrating his shofar-blowing ability



Jayapura, Papua Indonesia: The author and Ari Zivotofsky in front of the shul with children from the community. The synagogue is attached to the house of their leader, Aharon Sharon.



A young boy at the welcome party in Indonesia

A proud participant in the Jayapura classes at the welcoming party

Second Story from the Island of New Guinea on next page

Revisiting the Gogodala:

An Unexpected Shabbat in Papua New Guinea

by Ari Greenspan

Photos by Ari Greenspan

There's a riveting video on YouTube with hundreds of people wearing grass skirts and war paint in Papua New Guinea, all singing the Shema. My interest was piqued, and when I heard Kulanu was involved, I decided to visit the tribe, known as the Gogodala. The Gogodala claim descent from the ten lost tribes of Israel, and a visit by Kulanu volunteers and Professor Tudor Parfitt in 2013 cemented a relationship with a community in search of itself. Their dynamic leader, Tony Waisa, reinstituted their traditional Saturday prayers and is pushing for a more Jewish approach to tradition, yet others in the tribe disagree. The emergence of Jewish identity is fascinating to observe.

with Stars of David and a beautiful welcome sign in front of the sign from Kulanu's first visit. There were speeches and words of Torah and songs exchanged. We gave them gifts of havdalah candles and challah covers and they adorned us in handmade blue and white scarves. We were moved by this community's true love of Israel and the God of Israel. Israeli flags were everywhere, and we could feel their strong desire to move to their ancestral origins of "Yabi Saba," or what they say was Jerusalem. They described their traditions and the difference between themselves and all of the other tribes. We talked about Jewish history and destiny, and we tried to give them hope and support.



An enthusiastic reception outside the airport in Papua New Guinea for the author and his traveling companion Ari Zivotofsky

The tribe is centered in the small village of Balimo, which is located in the jungle and only reachable by a small plane twice a week. We took a 12-seater, landed on a grass strip, and 1 ½ hours later after traveling on a dinghy upriver, we made landfall to an extremely joyful welcome. Five hundred people were waiting, with long rows of men, women, and children wearing kippot and tallitot, dancing, singing Jewish songs, and blowing the shofar, and they accompanied us towards the large open structure. It was bedecked

We needed to fly back on Friday for the Sabbath but our flight from this remote location was cancelled. We had brought almost nothing with us for the one night stay and all our kosher food and Shabbat provisions were left back in the capital, Port Moresby. Also we had scheduled a large gathering of tribe members in the capital for Shabbat so we needed to return. It was explained to us that the closest plane was on the Island of Daru, "six hours downriver." Thus



Members of the crowd of about 500 people listened to different speakers, including Ari G. and Ari Z., discussing topics of Judaism and encouraging the community in their studies and practice.

continued on next page

Revisiting the Gogodala: *continued from previous page*

started an adventure worthy of a book. The six hours turned into 24 hours with stops in remote river villages, and facing potential tidal waves and the open sea with large waves—all on a small dinghy! We made landfall Friday at 12:30 only to have the afternoon flight back to Port Moresby cancelled. With no food, dirty and wet clothing, and no place to sleep, we, along with Tony, turned a disaster into one of our most meaningful Shabbats. When he understood we would not fly on Saturday, he kept repeating in amazement, “What a testament this observance of the Sabbath will be!”

However, maybe the most surprising thing was that on this isolated backwater were three small groups of Gogodala Sabbath believers. We met them on Shabbat afternoon in a house. We were amazed to see a lectern with the Star of David, the flag of Israel, and the Shema tacked up on

the wall. When people in kippot and with tallitot arrived, we understood that we were supposed to spend Shabbat here.

How the emerging Gogodala will turn out is yet to be seen. Their balance of Judaism and Christianity is in flux. However, they all feel a sense of belonging to the people of Israel. But this phenomenon of return, joining, and reemergence is spreading. I am proud to say that Kulanu is at the forefront of this worldwide movement. *



A community leader and others were decked out in tallitot traveling up the river from the landing strip to the village.



Ari and Ari with some of the community leaders on the field by the shul



One of the women wore a traditional woven Papua bag

There were a lot of Israeli flags welcoming Ari and Ari when they arrived.

Guatemala: Adat Israel Ushers in 5778 with Altitude

By Rabbi Eliot J. Baskin

Photos by Rabbi Eliot J. Baskin and Alvaro Orantes

Editor's Note: Rabbi Eliot J. Baskin, D.Min., DD., serves as Denver's Jewish Community Chaplain and the Rabbinic Director of Rafael Spiritual Healing Center at Jewish Family Service of Colorado. He enjoys teaching spirituality for Kevod Senior Living, volunteering for the Denver Police Chaplains' Unit, teaching philosophy for Argosy University, and leading holiday services for cruise lines and congregations the world over. He has traveled to all fifty American states, all ten Canadian provinces, and almost one hundred countries connecting Jews to Jewish life. Recently he has volunteered to lead holiday services in Guatemala, Myanmar, and Bali.

After a year hiatus, I returned with my wife, Dr. Hilary Nieberg Baskin, to volunteer to lead Shabbat Shuvah and Yom Kippur 5778 Days of Awe in one of the highest WUPJ (World Union for Progressive Judaism) congregations, Adat Israel (www.adatisrael.info). This Reform congregation is located in 1.5 km high Guatemala City, the same altitude and time zone as we live in the mile "chai" city of Denver, Colorado, USA. Rabbi Debby Hachen participated in leading Rosh Hashanah services while on a cruise shore excursion, while I was attending Rosh Hashanah

services as a "Jew in the pew" for the first time in 36 years. I admired the gorgeous new beautiful jade inlaid ark built by a community member and the new Torah graciously donated by Anshe Emet of Pine Bluff, Arkansas.



Yom Kippur discussion about Teshuvah

After "Holy Hevruta" (sharing in pairs about why we were there, forgiveness, and teshuvah), we sang *nigunnim* (Jewish religious song often sung with repetitive sounds instead of formal lyrics) and swayed together to increase our *kavanot* (our heart's intentions) for the Days of Awe. We sang Ein Keloheinu in Ladino, and Sanctuary Song, translated into Spanish by our enthusiastic soloist Rivka Orantes, from the Shir Chadash CD donated by the Hebrew Educational Alliance (HEA) synagogue (headenver.org) where we daven in Denver.

The trilingual Machzor, courtesy of Kulanu's generosity with gracious licensing from the WUPJ-affiliated B'nei Israel congregation of Costa Rica, made services easier to comprehend and meaningful for all, regardless of language. I loved introducing the Amidah by singing the Adonai Sefatai Tiftach in Hebrew, Spanish, and English!



Detail of the jade inlay on Adat Israel's ark. Photo by Margo Hughes-Robinson, whose story about her visit with Adat Israel begins on page 3 of this issue.

We began with a spirited Shabbat Shuvah service and had Hilary, an

continued on next page

Guatemala: Adat Israel, continued from previous page

For our Yom Kippur haftarah discussion, I asked what would the prophet Isaiah say if he came to Guatemala City? Congregants weighed in with their answers, including that Isaiah would advocate for electoral reform, human rights, and protection for minors in government care. In the afternoon we did a Bibliodrama about living in a wicked society.



Congregants participating in a Bibliodrama Book of Jonah about living in a wicked society

We ended Yom Kippur by burning our sins (which we had written out) with our havdalah candle before enjoying our break-fast of traditional Guatemalan soup and treats.

While the greater Jewish community is continuing to dwindle from about 800 families, there is potential for the Reform community to grow among Jews by Choice and Conversos, ex-pats, and spiritual-seekers from Antigua and Lake Atitlan who joined us. The traditional community, Centro Hebraica, is closed to the public-at-large because of security concerns, although we managed a tour and introduced ourselves to Rabino Garmon and gave regards from Adat Israel's hard working president, Jeannette Orantes.

I was impressed to see how the Progressive community has grown both in numbers and learning! My family and I appreciated the warmth of Adat Israel and look forward to building on our Guatemalan



Challah-baking with Hilary Baskin

friendships and serving other WUPJ congregations in the upcoming new year! *Muchas gracias* to all who lead, support, and participate in this very sweet community. Thank you to Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, Adat Israel's regular visiting rabbi, for her gracious and insightful advice and guidance as spiritual leader. Thank you also to Adrienne Rosen, who generously donated airline miles for my flight. Shana Tova 5778—*un dulce y hermoso año* (a sweet and beautiful year)! *



Rabbi Eliot leading a group aliyah for the congregants of Adat Israel

Kulanu Notes

Life Cycle News



Rabbi/Cantor Oizer Neuman.

Photo by Barbara Vinick

- We are saddened by the death of **Rabbi/Cantor Oizer Neuman, z”l**. Rabbi Neuman was an incredible asset to Kulanu who assisted in conversions in Nicaragua and Madagascar, as well as the conversions of several Kulanu visitors to the USA over the years. He is survived by his children.

- We are also saddened by the passing of **Rachel Beth Leon, z”l**, the daughter of former board member **Rabbi Stephen Leon**; she passed away on Yom Kippur. She is survived by her husband David and siblings Rebekah and Shoshana. Rabbi Leon has been central to our

work with the Anousim community and runs the Anousim Center in El Paso, Texas.

- In happier news, **Modreck Maeresera and his wife Brenda** of Zimbabwe welcomed their third child, Maya Miriam (Mickey) on June 29th. She is named after Kulanu volunteer **Miriam (Mickey) Feinberg**.

- Kulanu is happy to share that we are sponsoring **Dr. Moshé Henriquez** in his enrollment in rabbinical school program. Moshé, of Managua, Nicaragua, will be attending the online Spanish-language rabbinical school Yeshiva Pirjei Shoshanim, based in Israel, for the year. Moshé was instrumental in Kulanu’s recent visit to Nicaragua, opening his home to, and helping organize, 114 conversions from his community and two others in Nicaragua.

Kulanu in the Community

- **Kulanu Vice President Boni Sussman** participated in the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies conference in July. She discussed **Dr. Tudor Parfitt’s** research on genetic testing of the Lemba of Zimbabwe and the Gogodala tribe of Papua New Guinea. She also spoke at the Morasha Forum (Union of Traditional Judaism) about Kulanu’s involvement in Nicaragua and the recent conversions there.

- **Kulanu secretary Barbara Vinick** spoke in September on the recent conversion of the Jewish community of Madagascar at Hadassah of Vermont’s annual luncheon at Temple Sinai in South Burlington. She will be discussing her visit to Madagascar again at the JCC of the North Shore in Marblehead, Massachusetts on November 17th at 11:00 AM. All are welcome.

Kulanu Developments



Clockwise: Harriet Bograd (USA); Boni Sussman (USA); Rebeca and Jeannette Orantes (Guatemala); Amir (Serge) Etele (Cameroon)

- On September 17th, Kulanu hosted its first **International Skype Conference!** The conference consisted of English-speaking representatives of many of the communities with whom we work in Africa, India, and Latin America. The leaders came together to discuss the successes and frustrations of developing their communities, as well as ideas to support one another. It was a great success and we look forward to hosting more in the future.

continued on next page

Notes, continued

• Kulanu held its annual board retreat

this past May in Miami Beach. We are thankful for **Temple Emanu-El of Miami Beach** for hosting us over the weekend. Our thanks as well to **Professor Tudor Parfitt** and **The Jewish Museum of Florida-FIU** (Florida International University) for generously allowing us to use their space for our meetings. Board

Rachman Nachman Video

Rachman Nagwere (also known as Rachman Nachman), 31, an Abayudayan Jew living in Brooklyn, sent us an article which we've excerpted here: "I travelled to Uganda to visit my home and to bring some food, using funds I raised in the USA to help. While there, I recorded this song and got positive responses from the public. With the help of my friend Edward Rensin and videographer Rebecca Israel, I came come up with good ideas for the video which also features a group of traditional young artists known as Hope Cultural Troupe. I am sending a message of peace and also showing the cultural life of Uganda, and looking for opportunities to improve

members gathered together to discuss future programming of Kulanu, and, after a special Havdalah ceremony, hosted a reception for **Remy Ilona** to celebrate the completion of his Master's Degree in Religious Studies. Remy, who is from the Igbo community in Nigeria, has studied with Professor Parfitt for the past two years at FIU with help from Kulanu.

the lives for people such as these kids who are featured.

It would please me very much if you would view my video and share it with others."

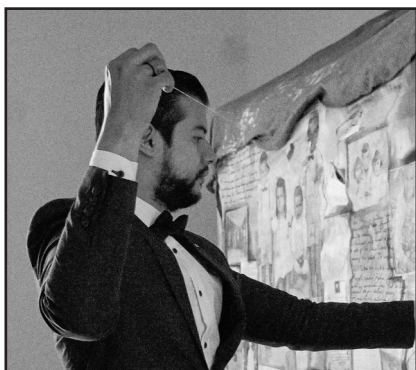
Rachman's entire story about this video: bit.ly/rachmanstory.

Video link: bit.ly/mulembebyrachman.



Rachman Nachman, who sends us a message of peace through song and video

Kulanu Anousim Speaking Tour 2017-2019



Jewish artist Jonatas Chimen is available to come to your community for Kulanu's Anousim speaking tour.

We are excited to kick off our annual Kulanu Speaking Tour featuring Brazilian-American Jewish artist Jonatas Chimen. This speaking tour will continue into 2019.

Chimen will discuss his family's history and migration to

America and his return to Judaism as part of the B'nei Anousim community. His narrative encompasses his artwork as well, as it best describes his family's story of acclimating as foreigners in many new lands, changing identities throughout the years in an effort to not be persecuted, while

still retaining the core of who they were.

He is best known for his piece *In Thy Tent I Dwell*. Using the metaphor of a tent, Chimen speaks of the universal immigrant experience of wandering throughout time and space, and discusses the isolation and secret religious practices which his family was forced to adopt as far back as the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions in the 15th century.

Jonatas is scheduled to speak in New Jersey at Congregation Ohab Shalom in Teaneck and at the United Synagogue of Hoboken, and at the Jewish History Museum in Tucson, Arizona, with more speaking events in the works.

If you want to explore bringing Jonatas to your community, please complete this form: bit.ly/kulanu-inquiry-form. Thanks! *

Book Review of *In the Shadow of Moses: New Jewish Movements in Africa and the Diaspora*

Edited by Daniel Lis, William F. Miles, and Tudor Parfitt

Reviewed by Santiago Slabodsky, Kaufman Chair in Jewish Studies, Hofstra University

Editor's Note: *Most of the essays in In the Shadow of Moses were written mainly by members of Kulanu's Academic Cohort. This cohort is comprised of academics who have researched and written about returning, emerging and isolated Jewish communities around the globe. We are proud to assist scholars by providing resources and connections to our partner communities, and we love seeing ever-strengthening connections between the academic study of Judaizing communities and the work that Kulanu does.*

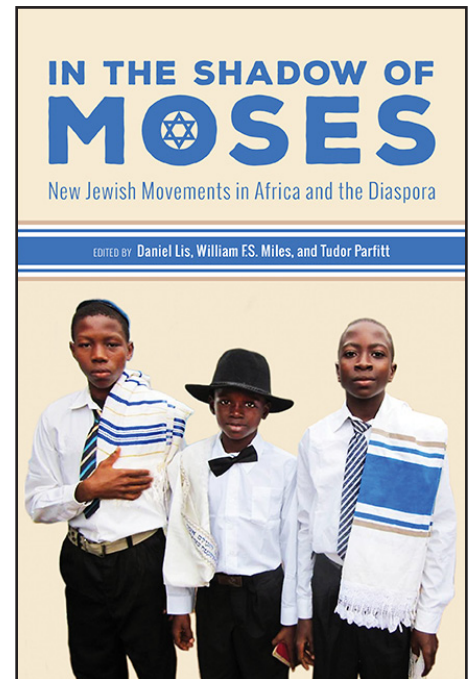
For a long time, scholars, journalists, religious leaders, and even politicians have presumed the decline of religious identity and the secularization of the world. In recent years, however, a number of intellectuals and social organizations have shown us that we may have spoken too quickly in presuming that the experience of Europe and America is universal. In the rest of the world, new dynamic, complex and provocative religious movements are emerging. Christianity and Islam are radically changing their forms to accommodate their increasing constituencies in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America.

The study of Judaism seems to have been largely excluded from this phenomenon. Indeed, Judaism has become more and more exclusive with its insistence on the European-American-Israeli reach. The publication of the book *In the Shadows of Moses: New Jewish Movements*

in Africa and the Diaspora is a provocative challenge to this limited geographical outlook. The editors of this collection, Drs. Lis, Miles and Parfitt, collect a wonderful array of voices that have been confronting the exclusion of Jewish experiences from religious studies, African Studies, and traditional Jewish Studies. The result is truly provocative.

The editors, pioneers, and leaders of this emerging field start by examining Judaism within a paradigm of "New Religious Movements" around the globe. They wisely leave behind questions of race and colonialism (such as inquiring about the "true origins" of the communities) and begin asking more interesting questions. They not only explore the engagement of the communities with their surroundings and with the Euro-American-Israeli Jewish world, but also investigate how this new reality could bring challenges to the mainstream Jewish community. The study of these movements, the editors suggest very well, eventually challenges the traditional geographic conception of Judaism as a Western religion, its presumed adherents, and finally the social, economic, and racial status of Jews across the world.

This book is divided into three equally fascinating parts. The first unit is entitled "The Euro-Jewish Encounters" and we learn about experiences



on both African and European soil. The articles explore how Africans creatively used the narratives of European missionaries to develop a provocative African Judaism (Lis) and how these same Jews, when they arrived in cities, were discriminated against by the established community that insisted on the whiteness of Judaism. Diversity was limited to Ashkenazi or Sephardic ancestry (Mokoko-Gampiot and Coquet-Mokoko). The opening article by Professor Tudor Parfitt, the prolific pioneer of the study of emerging Jewish communities in Africa, explains how the treatment of Jewish difference is a wonderful prism to understand social taboos and racial divisions, and ultimately becomes a multilayered challenge to conceptions of Jewish whiteness.

In the Shadow of Moses: *continued from previous page*

The second unit, “New and Renewed Judaism,” analyzes the diversity of Jewish experiences and builds a foundation to go beyond the pervasive (and sometimes perverse) problem of recognition of these new communities by the mainstream. Here we learn about the diverse experiences of communities in Ghana, Cameroon, Uganda, Ivory Coast, and Gabon. Some communities, for example, have had a longstanding history but were made invisible by the dominance of Western conceptions of Jewish origins (Levi). Others do not claim a historical heritage but acknowledge their newly-acquired Judaism emerging during the digital era, thanks to the support from organizations such as Kulanu (Devir). A third case emerged during colonialism as a rebellion against the unfulfilled promises of Europeans (Soi). And finally we learn about the role that socio-economic factors play in the different attachment of some communities to standard Jewish institutions or paths (Brettschneider).

The last unit, entitled “Newly Invented Diasporas,” explores the relationship between communities who moved to Israel or have Zionist aspirations. First we learn about the legal treatment of (Jewish and non-Jewish) Sudanese and Eritrean asylum seekers in Israel and the ethical implications of their experiences (Gellar). Next we explore the complex history and the emergence of a “Black Jewish” identity among Ethiopians, the most longstanding Sub-Saharan community in Israel, after they suffered intense discrimination there (Lyons). And finally we read about the similarities and differences between two “Zionist” aspiring communities, the African Hebrew Israelites and Rastafarians, who strongly promote repatriation to their idealized homeland.

This collection of essays is a truly provocative challenge to the dominant geographic and political limitations imposed by Jewish Studies in the West. The book has the potential to become a landmark in the field of Global Jewish Studies and a true challenge to the concept of Euro-American exclusivity. It is a must-read by anyone interested in the most dynamic Jewish experiences of the 21st century. *

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Kulanu (“All of Us”) is a tax-exempt organization of Jews of varied backgrounds and practices which works with isolated, emerging, and returning Jewish communities around the globe, supporting them through networking, education, economic development projects, volunteer assignments, research, and publications about their histories and traditions.

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KULANU

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Yasher Koach, Nicaragua!

Three communities came together in July to welcome a Beit Din and volunteers from Kulanu to Managua. Over the course of six days, a Beit Din convened and met with enthusiastic individuals and families who have been studying and practicing Judaism for a number of years. The process included meetings with the rabbinic court,

ritual immersion (*mikveh*), circumcision, and *hatafat dam brit* (drawing a drop of the blood of the covenant). We celebrated Shabbat together and then rejoiced as one when 24 couples were married according to Jewish tradition. To read the stories of the two new Jewish communities in Nicaragua, turn to page 11.



Mazel Tov, Nicaragua!

Clockwise, starting from upper left, photos by Joshua Kristal (Josh), Josh, Boni Sussman, Josh, Josh, Josh, Judi Klover, Josh, Dassi Owens-Klover, center: Josh