



"All of Us" Kulanu

Supporting Isolated, Emerging, and Returning Jewish Communities around the Globe

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*Mama Devorah of the Abayudaya community in Uganda lights the Hanukkah candles with her granddaughters. Amidst our sorrow, Jews around the world celebrated Hanukkah with joy and hope and, as Dr. David Breakstone writes on page 3, with **an unbroken spirit and a determination not to let the darkness overwhelm us.***



We have come to banish the darkness
In our hands light and fire
each of us a small light
all of us together a great light.

Shattered Hearts, Unbroken Spirit

By Dr. David Breakstone, Kulanu Board member

David Breakstone, who lives in Israel, has published widely on matters of Israel and contemporary Jewry as a columnist for The Jerusalem Post and as a blogger for the Times of Israel. To learn more about Dr. Breakstone, see <https://kulanu.org/about/staff-and-board/>.

When I was thinking about celebrating Hanukkah this year in the shadow of the most devastating attack on the Jewish people since the Holocaust, a favorite children's song for the holiday crept into mind, the song *Ba'nu Choshekh* by Yemenite composer Sara Levi-Tanai. The lyrics in English translate as follows: *We have come to banish the darkness / In our hands light and fire / each of us a small light / all of us together a great light.*

You can listen to the song, played by the band Banot, here: <https://bit.ly/BanuBanot>.

And a bluegrass version played by Jacob's Ladder is here: <https://bit.ly/BanuBluegrass>.

That was all I needed to convince me that this year's celebration of the Jewish people's triumph over the forces of evil was every bit as important — actually, even more so — than in years of peace and quiet. Moreover, I discovered in the Hebrew

words of the song yet another dimension of meaning.

The last line of the verse: *KULANU ohr eitan!* כולנו אור עיתן — *Together a great light* — is especially significant this year. Yes, Kulanu, together, a great light! How empowering that is for all of us engaged with the strengthening of isolated, emerging, and returning Jewish communities, whether from within or from afar. And how important those communities are for us here in Israel! The messages that arrived from around the globe in the wake of October 7th — of unwavering support, a willingness to volunteer, and a determination to act on behalf of the Jewish state — are truly inspiring.

Those messages reminded me of another poem, one of my favorites by Yehuda Amichai that has long inspired me in my work on behalf of Am Yisrael worldwide. This one speaks volumes for what we are all going through today — whether facing Hamas in the Land of Israel or struggling against the alarming rise in antisemitism everywhere:



Menorah candles blazing in front of photographs of hostages adorned with banners wishing bystanders a Happy Hanukkah on the first night of the holiday at Kikar HaHatufim, the plaza in Tel Aviv that has become the central gathering place of the families of those abducted on October 7th. Photo from Hostage and Missing Families Forum.

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Shattered Hearts: continued from previous page

The Diameter of the Bomb

By Yehuda Amichai

The diameter of the bomb was thirty
centimeters

and the diameter of its effective range about
seven meters

with four dead and eleven wounded.

And around these, in a larger circle
of pain and time, two hospitals are scattered
and one graveyard. But the young woman
who was buried in the city she came from,
at a distance of more than a hundred kilometers,
enlarges the circle considerably,
and the solitary man mourning her death
at the distant shores of a country far across
the sea

includes the entire world in the circle.

And I won't even mention the crying of orphans
that reaches up to the throne of God and
beyond, making a circle with no end
and no God.



"Together the flickering flames would bear testimony that though our hearts are shattered, our spirit remains unbroken." Photo from Derech HaChaim community in Honduras.

**Theology aside, the message is clear.
We are one.
Interconnected.
Interdependent.
Intrinsically joined.**

There was no question, then, that I would celebrate Hanukkah this year, united with Jews everywhere in our determination not to allow the darkness to overwhelm us nor allow those who would annihilate us to extinguish the eternal light of truth, justice, and Torah that we have proudly borne for 3,000 years.

But, still, there was a nagging thought: Should I not somehow, in the midst of celebration, take into account the unimaginable sorrow, the unthinkable loss, and the insufferable pain of so many thousands of victims of Hamas' heinous atrocities? In consideration of our present circumstances, then, I decided to light not eight candles this year but nine: a Yizkor candle alongside the hanukkiah. Together the flickering flames would bear testimony that though our hearts are shattered, our spirit remains unbroken.

Am Yisrael Chai! *



A Shabbat table has been set up in the heart of Tel Aviv for the past two months with seats for all the hostages. On the first night of Hanukkah, hanukkiah were placed in front of each photo. The four people pictured here are of the Bibas family (Mom, Dad, and their two children) who were kidnapped from their home on the Nir Oz kibbutz. Public domain photo.

Building Jewish Infrastructure: Focus on Mikva'ot

By Keshi Taryan-Kigel

Keshi has been Kulanu's multimedia manager and a part of Kulanu since 2020.

Over the years, as our Kulanu partner communities developed their Jewish ways, they asked for different things. Twenty years ago their requests were primarily for prayer books, ritual objects, and other basic Jewish items. While we still get those requests today, we additionally receive requests to build infrastructure, including synagogues, schools, and *mikva'ot* (plural for mikvah).

The mikvah is an essential part of traditional Jewish practice. It is a special bath of naturally occurring ("living") water in which one submerges for ritual purity, a concept not so familiar to us today but which has a long and sacred history. Mikva'ot have been excavated in Israel from ancient temple times.

A mikvah is not limited to an indoor enclosure. Any body of natural spring water can be used. In some progressive circles, even swimming pools have been considered mikva'ot.

Kulanu's regional coordinators Genie Milgrom, Ari Greenspan, Daneel Schaechter, and Lili Kaufmann helped to build mikva'ot around



This mikvah in Tanzania was built with the assistance of funding from Kulanu in 2022. Photo courtesy Lili Kaufmann.

the globe. It was a learning experience for them, as well as for the communities that they assisted, each learning about the construction of mikva'ot and how they can be used to fulfill *mitzvot* (plural of mitzvah).

Anusim communities (communities who

had been forced to abandon Judaism and have reconnected with their Jewish roots) assisted in the building of mikva'ot in El Salvador and Guatemala. Armenia, **El Salvador's** *Centro Judío Sionista Shaar Hashamaim* community built its mikvah in 2022, adorning it with simple lighting, floral paintings on the wall, and blue mosaic tiles on the inner walls of the bath. The mikvah in Guatemala City, **Guatemala** has wooden floorboards and delicate blue tiling. While blue tiling is a common detail in new mikva'ot, the variety of shapes, sizes, and patterns represent each community's unique appreciation for the mikvah. She further explained, "When you are going to build a community, in some cases before anything else gets built, the mikvah gets built." This is the case for both Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities.

The mikvah is especially social and collaborative in the Sephardic tradition, according to Genie Milgrom. "The Sephardim have massive parties the night before a wedding where they bring sweets and candies. After immersion, the women move on to a party in the outer room of the mikvah. They draw henna on their hands and wear beautiful kaftans and costumes. It's a typical Sephardic custom, something that is still done today."



The Madagascar Jewish community waited for their time in the mikvah at a river in Antananarivo, Madagascar, May 2016. Photo by Shep Wahnnon.

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Ari Greenspan described a new mikvah in Putti, **Uganda**. The most common mikva'ot in both the Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities are indoors. But this open-air structure in Uganda, built to invite people in, is unusual. Ari provided the suggestion for a mikvah with a spring running through it. "I was afraid that since it's in the middle of the fields, the building would be broken into, so I suggested that we make the building completely open with a roof so that anybody who wanted to could go in to use it as a bath." Like Kulanu's partner communities in Armenia, El Salvador, and Guatemala City, the Putti community's mikvah is a crucial structure, used for purification and conversion, as well as for the unusual purpose of non-ritual bathing.

Daneel Schaechter provided photos of a new mikvah in **Brazil**. A member of the *Yad Eliyahu* community described it as "... used by women only, monthly in the *niddah* (menstrual) period. We are being guided by our Sephardic Rabbi Moses Elmesany. Men cannot use the same mikvah — it has to be a separate mikvah."

Similar to the mikvah in Brazil, **Tanzania's** mikvah is used by women during their monthly menstrual cycles, but men also use it before their weddings and before Yom Kippur. According to Yehudah Amir, leader of the (Yemenite) *B'nei*

Levi community in Arusha, Tanzania, "... some men use the mikvah before each Shabbat and holiday, some even making use on days when they say *Tachanun* (also known as Supplication, a part of Judaism's morning *Shacharit* and afternoon *Mincha* services, after the recitation of the Amidah. It is omitted on Shabbat and Jewish holidays). But the most important and general usage of the mikvah is for purification by the menstruant woman."

Rabbi Gerald and Bonita Sussman had visited both an outdoor mikvah and an indoor mikvah built for conversions in **Nicaragua**. The outdoor version was built on the property of Carlos Peres who served as the community's rabbi and spiritual guide and who passed away several years ago. When the time came, the outdoor mikvah was enclosed by walls to secure the privacy of the converts. It was located in the town of Masaya, Nicaragua. The indoor mikvah was built in the home of the Moshe Henriques family and was primarily for conversions. It was located in Managua, Nicaragua.

Other communities make do with natural bodies of water. In **Côte d'Ivoire**, on a trip to assist in conversions organized by Boni Sussman and her husband Rabbi Gerald Sussman, a lake was used. In **Nigeria**, a lagoon served as the mikvah, and in **Madagascar**, a tent was constructed on the banks of a large body of flowing water, where converts disrobed before submerging as part of the conversion process.

As I wrote this article, I kept thinking about the meaning of Judaism for Kulanu's partner communities. The mikvah is one of the most important structures for enabling Jewish practice. Thanks to the waters of mikva'ot provided with Kulanu's assistance, members of our partner communities across the globe feel a greater connection to their rightful place in the worldwide Jewish diaspora.

For more about the importance of the mikvah, view this article about Madagascar conversions: bit.ly/MadagascarMikveh.



A lagoon in Jacquerville, a small coastal town in Cote d'Ivoire, served as a mikvah in December 2017. Photo by Boni Sussman.

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The three common uses of a mikvah:

Niddah (Family Purity): In Judaism, the laws of family purity, known as *niddah*, govern the intimate relationship between spouses. According to these laws, a woman enters a state of ritual impurity during her menstrual cycle and for a period afterward. To restore ritual purity, a woman immerses herself in a mikvah after the completion of her menstrual cycle. This immersion signifies a spiritual and physical renewal, allowing her to resume intimate relations with her husband.

Conversion: A mikvah plays a crucial role in converting to Judaism. Immersion in a mikvah is one of the essential requirements for an individual converting to Judaism. By immersing in the mikvah, the convert symbolically undergoes a spiritual rebirth and embraces a new identity as a Jew.

Ritual Purification of Utensils:

In addition to personal purification, mikva'ot are also used for the ritual purification of certain objects, such as utensils used for cooking and eating. In Jewish law, certain utensils made of metal or glass previously owned by non-Jews or used for non-kosher purposes require immersion in a mikvah to remove any spiritual impurity associated with their previous use. This process is known as *tevilat keilim*, the immersion of vessels.



In summer 2017, a mikvah was constructed in a community member's home in Nicaragua, and 114 people converted to Judaism and immersed in this mikvah. Photo courtesy of Kulanu.



The new mikvah at Sinagoga Beit Israel de Campina Grande in Brazil was built with Kulanu mini-grants in 2022-2023. Photo provided by Kulanu.

Wildflowers (for “Mama Harriet”)

By David E. Prager, 11/15/2022

“Mama Harriet” Bograd, Z”l, who served as Kulanu’s president from 2008-2022, left a legacy of thriving Jewish communities around the globe because of her commitment to assisting them in becoming part of the mainstream Jewish world. Her dedication to anti-poverty work and with numerous nonprofits was a blessing to so many. And Mama Harriet loved to dance, from New York City to Uganda! This poem was written a year ago as a tribute to our beloved Harriet. And, with all the pain and grief we are experiencing now as Jews, we offer this not just to honor her memory but as a prayer for a time when all of us, all people, will embrace our differences and dance together as one.



Harriet dancing in Uganda, 2012

May we cast our hopes

Like wild seedlings

Even in the brittle fields of Winter

— Patient and sure —

That they might someday burst to flower

As the dawn of our own potential.

Formidable

Though any obstacle may be

May it never overshadow

The fireglow

Of our will to surmount it —

And then, even darkness

Can become the place where we learn to see

With our hearts

And grasp

That last spark of light

Of a long-extinguished star

Still shining, in a vast night’s sky.

And may we hold fast

— All of us —

Together

As an ever-enduring family

Embracing our differences

As we would shelter chicks

Beneath feathered wings.

And may we dance!

With arms aloft and fingers outstretched —

Dancing

— As one —

Across seas and mountains

And even greater human divides.

May we dance

And dance

Like wildflowers in the wind.

*

Tribute to Mordy Feinberg, Z"l, and Mickey Feinberg

By Modreck Maeresera

Modreck, a Lemba Jew, is a Kulanu board member, current president of the Harare Lemba Synagogue in Zimbabwe, and the president of the Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance (SAJA).

The entire Kulanu community is deeply saddened by the passing of Mordy Feinberg in August 2023.



Modreck (the author) with Mordy and Mickey at their home in Washington, DC

The story of the Lemba's reintegration into Judaism would not be complete without recognizing the part that Mordy and Mickey Feinberg played. As a long-time

member of this community and current president, I can attest that their role can never be understated. Suffice it to say our journey back to Judaism and getting to where we are now is largely because of Mickey and Mordy's selfless effort to make the Lemba an integral part of the world's Jewish mosaic.

When the Harare Lemba Synagogue Community Center was established in 2013 with funding from Kulanu, one of the biggest challenges that the Lemba faced was a lack of Jewish education. Among other things, we needed to learn songs, prayers, and how to conduct services. We were starting from scratch. To give us the basic Jewish education that we Lemba desperately needed, Kulanu — through its traveling teacher education program and the cyber-education program — recruited teachers from the USA, Israel, and across the Jewish world to teach over the internet or travel to Zimbabwe and reside at the Harare Lemba Synagogue Community Center.

Mordy and Mickey Feinberg were our first volunteers in 2013, teaching a group of Lemba students over Skype. Mickey taught songs to a class of adults and to a class of kids while Mordy taught *cantillation* (also known as trope, chanting the ritual readings from the Torah) to a group of a selected few. At one point, more than half of the songs we sang during prayer services were the songs we learned from Mickey and Mordy.

In August 2014, after nearly a year of teaching us over the internet, Mickey and Mordy finally visited the Harare Lemba Synagogue community. They traveled to Zimbabwe for a month, teaching and staying with my family at the Harare Lemba Synagogue Community Center. Meeting them in person verified what an amazing couple they were, and their dedication to helping Jewish communities was clearly evident. Mickey and Mordy were Kulanu personified.

Life in Zimbabwe can be hard. Back then, Zimbabwe was at its lowest point with runaway inflation, a shortage of basic goods and services, power rationing, and lack of water in the taps. How Mickey and Mordy endured staying in



Mordy Feinberg helping to prepare these girls for becoming b'not mitzvah in August 2015

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Zimbabwe under those conditions, I cannot say. It was proof of their dedication and commitment to helping the Lemba become a functional Jewish community. They held two classes: the first from morning till noon and the second from noon till the evening. They had a full schedule. Weekly challah baking with Brenda and the children as well as members of the community, and discussions on Judaic issues at evening meals with our family, were absolutely essential to the development of the Lemba Jewish community.

By the end of August 2014, it was clear that they would not finish all the work they needed to do. There was still a lot of teaching and training to be done. The Feinbergs continued teaching us over the internet after they went back home to the USA, with even more students joining their classes.

In August 2015, Mordy and Mickey returned for their second visit. They had a full schedule on their hands. A group of Lemba had traveled from their countryside communities, and this meant that the Feinbergs had even bigger classes and a fuller schedule. They taught three classes per day and barely had time to rest. Mickey taught Hebrew and Mordy taught cantillation as well as a Bat Mitzvah class. We had our first bat mitzvah ceremony at the end of the Feinbergs' visit. By the time they left, we were praying mostly in Hebrew. Although we had a lot of things to learn, the Feinbergs had set us on a good course.



Mordy Feinberg and the congregation davening Shacharit at the Harare Lemba Synagogue in Zimbabwe



Mordy and Mickey Feinberg with Dr. Rabson Wuriga after visiting the Great Zimbabwe Synagogue

Mickey and Mordy were now like family to us. When I visited the USA in 2015, I stayed with them for a few days in their Washington D.C. home. When I visited Israel in 2016, I stayed with Mordy and Mickey's son Jon and his family, strengthening our bond even

more. Mickey and Mordy continued to meet with the children via Zoom until last year, teaching them Hebrew, Jewish holiday songs, and training for b'nai mitzvah. Mickey wrote to us after Mordy died, sharing "From the first time that Mordy and I stayed at your home, Modreck, we always felt like you are our family."

We are where we are now because of Mordy and Mickey's efforts and sacrifices. They were always called Mickey and Mordy — they were inseparable. Some kids called them Mickey-Mordy. In time, our community and the Feinbergs had become inseparable, too. Mordy passed away in August, but not even his death can separate us from what he helped us to become. We have become a vibrant Lemba Jewish community because of Mordechai Feinberg and his selfless dedication to see our community grow.

Coincidentally, both our Jewish names are Mordechai. I was born on February 25th and Mordy was born on February 26th. It feels like fate had brought us together.

Mordy will always have a place in our hearts and memories, and his and Mickey's efforts and work with our community will always be etched in our history. *

A Jewish Camp in Nigeria? Of Course! Camp Sarah!

Camp Sarah, founded in the summer of 2023 by Moshe Hezekiah (spiritual leader of synagogues in Abuja and Anambra, and now living in Philadelphia) and Debbie Isser (of the Washington, DC area), is a one-of-a-kind addition to the Nigerian Jewish community. The camp provided an immersive experience of Jewish tradition and values for 48 children as young as five years old. Camp counselors included 18 local staff and 10 from the USA and Haiti. With a deep commitment to unifying the

Nigerian Jewish community while providing a sense of belonging and fun, Camp Sarah's inaugural session for Nigerian Jewish children was a great success! Enjoy these photos! (Kulanu assisted by providing operational necessities.)

If you're interested in volunteering at Camp Sarah next year, please contact <https://kulanu.org/contact>. We look forward to another amazing and impactful experience in summer 2024!



Camp Sarah, Nigeria Photos: continued from previous page



Shalom, Uganda! Memories of a Post-World War Two Life

By Janice Masur

*Janice Masur of Vancouver, Canada, spent her childhood in Kampala, Uganda, at that time under British Imperial rule. Her book, *Shalom Uganda: A Jewish Community on the Equator* (2020) describes growing up in a remote community in the 1950s.*



Bridesmaids Ruth Levitan (left) and the author at Steve and Audrey Pullman's wedding, Kampala, Uganda, July 1952. Photo by Lily Masur.

On Erev Rosh Hashanah 2023, out of the blue, I had a phone call from Israel. My gut feeling insisted that I answer, even though I was late and rushing out the front door. I am so glad that I did! It turned out to be a woman who lived in Israel and who had read a short blurb about European Jews who lived on the equator during the last century. My caller had grown up in Uganda from 1966 until Idi Amin, the

army general turned leader of Uganda, chased out all the Israelis and most of the East Indian population. Stating that the country belonged only to Black Ugandans, he chose to forget how the East Indians of various religious beliefs were excellent businessmen and had helped the Pearl of Africa develop economically after British colonialism. And he was angry that Israel would not provide more jets than those used by Israeli pilots to train the Ugandan air force.

I told my Israeli caller that as a child I had lived in Kampala from 1949 to 1961. My blue-eyed, blond-haired father was a German refugee; he had been warned to leave his home in Germany the next day by his friends in the Hitler Youth. My mother had left London because her Jewishness had prevented her from retaining a stenographer job in a prestigious London law firm. So she broke her engagement to a man there and took a



Chief Justice Joseph Herbstein's United Israel Appeal Fund visit to Kampala, 1958. Left to right: (name unknown), Cecil Block, a couple from Cochin, India, Ilsa Dokelman, Helmut Masur, Lily Masur, Joe Gilman and Anne Block (front). Photographer unknown.

steamship to Palestine. My mom and dad met in Haifa in 1936. My parents then moved to Eritrea for better job prospects just after the British took over the country from the Italians. In Asmara, the capital of Eritrea, there was at the time a thriving Italian Sephardic Jewish community of about 500 who had built a synagogue and established a Jewish cemetery. Unlike Asmara, there was no synagogue and no Jewish infrastructure when my family moved to Kampala in 1949. We were a secular group of about twenty-three families who were sojourners; we never put down solid roots. We never employed a rabbi or purchased a Torah. We were situated 350 miles from Nairobi, Kenya, the Jewish hub, which was an overnight train ride from Kampala. A visitor once called Kampala a "one-eyed dump." Keeping kosher was almost impossible and when a visiting rabbi came for the High Holidays, it was a concern as to what to feed him. Kampala's Jewish community was unlike Nairobi's, which had a rabbi and was able to obtain chickens from the three or more Jewish farms in the surrounding areas and had the ability to *kasher* (make kosher) them.

Barely any records of the Kampala Jewish community survive in the Nairobi archives. It was

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recorded, however, that eighteen Jewish children were born in Uganda.

The community was not without its memorable times. Sir Andrew Cohen was the Jewish British governor of Uganda from 1952 to 1957. In 1958, we hosted South African Chief Justice Joseph Herstein who came to Kampala on a United Israel Appeal fundraising visit. A white tablecloth and candle-lit dinner was enjoyed in my parents' home. On other occasions, Louis Armstrong and a small contingent of ballet dancers from Covent Garden performed. These were much talked about events.

In the 1950s a few members of our Jewish community made contact with the Abayudaya, the community of indigenous people who had adopted Judaism. They helped the Abayudaya financially and provided religious books and some education. Today, with much help from North American Jews, the Abayudaya community that is based in Mbale is flourishing. Meanwhile, my Jewish community is lost and almost forgotten in the Jewish Diaspora. Barely anyone knows about this small Jewish community on the equator which ultimately perished under the tropical sun. The cemetery was destroyed and has become prime real estate.

Now, with the help of Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft of South Africa and Rabbi Gershom Sizomu, spiritual leader of the Abayudaya, and with permission from the Kampala City Council, we are unveiling a memorial to my Jewish

community on the edge of the Christian cemetery. Another memorial in the synagogue compound in Mbale, Uganda will acknowledge the help of my Jewish community during the last century.

My daughter and I will travel to Uganda to unveil these memorials on March 5th, 2024. Rabbi Silberhaft and Rabbi Sizomu will be there to celebrate the lives of those who lived, worked, and died in Uganda. We joyfully invite guests to come and help us on this momentous occasion. For more information about this event, please contact Kulanu at: kulanu.org/contact. *



The author's father, Helmut Masur, a German-Jewish Palestinian, stands at the entrance to his office and our living quarters at the Tile and Brickwork factory, 1949. Photographer unknown.



Murchison Falls National Park, northern Uganda, 1959. Lake Victoria empties into the White Nile through a very narrow gorge. The 1951 movie *African Queen* was filmed here. Photo by Lily Masur.

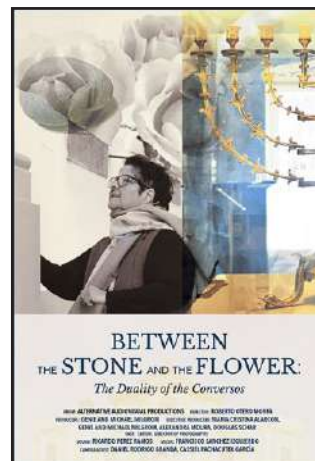


Almost the whole Kampala Jewish community at the Speke Hotel on Seder Night, 1956. Photo courtesy Ilsa Dokelman.

Kulanu Notes

Genie Milgrom's Documentary to be Released in Early 2024

Between the Stone and the Flower: The Duality of the Conversos is a new documentary featuring the amazing story of Genie Milgrom, our Anusim director. This beautiful film showcases how Genie's impressive genealogy skills helped her trace her Jewish roots back to find her 22 generations of Jewish grandmothers. The world premiere will be at the Miami Jewish Film Festival (<https://bit.ly/MJFFGenie>). To see a preview of the film and for updates on the other Jewish film festivals where it will be shown, please check this link: www.geniemilgrom.com/movie.



Potatoes are Growing in Zimbabwe



Potatoes are being used to feed families and as a cash crop in Zimbabwe. The five Lemba communities in Zimbabwe, recipients of the Gelfand Food Security Grant, have been busy harvesting wheat and potatoes on their community farms, along with the Bedza community. Modreck Maeresera, the community leader, organized the first distribution of potatoes to the families of the Harare Lemba Synagogue in the fall. This added food staple will help ensure food security in the Jewish community.

Kulanu's Executive Director In Uganda

Molly Levine, Kulanu's Executive Director (pictured with Yaacov Owani and his wife Rachel, leaders of the Ben David Primary School in Kwania), traveled to Uganda in October 2023 to visit the Abayudaya communities. Kulanu first started working with the Abayudaya in 1995. Molly was able to visit many past, present, and potential Kulanu projects. Each community welcomed her and shared their appreciation for the support Kulanu has given to them.



Welcome to Kulanu's New Financial Officer



Kulanu is thrilled to announce that Harold Cromartie has joined our staff as our financial officer. With a remarkable background in accounting and extensive experience in managing business operations for international nonprofits, Harold brings a wealth of expertise that will undoubtedly serve as a valuable asset to Kulanu as we grow and engage with even more Jewish communities worldwide. Welcome aboard, Harold!

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Holiday Meals Distributions

This past Rosh Hashanah, Kulanu assisted 31 Jewish communities in Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Nigeria, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zimbabwe to celebrate the Jewish New Year with community meal grants. Pictured (left to right, starting at the top), communities in Cameroon, Uganda, Kenya, and India, enjoying their Rosh Hashanah festivities.



Remembering Hamlet Zhou

Hamlet Zhou was a founding member and a chazzan for the congregation of the Harare Lemba Synagogue in Zimbabwe. As the musical leader, he composed



prayers and songs using unique Lemba melodies and tunes, giving their synagogue services a truly Zimbabwean Jewish experience. At the time of his death, he was working on recording his music, which we hope will be released at a later date. Read more about Hamlet and even listen to his music here: <https://bit.ly/MeetHamlet>. *

Kulanu Featured at World Culture Festival

By Debra Joy Eklove

Debra is a member of World Culture Festival Jewish Community Outreach. She grew up in Canada in the vibrant Montreal Jewish community and now resides in Toronto. Active with Darchei Noam Congregation, she is chair of its Interfaith Committee. She is a teacher with the Art of Living Foundation and serves on its Canadian board of directors.

The 4th World Culture Festival (WCF), held on the National Mall in Washington, DC from September 29th to October 1st, 2023, was an epic event showcasing the rich cultural traditions of the world — cutting across nationality, language, race, and religion. The message was a resounding celebration of diversity and the recognition that humanity is indeed part of a one-world family.

The brainchild of Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, founder of the Art of Living Foundation, this festival brought more than a million people together in person, and thousands more online.

As the WCF coincided with the beginning of Sukkot, a sukkah was constructed on the National Mall to honor our beautiful Jewish holiday. The Jewish steering committee for WCF saw Kulanu as a perfect partner to help educate the festival attendees about the diverse expressions of Judaism seen in communities around the world. Within and outside the sukkah, posters

describing the holiday of Sukkot, the significance of the sukkah, our prayers, and our religious tenets of *tikkun olam* and *welcoming the stranger* taught people about

our magnificent worldwide Jewish family. Each poster included many pictures from Kulanu's archive; these produced a much greater understanding and appreciation for the worldwide Jewish community and our traditions. It was heartening to hear sukkah visitors from India and Africa, as well as Native Americans, say how much similarity they saw between aspects of our traditions and their own.

Bonita Nathan Sussman, Kulanu's president, attended the dedication ceremony on Friday, September 29th, and brought greetings from Kulanu. Other speakers included Rob Trombold, the president of Art of Living, and Rabbi David Shneyer, who added heartwarming Torah teachings and music. The PJ Library (<https://pjlibrary.org>) provided books for children, and the Capital Jewish Museum engaged children and adults in arts and crafts activities that then decorated our sukkah. Our many volunteers happily engaged the public, answering questions and handing out our Shalom-themed buttons and postcards.

As part of the Art of Living steering committee, I am so proud of the outreach we accomplished. What a magnificent event this was! Thanks to all the wonderful groups, especially Kulanu, whose enthusiasm and full support with amazing photos helped make the sukkah come alive! All praise to Kulanu for the amazing work this organization continues to do. ✱



Rabbi David Shneyer demonstrates the shaking of the lulav while explaining the holiday of Sukkot to festival attendees



Debra Joy Eklove (the author, in green) welcoming people to the official opening of the World Culture Festival and speaking about Sukkot. Boni Sussman, Kulanu's president, sitting behind Debra.

Book Review of *The Hidden Jews of Ethiopia: The Beta Israel of Kechene and North Shewa*

By Ben Lefkowitz

Ben Lefkowitz serves as a Kulanu board member, and, after earning his Master's degree in Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School, he made aliyah to Israel where he now lives.

Introduction

As Jews, wherever we go, antisemitism has followed. Often, it has caused inconceivable horror. This is the tragedy of Jewish history. The comedy of Jewish history, on the other hand, is that in every case, we have survived our murderers, living to pass on our values, traditions, and identity to the next generation. We are what Mark Twain called the immortal people, not just because we stretch into the past, but also because we stretch into the future, perpetually adding to our traditions and generations.

In September, I was asked to write this review of *The Hidden Jews of Ethiopia: The Beta Israel of Kechene and North Shewa* for Kulanu's magazine. At the time, I was excited to learn about the community's fascinating history and practices. That hasn't changed, of course.



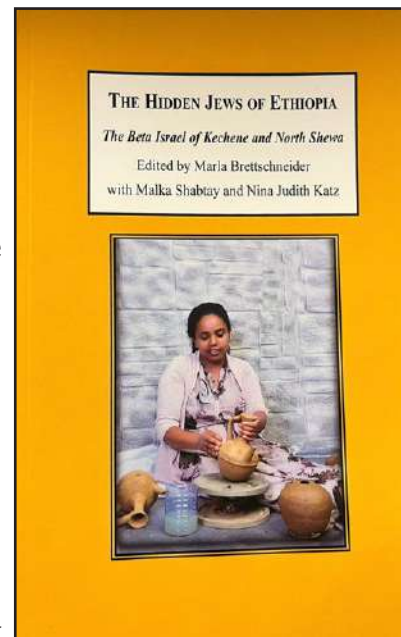
A tour across the USA for the film *Nafkot — Yearning*, based on this book, brought Belayneh of the Beta Israel to Portland, Oregon, along with the film director and book co-editor Dr. Malka Shabtay (second from right), and co-editor Dr. Marla Brettschneider (front center), along with members of the Oregon Jewish Law Students Association who sponsored the presentation, and Judi Klover (in yellow), Kulanu board member and magazine editor.

But in the wake of the October 7th massacre in my new country, Israel, I can't help but focus more on another theme in the book: the community's horrific and ongoing suffering at the hands of their non-Jewish neighbors, and the incredible measures they took to survive and live as Jews. I see parallels to today in the hope this book brings to Jewish history, and its calls to action to build a thriving Jewish future.

The Book

The Hidden Jews of Ethiopia: The Beta Israel of Kechene and North Shewa, written by members of the Shewan Beta Israel community themselves, was edited by Marla Brettschneider with Malka Shabtay and Nina Judith Katz. The Shewan Beta Israel are Ethiopian Beta Israel Jews, similar to those who arrived in Israel during Operation Solomon and Moses in the 1990s. However, they broke off from the main community (situated in northwest Ethiopia) and fled towards the central region around the capital, Addis Ababa.

The horrific antisemitism they experienced caused them to adopt an extremely hidden Jewish practice, not unlike the Conversos during the Inquisition. Members of the community outwardly live as Christians, and many are not even told they are Jews. As they grow older, they make more and more trips to the *gedams* (hidden monastery synagogues) and begin to



continued on next page

practice more. When Shewan Beta Israel Jews grow old, they retire to the gedams and take vows as *melekosats* — a unique role that combines our conceptions of monk and elder. Melekosats — called *abba(s)* and *ima(s)* (Hebrew for father and mother) — spend their days in worship, ritual, asceticism, and rigid chastity. Worship includes prayers in *Ge'ez* (Ethiopia's equivalent of Latin) and Hebrew, and occasionally features animal sacrifice. The Melekosats lead the Shewan Beta Israel and preserve its tradition, identity, and memory. The gedams are small hidden villages surrounding a “beta mikdas” building used for rituals. They are often extremely difficult to reach and are occasionally situated in cave systems.

The Shewan Beta Israel face horrific repression, not unlike the experience of my own ancestors in Eastern Europe. First, ancient antisemitic policy has forced them to become landless artisans, a caste despised by Ethiopian Christians as malicious witches. As a result, Shewan Beta Israel often live in segregated ghettos, as parts of villages, separate villages, or the Kechene district of Addis Ababa. They are also suspected of being untrue Christians of some kind, and often are realized to be Jews. As a result, they are viewed as the source of all forms of curses and ailments — they can cast their “evil eye” with a glance — and as “werehyenas” that drink blood. Christians often refuse to enter their communities, or do so

only while covering their eyes with cloth, to avoid their “evil eye” gaze. Christians often attempt to remedy sickness or misfortune by witch-hunting the suspected curser. This Jewish community is still subject to deep exclusion, segregation, and violence, despite its incredible secrecy.

“The only comparison I have for networks of synagogues hidden in the mountains is the Maccabean secret synagogues, disguised by the first dreidels.”

New winds have been blowing in the community in recent years, winds that made this book possible. Younger community members are not only realizing they are Jewish, but are seeking to come out openly and struggle for civil rights in Ethiopia. These young Beta Israel are also learning about, and connecting with, the greater Jewish world through the internet. Though the community missed Operations Moses and Solomon (1984 and 1991 respectively; their isolation and poverty ensured that they largely did not know it was happening), many are now looking to Zionism as a model of an open, strong, and proud Jewish identity. Currently, activists are split between those who want to focus more on community development and those who seek to build a strong open identity.

Why the Shewan Beta Israel should be Important to Us

I became involved with Kulanu not just because I want to support emerging, returning, and isolated Jewish communities, but also because I want to learn about what it means to be Jewish. I’ve always felt that my involvement here is self-exploration just as much as it is outreach and tzedakah.

Therefore, I find the Shewan Beta Israel’s distinctiveness deeply meaningful. Never in my life have I heard of a Jewish monastic system outside the



Map of Ethiopia. The circled areas show where the Hidden Jews of Ethiopia reside.

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Judaism is not something completely hidden or open, but slowly revealed as one ages...

Nazarites, and especially not one completely shrouded in secrecy. The only comparison I have for networks of synagogues hidden in the mountains is the Maccabean secret synagogues, disguised by the first dreidels. These are Jews who, when stripped of their lands, became not traders and innkeepers but blacksmiths and potters.

Judaism is not something completely hidden or open, but slowly revealed as one ages, and the most truly aware are elders.

This distinctiveness is not only fascinating; it allows us to expand our national imagination (the complex ways we see ourselves as a group), break our conceptions of what it means to be Jewish, and it challenges us to decide on the essential definitions of Jewish identity. This is necessary if we, as a people, seek to eliminate prejudice and exclusion within us, while maintaining coherency and solidarity.

I'd like to emphasize, however, that while this community is exceptional and important for that, it is still clearly Jewish. These are Jews who have preserved their identity, faith, and heritage for millennia and have endured horror for its sake for just as long. To me, this book is meaningful for a second reason: it is a wake-up call for an endangered community taking brave steps to achieve Jewish confidence, pride, and basic human rights.

If you feel called to assist the Shewan Beta Israel of Ethiopia, there are many opportunities. Whether it be financially or through contact such as online teaching or WhatsApp communication, your support can have a huge impact. For more information, contact Kulanu at <https://kulanu.org/contact>. *

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NEW! “Kulanu Matters” Podcast!



Our new “Kulanu Matters” podcast series will discuss matters important to ‘all of us’ in the worldwide Jewish community. In the first episode, we shared more about the mission of Kulanu. The second topic was reactions to the events of October 7th from Jewish communities around the globe. The next episode will focus on different Kulanu partner communities. You can watch or listen to all our episodes on YouTube, Apple, or Spotify!

Our first episode on YouTube: <https://bit.ly/KulanuMattersEp1>

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