



"All of Us" Kulanu

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

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In February 2026, Kulanu board member and volunteer Judi Kloper visited the Bene Ephraim community in Guntur district in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India. As they have for many years, the Yacobi family warmly welcomed Judi as the community came together for Havdalah. The following day, Ryan (back to the camera) and Yonatan practiced their volleyball skills as their uncle and community leader, Yacob Yacobi, walked by, cheering them on! See more photos from this community on page 8.

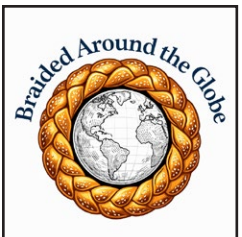
Letter from Kulanu's President



By Bonita Nathan Sussman

Kulanu continues to expand its reach and deepen its impact across the globe. From Africa to Latin America, from holiday celebrations to strategic planning, our work reflects the growth, purpose, and strength of our mission.

Passover was celebrated on an unprecedented scale this year, with Kulanu supporting 97 communities across 17 countries — the largest Passover initiative in our history. In Uganda, Sarah Nakintu coordinated the fourth annual Matzah Bake and Wine-Making Project, bringing together representatives from 30 communities across the country to bake approximately 9,850 matzot and prepare wine for Passover celebrations. In Nigeria, Engr. Jator Abido, Nigeria's representative to SAJA (the Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance), worked to distribute matzah and wine to approximately 40 communities so families could celebrate seders with the ritual items needed for the holiday.



This past February, Kulanu launched a new project, ***Braided Around the Globe***, with support from Dr. Beth and David Ricanati. The first program took place in Guatemala, where women

gathered for a hands-on challah-baking class focused on tradition, connection, and community. Participants baked challot together in a welcoming environment that encouraged both learning and conversation. The project reflects Kulanu's broader mission of strengthening Jewish life through meaningful shared experiences. If you're interested in learning more about this project, visit <https://bethricanatimd.com/challah-projects>.

Through collaborations with organizations such as the **Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs**,

Kulanu is also helping provide ritual items, including tefillin, to communities in need.

In addition, Kulanu's work was presented to an international audience of scholars and academics at the **International Society for the Study of African Jewry** conference in Paris in February. See article on next page.

At the same time, we are looking ahead. The Kulanu Board of Directors is actively engaged in strategic planning around Kulanu's future priorities and new initiatives. These include an **African radio project** that would amplify Jewish voices and strengthen Jewish identity within the broader African context, as well as an **African Jewish dating app**.

We are especially grateful to the **Jules and Gwen Knapp Charitable Foundation** for its recent \$15,000 grant supporting 53 scholarships for Jewish children in Cameroon, Nigeria, and Uganda, while also strengthening Kulanu's general operations. This investment reinforces our long-term commitment to Jewish education worldwide.

On behalf of Kulanu, we extend our condolences to our executive director, Molly Levine, whose mother, Dr. Kay Jennings, passed on May 15, 2026, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at age 83. Dr. Jennings was a child psychologist at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, a Peace Corps volunteer who served in Turkey from 1964-1966, and an ice skater who played hockey into her 70s! Perhaps her greatest roles were that of beloved wife, mom, and grandma. May Molly and her family be comforted among the mourners of Zion, and may the memory of Kay Jennings be a blessing in their lives.

Kulanu's mission is not only to support Jewish communities but to help nurture a global Jewish network rooted in connection, understanding, and shared Jewish heritage. Thank you for being part of this journey. *

African Jewry Conference

By Molly Levine, Executive Director of Kulanu

This past March, scholars, community leaders, and advocates gathered in Paris for the 6th International Conference of the International Society for the Study of African Jewry (ISSAJ), titled “From Beyond the Rivers of Cush: African Communities Negotiating Jewish Identities.”

Held on March 9–10, 2026, at the historic *Musée d’Art et d’Histoire du Judaïsme* in Paris, the conference brought together academics, experts, and African Jewish community leaders to develop a deeper understanding of Jewish life across Africa. The program featured a wide range of presentations exploring identity, history, and contemporary developments in African Jewry.

Kulanu presented twice at the conference. The first Kulanu session included Dr. Marla Brettschneider, Kulanu’s president Bonita

Nathan Sussman, and Azriel Zecharia Vidan, who presented “Jewish Voices Across Africa: Narratives and Documents of Sub-Saharan Jewry.” This session drew on personal narratives, archival materials, and years of Kulanu engagement with communities, highlighting the diversity and resilience of Jewish life across the continent. Later in the program, Bonita Nathan Sussman and I shared, “A Presentation of Kulanu.” This session was opened by Rabbi Gerald Sussman, who emphasized Kulanu’s commitment to supporting isolated, emerging,

and returning Jewish communities. My participation was supported by an OLAM in Motion grant (www.OLAMtogether.org), and I spoke about Kulanu’s humanitarian work across Africa, helping to connect the academic discussions with real-world impact.

A recurring theme throughout the conference was visibility. Many of the communities being discussed — whether in West, East, or Southern Africa — have long existed and thrived outside the mainstream Jewish narrative. Presentations explored both the resilience of these communities and the challenges they continue to face, including limited access to resources and recognition within the broader Jewish world.

The setting of Paris added an additional layer of meaning. A city deeply connected to Jewish

history, it provided a fitting backdrop for conversations about identity, continuity, and belonging. Informal discussions between sessions allowed participants to exchange ideas and build connections across disciplines and regions.

The ISSAJ Conference underscored a powerful message: the story of Jewish life is far broader and more

diverse than many realize. As interest in African Jewry continues to grow, gatherings like this play a critical role in ensuring these communities are not only studied but also supported and included in the global Jewish narrative. *



Conference group photo in front of the Museum of Jewish Art and History in Paris, France. Some Kulanu attendees include: top row starting left, Jonatas Chimen (former Kulanu Brazilian artist-in-residence); Molly Levine (Kulanu’s executive director); Firmin Ahou (community leader from Côte d’Ivoire invited by Kulanu); Dr. Tudor Parfitt (British historian and Distinguished University Professor at Florida International University who studies Jewish communities worldwide, including Africa); standing to the furthest right, Azriel Vidan (Kulanu intern); seated starting right, Bonita Nathan Sussman (Kulanu’s president); Rabbi Gerald Sussman; Laurent Elouna (community leader from Cameroon, invited by Kulanu); Dr. Edith Bruder (founding president of ISSAJ); and standing behind the Sussmans wearing sunglasses, Dr. Marla Brettschneider, who spoke about Kulanu.

the continent. Later in the program, Bonita Nathan Sussman and I shared, “A Presentation of Kulanu.” This session was opened by Rabbi Gerald Sussman, who emphasized Kulanu’s commitment to supporting isolated, emerging,

The Path to Building a Synagogue in Uganda

Written by and photos provided by Cantor Pamela Schiffer



Cantor Pamela Schiffer is Cantor Emerita of Congregation Shaarey Zedek in East Lansing, MI. She is a member of the Cantors Assembly and the Michigan Board of Cantors. After retirement, she and her husband, Charles, joined Adat

Shalom Synagogue in Farmington Hills, MI.

I first met the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda during a Cantors Assembly service trip in February 2019, which aimed to support the Abayudaya's place in Israel and the broader Jewish world. We were warmly welcomed at many synagogues throughout Uganda. We worshipped together at Shabbat and weekday services at the Stern Synagogue in Nabugoye, recorded Abayudaya music for an Abayudaya Haggadah, celebrated the Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs World Wrap Day, visited the Hadassah Primary School, toured water and sanitation projects with Drink Local



The presentation of the community's first Torah, donated by Congregation Shaarey Zedek in East Lansing, Michigan.

Drink Tap director Erin Huber Rosen, and visited many other places during our travels there. We left feeling a strong connection to this vibrant community of more than two thousand Jews.

Pandemic Food Relief Project

Fast forward a year to the Covid pandemic:

Uganda completely shut down, with people confined to their communities. Wishing to help, the Cantors Assembly raised funds for pandemic food relief and I was asked to join the team organizing the food distribution. With the guidance and mentorship of Kulanu's president Harriet Bograd, Z"l, and Joan Levine, director of the Abayudaya Fund of Congregation P'nai Or in Portland, Oregon, we created a process to equitably distribute food to each community, ultimately feeding the entire Abayudaya population as well as their non-Jewish neighbors during the difficult early months of the pandemic.

Harriet subsequently asked me to join the Kulanu Abayudaya Advisory Group (KAAG), whose members are actively involved in working with the Abayudaya through NGOs, synagogue funds, and other organizations. We update Kulanu on the activities of each group and advise on grants and new programs.

During the Covid Food Relief project, I communicated predominantly on WhatsApp with the project representatives of each community. Following the project, I continued to correspond with Joseph Takani, the spiritual leader of Buseta. Buseta is a very rural village with about 75 Abayudaya, located an hour from Mbale, the closest large Abayudaya community. Joseph's grandfather, Yokasani Wasona, and other founding members moved to the Buseta area after the 1979 fall of dictator Idi Amin. At first, they worshipped in Namutumba and Nabugoye, but the distance by bicycle was too long, so they decided to start their own synagogue. Through our communications over the years, I learned about daily life in Buseta and that many of them had attended the Hadassah Primary School. I kept up with their family

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and community celebrations and was able to provide several ongoing school scholarships.

Global Village Connect Funds Buseta Projects

Joseph had told me soon after the pandemic that the current synagogue was in bad condition. Buseta is a small agricultural community, and at that time had limited business knowledge. I had met Joanne Trangle through KAAG, and learned that her organization, Global Village Connect (see <https://bit.ly/KulanuSummer2019> page 12-13), funds and facilitates two community projects: Give a Goat, and their own three-month Business Training course. The Buseta community applied in 2023 and was accepted into both programs. After graduation, I could see Joseph and the community gaining confidence in themselves, and I gained confidence in them as well. We were learning to trust each other.

Rebuilding the Synagogue

In 2024, their 20-year-old plywood synagogue completely fell apart due to weather and termites. It was time to commit to building a new synagogue. With a gift from my dear friend Winifred Rome, Z"l, as well as contributions from my husband Charlie and me, we provided the Buseta community with

the funds for a small synagogue. From its experience in Uganda, Global Village Connect shared advice about architectural design, blueprints, budgets, the hiring of contractors, timelines, and community involvement. It sounded simple, but communicating across the world through WhatsApp and email had its challenges.

Construction began in December 2024 and went smoothly, with only a few small hiccups, and it was completed at the end of summer 2025. All that was left was to install the budget add-on of solar power and acquire furniture. The Buseta community applied to Kulanu and received a grant to build an ark, benches, a Torah table, shelves, and two clergy chairs.

Visiting the Buseta Community

To help celebrate this accomplishment, Charlie and I traveled from Michigan to Buseta on October 30, 2025. We finally met the community in person and were welcomed with such joy! Joseph, his wife Ritah, his parents Nathan Walujo and Miriam Kanyi, and all their family, were gracious hosts for the entire weekend.

We were fortunate to have many donated items to bring to the community. Adat



The dedication of the synagogue included the official ribbon-cutting ceremony, led by Cantor Pamela, and a special Torah service.

Shalom, our synagogue in Farmington Hills, Michigan, donated tallitot and tefillin, a *Tikkun* (a book used to prepare for reading or writing a Torah scroll), and a Torah Blessing card for the bimah. Friends



The finishing touches were applied to the new synagogue.

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and colleagues donated Judaica, including siddurim, tallitot, and hanukkiyot. I brought Hebrew primers, Hebrew dictionaries, Torah and Haftarah chanting books, Luach and Gabbai handbooks, and books for Torah study. Kulanu friend Margie Billian sent gifts, including a large, beautiful, handmade tallit for Joseph. Lastly, I was thrilled to present books, Judaica, and a beautiful Torah, all donated by Congregation Shaarey Zedek in East Lansing, Michigan, where I am Cantor Emerita. Everyone's generosity was overwhelming to the Buseta community and me.

Before Kabbalat Shabbat, our Sabbath meal was traditional Ugandan food with a wonderful, large challah. When it was time for the service, the synagogue was packed. The Abayudaya are known for spirited worship and original prayer and hymn melodies. Welcoming Shabbat together with the entire community was inspiring and soulful. Joseph, his brother Isaac, and sister Ezeza led this service as well as the Shabbat morning service. Guests from outside the community were honored. The community buzzed with excitement on Shabbat morning as we all anticipated its first Torah service



Community members chanted from the Torah on Shabbat in their new synagogue, with Cantor Schiffer second from right.

with an actual Torah. The Kiddush lunch was followed by their customary Torah study discussion outside.

Sunday's all-day celebration began with the official ribbon-cutting dedication of the synagogue and a special Torah dedication service. More than three hundred guests enjoyed dancing, music, food, and speeches by local dignitaries and Abayudaya community leaders. I was especially moved when Joseph introduced the elders of the community, including his father, Nathan, who kept the community alive before and after the Idi Amin years. I spoke briefly, acknowledged Kulanu and my congregation, honored Winifred, and thanked the Buseta community for their hard work to make their dream a reality.

Focusing on the Future!

With the synagogue as their spiritual and communal base (and a subsequent sanitation project with latrine, bathing area, and handwashing station built by Drink Local Drink Tap in January 2026), the community is now focusing on education — both Jewish and secular — and connection with other Abayudaya communities, involvement in the International Federation of Jewish Men's Clubs activities, and teen youth projects.

Two projects in their Jewish education goals are already in progress. I've arranged for a traveler to bring High Holiday *machzorim* donated by my Lansing synagogue, and they are in the process of hiring a teacher to work with both adults and children on liturgy and holidays.

Their goals are a tall order for a small, rural community, but, like the synagogue, they can be accomplished brick by brick, step by step. *

Welcomed by Light and Spice in India

Written by and photos by Judi Kloper, Kulanu board member and volunteer

In February 2026, I again visited the Bene Ephraim community in Andhra Pradesh, India, which claims a lost tribe heritage. The synagogue is built adjacent to the home of the late community leader, Sadok Yacobi, Z"l, and his family. Yacob, Sadok's son, is now the community's spiritual leader, and along with his wife Anusha, his sisters Keziya and Beula, Beula's husband and sons, and his mom Miryam, they share every Shabbat

with members of their community. I arrived in time for Havdalah, where I was welcomed with the sweet fragrance of spices and the brightness of the Havdalah candle. The next day, we went in search of my favorite chai (Indian tea) shop from many years ago. Thank you to the Yacobi family for their always-warm hospitality. *Shavua tov! Subha Varamu* (in Telugu, the language of Andhra Pradesh)!



Anusha has been learning Hebrew via online videos and classes. Photo taken during Havdalah.



As Shabbat ended, Yacob led the Havdalah service with the Bene Ephraim community.



Yonatan completed an Israeli-made puzzle that I brought as a gift; it told the story of *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation), an ancient and mysterious Kabbalistic book that, according to tradition, was written by Abraham. (from left to right: Miryam, Anusha, and Yonatan)



Yacob explained to his attentive sister Beula (left), his mother Miryam, his wife Anusha, and his nephew Yonatan the story that accompanied the puzzle (*Sefer Yetzirah*). Yacob has been engaged in Torah study for several years, and this puzzle added a new dimension to his studies.



Miryam read from Tehillim, Psalm 92, in Telugu: "It is good to give thanks unto the Lord, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most high."



On the Sunday following Shabbat, the Yacobi family and I embarked on a search for a small chai shop that several years ago had prepared delicious almond chai that I still talk about to this day. I rode with the women in the autorickshaw (left photo, Miryam, Anusha, Beula, and Keziya), while Yonatan and Ryan followed behind on the motorcycle, with Uncle Yacob driving (Ryan is hidden behind Yacob). When we found that the shop was not there, someone pointed us to a "very good chai shop." I was the one who was surprised; it was a Starbucks! The Yacobis had never heard of Starbucks! But this Starbucks, though expensive by Indian standards, did offer masala chai, which tasted surprisingly good! (I wish, though, that the little almond chai shop were still open!) ✱



South of the Equator, Toward the Soul

by Rabbi Dan Epstein

Rabbi Daniel Epstein is a Jewish educator, speaker, and writer who has spent more than a decade mentoring university students and teaching Torah in communities across North America and around the world. A former financial advisor on Wall Street, he now helps people discover timeless wisdom in Torah and everyday life. To learn more about him, visit his website: <https://www.rabbidanepstein.com>.

During the week of January 11th, 2026, a small independent *beit din* (rabbinical court) that included Rabbi Eliot Pearlson, Rabbi Pinchas Klein, and me traveled to northeastern Brazil with Kulanu's President Bonita Nathan Sussman and Executive Director Molly Levine, Rabbi Gerald Sussman, and Jacob Epstein. This *beit din* worked in close partnership with Kulanu but was an independent entity. On paper, it was an ambitious itinerary: Recife, Campina Grande, fifty-two conversions, thirteen weddings.

The Torah rarely tells a story on paper alone. There is the *pshat* (the plain meaning and details of the text) — the flights, the meals, the logistics of this journey. Then there is the *drash*, the inner story, the one written in the quiet spaces between words. This journey unfolded almost entirely in



The *beit din* in Campina Grande (northwest of Recife) included, from left: Rabbi Eliot Pearlson, Rabbi Pinchas Klein, and this article's author, Rabbi Dan Epstein. Photo courtesy of Bonita Nathan Sussman.

that second language. It was not simply a trip south of the equator. It was a return of souls, of memory, of something long misplaced but never truly lost. The stories of each convert and our journey to Brazil are hard to put into words, but it was easy to feel the cosmic significance. Like many of my spiritual experiences, it was both *ineffable* (indescribable) and *noetic* (intuitive, referring to inner wisdom) at the same time.

We landed in Rio de Janeiro first. There was a brief stop, a kosher restaurant, and a hurried visit to the beach. Mountains rose straight out of the ocean, as if the land itself were reaching upward. It was breathtaking, and yet it felt like we had not thus far begun our spiritual sojourn.

The real beginning came later, in Recife. Upon arriving at the airport in Recife on our first day, a large delegation was waiting. For the first time in my life, someone stood holding a sign with my name on it. I always wanted to be that person. They brought kosher food after a long journey, but more than that, they brought a kind of joy that is hard to translate. Every face carried gratitude, anticipation, something almost luminous. Before a single word of Torah was spoken, something sacred was already in the air. Like a bride before her wedding, the anticipation was palpable.

On our first full day, we traveled to Campina Grande, the location of the Beit Israel Synagogue. We were welcomed with gifts, hats adorned with fringes reminiscent of sidelocks. I shared the following *drash* (inner story) with the group to start our proceedings:

The Midrash Tanchuma (a collection of stories, discussions of specific laws, and rabbinic sermons) tells us a fictional story about a wild deer that accompanies the sheep in and out of the shepherd's pen. Every day, the sheep and the deer go in and out just the same, but the deer is the most beloved of all the shepherd's animals.

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The Midrash tells us why the shepherd loved the deer more than the other sheep. A sheep follows the flock; it is born that way, and that is all it knows. The wild deer enters the enclosure by choice. It did not grow up this way, but it chooses to live this life. In this analogy, G-d is the shepherd, and the deer are the holy converts to Judaism.

Here, in this unlikely corner of the world, were people who were becoming Jews by choice, not just Jews by chance.

After the opening ceremony on the first official day, the beit din began interviewing the candidates for conversion. These were not interviews in the conventional sense. These were encounters. The three rabbis asked each conversion candidate standard questions found in the Talmud and inquired about each candidate's backstory.

One candidate had been a priest. He described a dream, clear and insistent, that led him to leave his congregation and begin again. Others spoke of childhood practices: candles lit quietly on Friday nights, pork avoided without explanation, customs preserved like fragments of a forgotten language. Some were lawyers, others doctors, teachers, and policemen. Young and old. Wealthy and struggling. A full spectrum of human experience drawn, somehow, toward the same point.



Bonita Nathan Sussman in the synagogue held the daughter of the community leader in Recife. Photo courtesy of Bonita Nathan Sussman.

We asked them *why*. Why do you want to be Jewish? Again and again, the answer we heard was: *It makes sense. It feels right. It felt like everything in my life was leading me to this decision to*

become Jewish. This feeling was not just intellectual; it was existential. As if something in their lives, long disjointed, had suddenly aligned. Many said that everything clicked when they decided they wanted to become Jewish formally.

One woman spoke with quiet intensity when she was asked if she was concerned about facing antisemitism if she became Jewish. "I want to share in the pain and the joy of the Jewish people," she said, "no matter what the cost." Another said, almost searching for the words as she spoke them, "Maybe it is blood. Maybe it is soul. I don't know. But when I do mitzvot, it feels like I am continuing something that was stopped. I think I found my family. I think I found my way."

A Declaration Echoing Across Time

Near the end of each long conversation, there came a moment of transition. The candidates were asked to stand. And something shifted. Until that point, it had been study, preparation, and aspiration. Now it was becoming real. The candidates could sense what was happening, and they began to tear up. Together, we recited the Shema.

The Midrash describes a moment when Jacob, nearing the end of his life, gathered his sons and feared that one among them might have strayed. They responded with a unified declaration of faith, reassuring him. Jacob recited the Shema prayer out loud with his children. That ancient moment was not merely remembered — it was recreated. In that room, across continents and centuries, the same declaration was spoken. And it felt as though something that had once been fractured was being made whole again. Some experiences resist description. This was one of them.

Water and Return

The next day brought more hours of interviewing candidates and an immersion in the mikvah, the ritual bath that requires natural water. Jewish

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law requires forty *se'ah* of water, a measure that connects to transformation and rebirth. These forty measures of water parallel the forty weeks of gestation for a baby. Immersion is not symbolic alone. It is generative. These people were being reborn. Each person entered the water carrying a lifetime. Each emerged . . . different. It is difficult to describe the expression on someone's face at that moment, wrapped in a simple towel. There is a kind of stillness, a quiet joy, as if the world has been reset in some subtle but irreversible way. Not everything spiritual announces itself loudly. Sometimes it appears in the smallest details, in the softness of a smile, in the way someone breathes after coming up from the water.

Weddings Before Shabbat

That night, after the interviews and immersions, we traveled to a wedding hall. Because these were new Jewish souls, those who had converted with a spouse now needed to get married under Jewish law. Families gathered, and love filled the air — a love for G-d and the love of six new Jewish couples who were now on a new path in their relationship.

The next day, we traveled back to Recife and conducted more interviews, seeing as many conversion candidates as we physically could.



Just outside of Recife, women waited to enter the mikveh; once inside, they disrobed as per the mikveh requirement. Some women and girls of the same family entered the mikveh together.

Photo by Bonita Nathan Sussman.

After another round of immersions in the mikveh, the next day was Shabbat. Some would be celebrating as full-fledged Jews for the first time in their lives.

The Midrash teaches that each day of creation was paired, but Shabbat stood alone until the Jewish people became its partner. Shabbat is not only a day of rest; it is a union. We use the bridal imagery to symbolize this relationship between Shabbat and the Jewish people. Here in Brazil, this metaphoric idea became literal.

Just before the Shabbat arrived and we were to sing the Kabbalat Shabbat prayers welcoming the Shabbat as our bride, we conducted more wedding ceremonies. These new Jews who had just entered the covenant now stood beneath a chuppah. After an incredible Shabbat filled with songs, stories, Torah learning, and rich conversation, we conducted our last round of weddings on Saturday night. Shabbat was bookended by wedding ceremonies on each end. My heart was full. Just as Shabbat begins with lighting two separate candles and concludes with the lighting of the braided Havdalah candle — its multiple wicks now woven together into a single, radiant flame — so too, at the end of our trip, we bound



In Campina Grande, Rabbi Epstein admired a hat — adorned with fringes representing sidelocks — that he received as a gift.

Photo by Jacob Epstein.

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these new Jews to the Jewish people, past, present, and future.

That Shabbat afternoon, after services, everyone remained in the synagogue and we sang songs, learned Torah, and spoke informally to the community. A few people approached with questions, some about Jewish law, but most were about life. Someone asked me if I was happy. I replied with a smile, “Of course. I get to spend your first Shabbat as a Jew with you!”

Someone else asked me, “Why do Americans have so much anxiety?” I suggested that the constant presence of phones might have something to do with it. What Americans — all Americans — need is a Shabbat, a period of rest and respite; they need to unplug, literally and figuratively. Humans were not meant to be connected to devices every day of their lives. But the truth is that the question itself revealed something. These were people who had found, or were finding, a rhythm of life that felt grounded, intentional, whole. Another conversation was about people’s favorite Jewish holidays. Many spoke of Yom Kippur as their favorite holiday. I asked, “Why? You have to fast.” A couple responded with authenticity in their voices and passion in their eyes, “It is a privilege.” In a world often shaped by inherited guilt, Yom Kippur offered something radically different: agency. The possibility

of return. *Teshuvah* not as punishment, but as homecoming. I believe this idea of return resonated with these Jews who had lineage connecting them to the Spanish Inquisition, and they were now returning to their roots. The Midrash teaches that all souls, past and future, stood at Sinai. Listening to them speak, it was hard not to feel that this was less a conversion than a return.

The Lost and the Found

At the close of Shabbat, during Havdalah, Rabbi Pinchas Klein shared a final Midrash:

A man loses a precious pearl. He can not find it; to him, it is lost. But in truth, it is not lost at all — it remains exactly where it is — it is not lost to itself, and it is not lost to G-d. All along, it was not truly lost. These newly converted Jews were the pearl. They were never really lost to G-d, only hidden from the world.

For centuries, much was lost in the wake of the Spanish Inquisition. Physical ritual objects from Spanish Jewish life before the expulsion are extremely rare. But the most devastating losses were Jewish souls. And yet perhaps they were never truly lost, only missing. They were never lost to G-d. Only waiting.

What Cannot Be Measured?

Fifty-two conversions. Thirteen weddings. Those are the numbers. That is the *pshat* (plain meaning and details). But the deeper story resists counting. The deeper story can only be told with metaphors and analogies because it can not be quantified with numbers or truly expressed in words. The story lives in the taste of the delicious fish we enjoyed, which cannot quite be described; in the expression of someone stepping out of a mikvah with a glow; in a question asked after prayer; in the declaration of the Shema spoken in unison across generations. It lives in the quiet recognition that something ancient has begun again. These are the ineffable moments that can not be described in words. These are the moments that make up the heart and soul of Judaism. ✱



In Campina Grande, a special celebration took place after the weddings. Photo by Molly Levine.

Kulanu Notes

Hanukkah Celebrations in Nigeria

Kulanu communities around the world celebrated Hanukkah with gatherings, candle lightings, music, and community events. In Nigeria, members of the Maccabi Football Club gathered at Gihon Hebrew Synagogue for Havdallah and Hanukkah celebrations, proudly wearing Kulanu jerseys as they shared messages of unity and joy. Across many countries, communities marked the holiday despite limited resources, reminding us once again of the power of connection and shared Jewish tradition.



Brazil and Returning Jewish Communities



Kulanu continued to strengthen relationships with emerging and returning Jewish communities in Brazil, including those participating in recent conversion ceremonies and Jewish educational programming (see page 8 of this issue for a story about this). Many

of these individuals are reconnecting with Jewish traditions and ancestry after generations of separation, and have been building Jewish communal life for years, and in some cases, decades. Community leaders also shared the ongoing challenges these groups face, including limited access to kosher food and mikvahs, as well as to formal recognition.

Welcoming Samantha Shokin

Kulanu recently welcomed Samantha Shokin as the organization's new Development & Programs Manager. Samantha brings experience in nonprofit communications, grant writing, and cultural programming, having previously worked with organizations including the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Museum of Jewish Heritage, and the European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative (ESJF).



Kulanu Records in the University of Pennsylvania Archives



Bob Lande, one of the founders of Kulanu, donated several boxes of original documents from Kulanu's early years. The University of Pennsylvania has graciously placed them in its Jewish archives for researchers of African Jewish history. In addition, Laura Wetzler, who served as Kulanu's Abayudaya coordinator, will

share records in the archives later this summer to increase awareness of our work in Uganda. These records will provide an opportunity for people to learn more about our work and Jewish communities around the globe.

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Education and Scholarships

Kulanu continued supporting Jewish education initiatives in Uganda (pictured), Nigeria, Ethiopia, and other countries through scholarships and partnerships with Jewish schools. These efforts help students access education while also strengthening Jewish learning and community life. The organization continues to focus on community-based educational support that reaches students through local schools and programs.



Celebrating Passover Around the Globe Zoom Event



This spring, Kulanu hosted its first-ever post-Passover Zoom gathering, *Celebrating Passover Around the Globe*. Supporters heard directly from community leaders in Uganda and Nigeria and viewed photos and videos from Passover celebrations across Kulanu partner communities. The event allowed participants to hear firsthand how communities worked together to organize seders, distribute supplies, and celebrate Jewish

traditions despite limited resources. Here's the link: <https://bit.ly/PassoverZoom26>.

Sarah Nikintu of Uganda Travels to USA

Sarah Nikintu, vice president of SAJA (Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance) from the Abayudaya community in Uganda, and a spokesperson against gender-based violence from a Jewish perspective, attended a program in New York presented by the Israeli Consul General about sexual violence that occurred on October 7, 2023. (Pictured here with the director of the center from Israel.) She is in the United States to attend a three-month training in sustainable farming within the framework of Jewish values sponsored by Adamah (<https://adamah.org>).



Kulanu's Online Speaker Series Continues



On May 19, 2026, Kulanu hosted a presentation as part of its online speaker series, "Impact of the Iran war on Kulanu's partner communities." Speakers included leaders from Cameroon, Italy (Rabbi Barbara Aiello, pictured), Uganda, Pakistan, and Zimbabwe. Here's the link: <https://bit.ly/KulanuSpeakersIran>.

You can watch all the recorded sessions on our YouTube channel or on our website at kulanu.org/recorded-sessions. *

Thank You Kulanu Donors

Donations listed below were received between May 1, 2025 and April 30, 2026. Please contact us at <https://kulanu.org/contact> if we have missed your name or contribution, and we will list you in a future magazine. *Thank you!*

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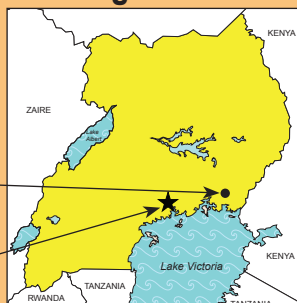


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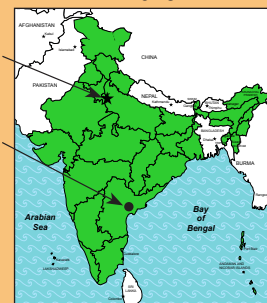
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