

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

KULANU

“All of Us”



The first bat mitzvah ceremony to be held in this synagogue built in 1577 on the island of Rhodes. Emma B. from the USA became a bat mitzvah here. See story on page 20.



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A Bar Mitzvah to Benefit Guatemala



As part of his bar mitzvah project, Jonathan Popper (left), from Rochester, New York, raised funds for the Asociación Judía Reformista de Guatemala Adat Israel in Guatemala, a Kulanu community since 2012. The following is an excerpt from his bar mitzvah speech. Thank you, Jonathan, for leading the effort to help this community acquire

the needed supplies and furniture for the children. (Readers can learn more about this community at <https://kulanu.org/communities/guatemala/>.)

If your child is considering a bar/bat mitzvah project and would like to work with one of our communities, please contact us at <http://bit.ly/mitzvahcontact>.

In His Words: Excerpt from Jonathan's Bar Mitzvah Speech

Mom and Dad and I have talked a lot about honoring our heritage, from all its directions. We eat a variety of foods from around the world to honor all the many places our ancestors have traveled. We talked about my bar mitzvah as a time to bring together my heritage, as Jewish, as Guatemalan, and as African-American. That is why my tallit and kippah are from MayaWorks. They make fair-trade tallitot, kippot, and many items for the home. MayaWorks promotes economic justice for women in Guatemala.

Also, my mitzvah project is learning about a progressive and inclusive Jewish congregation in Guatemala City called Adat Israel, and raising money for them. They are growing and need more benches for seating, a play and learning area for the children, and a Ner Tamid for their ark. Because of where they are, they do not have

access to many Jewish foods or items we can get here, so this money will help them with that. I am designing a tablecloth to send to them to use for their kiddush table after services. I have sent emails back and forth with Jeannette Orantes, the president of the congregation, and with Rabbi Elyse Goldstein, the rabbi who is helping them.



Guatemalan-made benches purchased with funds raised by Jonathan

From Jonathan's Mom, Paula Popper:

It was very gratifying for our whole family to explore Jonathan's heritage, share our own, and then discover this wonderful congregation in Guatemala. We do plan a visit, but it will likely take us a couple of years to put that together. Jonathan is still working on part of the project. We are pleased to be able to help out in meaningful ways and that so much about the congregation was shared with us.



Children enjoying the new play area at Adat Israel

Gratitude from Guatemala



My name is Jeannette Orantes. I'm president of the *Asociación Judía Reformista*

de Guatemala Adat Israel in Guatemala City. Miss Rebecca (Rivka) Orantes, my daughter, is my right hand. Both of us volunteer for our synagogue.

We have been an active community since 2005 and we continue to grow. In 2011, we met Rabbi Elyse Goldstein of Toronto, Canada, who has become our volunteer rabbi as well. Through her, we met Daneel Schaechter, an energetic young man who represents Kulanu and who visited us in 2012. Since then we have created a beautiful friendship between Adat Israel Guatemala, Rabbi Elyse, and Kulanu. With the assistance of Harriet Bograd, Kulanu has provided tremendous support to our young community. We are very grateful to them for their constant desire to help us, which in our country is very necessary.

Recently, we achieved **our first big project's** completion, thanks to Jonathan Popper and his bar mitzvah project. We received funds which we used to make our children more comfortable in the community and at the same time learn Torah, a little Hebrew, halacha, and many other topics that we want them to learn so that they may continue our traditions: L'Dor V'Dor.

The children's room has many materials so that the teachers can plan for and develop different activities. Through crafts they will learn special topics from the weekly parashot. As this donation reached us just before Rosh Hashanah, we followed the tradition of dipping apples in honey so that our next year will be as sweet as the honey. The children also made cards to wish their families to be written in the Book of Life.

The second project is to buy more benches for our members, so everybody can be seated comfortably. They are made by artisans from Guatemala. We all will be very glad to have them.

The third project is to have a real Ner Tamid for the synagogue. This project was more complicated because in Guatemala we are just learning what a Ner Tamid is and what it's for. My daughter and I went to the URJ (Union of Reform Judaism) North American Biennial in Boston, Massachusetts last year. While we were there, we saw many beautiful Judaica items. Both Rivka and I were particularly astonished by a glass artist who created unique pieces full of color and dedication. There was a magnificent Ner Tamid which we thought would be perfect for our room where the aron kodesh (ark) is in Guatemala. We were disappointed when we discovered the price was unthinkable. My daughter Rivka approached the artist, Claude Riedel (clauderiedelart.com), and told her story, and he lowered the price to fit our grant from Kulanu.



Adat Israel's new Ner Tamid

Many miracles happen around Adat Israel, and having Jonathan Popper as well as Kulanu as friends is one of the best. We are very grateful for this donation and we invite you to visit Guatemala in Central America to experience our community.

Thank you, Jonathan! Mazel Tov on your becoming a bar mitzvah! Thank you from the bottom of our heart!

Shalom and Lehitraot!

Jeannette



A Family Mitzvah Trip to Kenya

By Michelle (last name withheld at author's request)

For their bar or bat mitzvah, our children have been presented with the opportunity to participate in a community service project. In response, we made our second trip to Africa. Two years ago we traveled to Uganda with our second oldest son. This time we went to Kenya with our youngest son.

After collecting donations from family and friends, as well as contributing ourselves, my husband Eric, our son Wyatt, and I traveled to a remote Jewish community in northern Kenya near Nyahururu. The objective was to help the Kehillat Kasuku Jewish community to build a social hall and kitchen so that they can effectively gather as many as two hundred people during holidays and for special occasions. In addition, we brought soccer balls and school supplies for the children.



The welcoming sign into the Kasuku community in Kenya

While we were there helping them to build, we also spent time learning about their culture and customs, as well as taking time to enjoy meals with community members during work breaks. We tried to show our son the power of providing for others in a respectful, compassionate, and caring manner. We

are hoping that he internalizes significant lessons going forward as he matures.

Values We Learned

Diversity and Openness

In the village, Jews, Catholics, and Muslims live together peacefully and tolerantly. They share natural resources, live near one another, and unequivocally help each other if there is a need. The community leader reported that he expects

Editor's Note: Several members of the Kulanu team supported Michelle's family in planning this mitzvah project. Harriet Bograd, Kulanu's president, assisted this family in choosing a community to partner with and visit. The plans and budget for the kitchen and social hall were developed by Yehudah Kimani, Kenya's Kehillat Kasuku Jewish community leader. He was assisted by Harriet and Sarapage Podolsky, Kulanu's technology director. Harriet and Mili Leitner, Kulanu's former communication director, helped the family create a personal fundraising page. Jerry Krasny, Kulanu's business manager, tracked the income and payments and sent thank you notes to donors. Peter Persoff, volunteer engineer, assisted in providing oversight on the progress of the construction. Kulanu is now seeking families or congregations to help fundraise for furniture as well as cooking and eating utensils. Please contact Kulanu for more information about how your family, synagogue, or group can get involved.

to share the structure we built with his neighbors because it is the only one of its kind and is in close proximity to neighboring communities. He expressed that it is customary for surrounding communities to share and be generous with their resources.

It was explained to us that there are children in Kasuku who were originally from other communities. They requested to change their faith and were given permission by their parents to join the Kasuku community. These children, as young as six, remain in contact with their biological parents, but live with community members and practice their new faith.

A community member who identified as a convert told us that as a child and teen, she would stay home while her family attended church because she found herself unmotivated and uninterested. I asked how her family feels about her conversion. She responded that her parents are happy that she is actively participating in an organized

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religion and that she has found a religion that she feels joyful about and connected to.

Sharing and Empathy

I was astonished to see how caring and connected the community seems to be. Several examples stood out. We distributed some specialty snacks when we arrived. A mother was eating one and realized that her son didn't get one. When she offered hers to him, he quickly said he didn't want it. I was surprised that he wouldn't jump at the chance; I thought that maybe he just didn't like it. When I asked why he was giving it up, his mother explained that he would never take food away from her, even if he really wanted it. He preferred that she enjoy it and didn't want to get in the way of her pleasure.

It was evident, as well, that community members come to the aid of others in need. If parents are sick or have died, community members step in to foster or adopt their children. If someone is hospitalized, the community raises funds to pay their hospital bill. Otherwise, a patient is unable to leave until their bill is fully paid.

Personal Responsibility and Independence

Children do chores from a very young age and are expected and required to contribute to the needs of the family and household while they are living at home. A member told us that as soon as her three-year-old is able, she will teach her how to wash clothes by hand. She will help with many other tasks, including cooking, cleaning, and watching younger siblings when she is older.

Children walk to school by themselves, often a great distance. One community member expressed the idea that it teaches them independence and to work for what they need and want. They see personal responsibility as being both independent and interdependent, that one does not preclude the other. Their attention is generally toward the collective, even if they are doing something independently.

Gratitude and Being in the Present Moment

Members shared that social mores and the value system focus on gratitude for everything they have and being a kind, caring, and hard-working member of the community. Because resources are scarce, and life is generally precarious because of the economy, the weather, and other factors, community members are taught to avoid comparing themselves to others and to base their pride on who they are and their own accomplishments.

The people who live here stress that they feel gratitude for all they have, and they do not dwell on what they don't have. When I spoke with many of them, they shared that they are happy to be healthy and alive, to eat every day, and especially to cherish occasions when they can gather and enjoy each other's company.

Parenting and Family

There is a well-established hierarchy in families. Because of the need, family members highly rely on one another. During "holiday," when children are off from school, they are expected to follow up on tasks that they are not able to do when they are engaged in their studies. While we were visiting, children were harvesting in the fields, helping their mothers prepare meals, and even assisting their fathers at the construction site.

Siblings are especially close and protective of one another. They are cognizant of where their siblings are and include them in



Wyatt with community member Daniel working on the construction of the new social hall and kitchen

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Kenya Mitzvah: *continued from previous page*

their tasks. It was heartwarming to see the sense of brotherhood and sisterhood that community children share, whether they are biological siblings or not. They travel in groups and are playful with one another.

Children are taught to share and to give up their own things for the sake of others. A member explained that most things are purposefully shared, even if they don't necessarily need to be, in order to teach children to be flexible, resilient in the face of discomfort, and to be open to others. This was evident in their interactions. When we inflated and disseminated the five soccer balls, it was noticeable that among 20 or so children, none of them quarreled over their turn. Each child quickly took their turn and generously passed the ball on. They were excited about taking their turn and were not concerned with what other children were doing.

Expressing Love and Affection

Community members are especially warm and affectionate. They have no qualms about expressing their feelings very straightforwardly. Many of the children wrote endearing notes to my son, expressing warmth and appreciation for his project. The letters were written in a heartfelt, thoughtful, and loving way. The leader, his delightful wife, and other community members

openly expressed love and gratitude toward us. We continue to receive messages conveying love for who we are and what we and our community provided for them.

We videotaped our son in order to hear his perspectives and reflections about his experience. He said that he is left feeling “a greater understanding about how people in other parts of the world live and how hard it could be for them” and that he realizes that “it’s important to be happy with all that you have and always try to give to others.”

We have gained so many gifts and life lessons from our experience with the Kasuku community. Our experience has helped us to get in touch with what is truly important in life and the need to return to our fundamental values when we are interacting on a daily basis. It amazes us that despite all the adversity the community has to contend with, including lack of sanitation, contaminated water, and meager financial resources, they maintain their integrity, kindness, and connectedness.

We left feeling a bit guilty and shameful for all that we take for granted. We also questioned our ability to connect, to accommodate the intensity of emotion when we were approached with such open expressions of love and appreciation. We were reminded that we need to strive to be present, to be grateful, to express appreciation, and to work toward more open emotive and expressive connectedness with those we love.

These are the values and life lessons we will continue to reinforce with our son and our other children through their development. Our experiences in Kenya were incredibly meaningful and powerful. We will savor and continue to learn and grow from each of them throughout our lives.

We are so grateful for all the support and assistance from Kulanu, especially from Harriet, Jerry, Sarapage, and Mili. Your guidance made this trip not only possible but successful. We encourage other families to explore traveling to a Kulanu community.

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Visitors and community members with the outdoor menorah which they light on Chanukah

From Kenya: With Gratitude

By Yehudah Kimani

Yehudah Kimani is the leader of the Kehillat Kasuku Jewish community in Kenya. Born and raised in the city of Eldoret, he has been working with this Jewish community since 2012. Yehudah's main role is to connect his small Jewish community to other Jewish communities around the world, and to work on community establishment and development. Yehudah also raises funds to help disadvantaged children be able to attend school.

It was a warm evening when our guest family from the USA, with whom I had only connected a few months before, arrived and was welcomed by my wife Miriam and me to Kehillat Kasuko in Kenya. After planning with Kulanu and the family for days and weeks for the special social hall and kitchen project, we were so excited to have them here with us. We were also very grateful that this family's friends and relatives joined them in supporting our project to celebrate Wyatt's bar mitzvah.

It was a special time for both our guest family and Kenya's Kehillat Kasuku Jewish community. We shared so much about our lives and experiences from our two different countries. We showed them around the community and we received gifts that they brought especially for the education of the children of Kehillat Kasuku.

I remember that Eric and Michelle mentioned that they would like to participate in the building of the social hall and kitchen, so we gave them a chance to do so. On the second day, it was well-organized so that Eric and his son Wyatt, the bar mitzvah boy, joined other workers carrying cement blocks to the building site. Michelle joined the women to prepare food for the workers, about forty people. It was a beautiful lunch that showed our appreciation to our community and all the workers who were of many different faiths. We felt that this was a good demonstration of oneness and love.



Wyatt and his family distributed notebooks to the children and teens in the Kasuku community.

Wyatt and his family have set a very good example for other organizations and families around the world who would like to do a mitzvah project for Kulanu communities that need them. The social hall and kitchen will be of much help. We look forward to being able to use our new larger space for cooking in all different kinds of weather—now that we don't have to cook out of doors anymore—and having a large hall for all our events, parties, services, and our seders.

Wyatt and his family will always be a special part of our community and we will always treasure our memories of our time together here. When we received the plaque to put on the building, and especially the mezuzah, we could finally say "everything is done!" Our sincere thanks go to Wyatt, Michelle, and Eric. We will always cherish the day we met.



Construction of the social hall and kitchen in the Kasuku community which Wyatt's bar mitzvah project helped to finance

Becoming Jewish in Brazil

By Sarah Leiter

Note from Daneel Schaechter, Kulanu's regional coordinator for Latin America and board member: Nearly four years ago, I had my first contact with Kehilat Ahavat HaTorah, a small yet growing community in Brazil's capital city, Brasília. Since then, we have sent a Brazilian rabbinical student, Natan Freller, to serve as a teacher and most recently, Sarah Leiter, a PhD student of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico who researches how people make sense of their changing religious identities. This is a brief description of her experience during Summer 2018.

Over the past decade, a growing number of Brazilians have been turning toward Judaism from various denominations of Christianity. Hoping to find out why, I traveled to Brazil this past May to meet some of these new Jews.

After failing to secure visits to two emerging Jewish communities that are crumbling without the support of more established Jewish institutions in Brazil, I went to Brasília, the capital of the country. There, a community of about twenty people practicing Judaism immediately welcomed me as a member of their extended family.

For several weeks, members hosted me in their synagogue, a converted three-story townhome in the center of the city. They treated me to

countless meals, all vegetarian both because of my own dietary preferences and because kosher meat, the only kind they'll touch, is rarely available. I heard them replace the occasional Portuguese "obrigado" with a Hebrew "todah," picked up from the native Israeli they employ to teach them conversational Hebrew each week. I watched as they looked up rabbinical interpretations on their smartphones and listened as they played liturgical melodies through their cars' audio systems. I sang with them each Shabbat as they filled their synagogue building with Hebrew harmonies reminiscent of my childhood in a California Jewish community. Together, we celebrated the holiday of Shavuot, recalling the biblical story of Ruth and her famous conversion to Judaism.

I came to this community as a doctoral student in anthropology, a discipline that seeks to add nuance and understanding to the plethora of ways we go about being human. It is a discipline that tries to let more voices be heard; its goal is to listen.

Over a lakeside lunch one day in Brasília, I asked one of the community members what he thought an article about them should include. His answer: "Just tell our stories."

Rodrigo and Sophia

The first time I met 34-year-old Rodrigo and 30-year-old Sophia, they were taking off their motorcycle helmets and waiting for an Uber to a vegan restaurant. The married couple were relatively new to the community; they had met on a dating app just one year earlier and celebrated their wedding five months after that. Sophia, a pharmacist by training, taught herself English and travels often. Rodrigo, who works in



Lucas (a community member), Katy, Isaac, and the author Sarah after lunch at one of Brasília's many vegan restaurants

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Community members Rodrigo, Davison, and Betsalel taking a selfie at a Sunday afternoon barbecue at a local recreation club. Because kosher meat generally is not available in Brasília, the main dish at the barbecue was grilled fish; everything else was vegetarian.

Information Technology, has a particular affinity for Jewish mysticism and the intersections between Jewish and Brazilian histories.

Though the newlyweds came from Christian and Spiritualist backgrounds, they had turned toward Judaism by the time they married. They have not yet been able to convert, but their wedding ceremony included several symbolic elements that celebrated their Judaism.

Since the wedding, they have been participating in Shabbat services at the synagogue every week, taking conversational Hebrew classes with the rest of the community, and learning to lead Havdallah with a candle brought back from a trip to Tsfat. If you listen closely, you may even hear Rodrigo say “Baruch Hashem” a few times during conversations.

Despite their limited access to mainstream Jewish institutions in Brazil, Rodrigo in particular remains eager to undergo the process of conversion. He asked if I might be able to introduce him to American rabbis willing to help foreigners, as he had little hope that his conversion would be supported by rabbis in Brazil. The story of how he and his wife became Jewish, like the stories of everyone else in the community, is to be continued.

Isaac

Sixteen-year-old Isaac was first introduced to the community by his older brother when the family was still Christian. A young teenager at that point, Isaac began to research Judaism on his own. Soon, he was hooked. He began studying Hebrew because, as he told me, “Judaism doesn’t exist without Hebrew—the Torah is in Hebrew.” In another conversation, when I asked him for the meaning of a Portuguese word, he translated it into Hebrew because it was easier to remember than the English.

One afternoon, while waiting together for his retired police officer father to arrive, Isaac told me that his classmates all thought he was strange. It wasn’t cool, he confessed through laughter, to be constantly reading about Judaism and history and world politics, but he enjoyed doing it anyway—even if becoming the only Jewish person in his school meant dealing with his new nickname, “Jew.”

These days, Isaac is usually the only member of his family at the synagogue each Shabbat. He’ll even spend Friday nights on an extra mattress



Alice leading a Friday afternoon challah baking lesson for some of the women in the community, including Katy and Sophia (pictured here learning how to braid challah). Their recipe was adapted from a cookbook purchased in Israel; as the book recommended, the women paused for personal prayer just before burning an olive-sized piece of the dough.

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Alice, Sean, Isaac, and Katy sitting by the front entrance of the synagogue, enjoying each other's company during a mid-week visit

in the building so that he doesn't need to find a ride home and back between Friday Ma'ariv and Saturday Shacharit.

Though he's never been on an airplane, Isaac dreams of one day boarding a flight to Israel and serving in the Israeli Defense Forces. He'd like to participate in a Birthright trip when he's older too. But first, he hopes to convert.

Alice and Sean

One Sunday in a Brazilian church, Sean, the son of an evangelical pastor, noticed a girl with wild curly blond hair. He approached her with a bold pick-up line: "When are we getting married?"

That Sunday was over 25 years ago. Today, Sean and Alice, the girl with the wild blond curls, are married and have three teenage daughters. Sean is the president of the synagogue I visited in Brasília.

Their journey to Judaism, they explained to me, involved several cycles of questioning, of learning, of deconstructing, and of rebuilding. It began about a decade ago in a Protestant Christian church, where Alice would often turn to her husband in disbelief at what the pastor was preaching; it clashed with how they saw the world. Soon, the family stopped attending

their church and distanced themselves from Christianity altogether. For about five years, they remained unaffiliated with any religion. Then, through what Alice's sister found on the internet, they discovered Judaism.

To them, what they learned just made sense. The Jewish emphasis on studying, on being kind to others, and on following commandments that provide practical structure for a good manner of living drew them in. So, they began to look for local synagogues to visit.

Visiting synagogues proved more difficult than they had anticipated; most were simply closed to non-Jewish visitors. Finally, Alice and Sean found an unusually welcoming one—which they soon realized was a messianic congregation.

Feeling "tricked," as they put it, they quickly left the messianic group and dove into a strict practice of Orthodox Judaism. They found others like them, others who wanted to be Jewish but had no congregation with which to learn, and hired an Orthodox rabbi as their teacher. They did everything just as the rabbi taught them; Alice began dressing modestly in long skirts, and Sean began preparing for the hatafat dam brit.

Eventually, the couple decided that Jewish learning was more important to them than following traditions "correctly." Alongside the rest of their community, they turned toward Reform Judaism. Their eldest daughter became the congregation's chazzan.

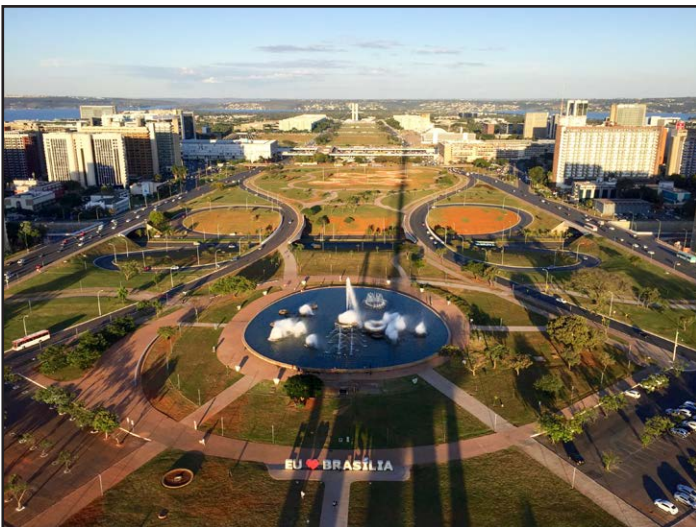
I asked Alice if she thought their religious practice might change again in the future, since her family has moved through so many iterations of both Christianity and Judaism. She told me that it was possible, of course, because a willingness to learn meant a willingness to change. But it is clear that in their Judaism, they have finally found what makes sense for them.

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Betsalel

Betsalel, the community's resident artist, made Brasília his home in part because of its sky. As a professor of architecture and urban planning with a particular penchant for open spaces, he moved to the city to take in its openness. Betsalel's life changed on a 2005 trip to the city of Salvador, where, in his mother's home, he found a Hebrew bible. He started reading. And he kept reading. He read everything he could find about Judaism. It was the translated works of the noted rabbi and author Aryeh Kaplan that catapulted him into Jewish life.

I happened to be in a car with Betsalel—who was wearing a kippah and playing Israeli music—at the beginning of a truckers' union strike, a national crisis that cut off gasoline, jet fuel, and food deliveries to much of the country for about a week. In the car, we passed a long line of honking trucks inching toward the government's most important buildings. Before I could ask him about the trucks, Betsalel veered toward a side street and said, "Let's talk about higher things," specifically, about the world's creation as it is written in the Torah. With Betsalel, mundane conversational topics like Brazilian politics could wait.



A view of the center of Brasília. At the far end of this central park are the buildings that house Brazil's executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. The synagogue is located just two kilometers to the south (to the right in the photo).

Katy

Fifty-eight-year-old Katy from Rio de Janeiro has African ancestry on her mother's side and descends from indigenous Amazonians on her father's side. Taking after her ballerina mother, Katy did gymnastics for four decades. Today, her feet still move constantly—through the city in political protest marches, around the park while chatting with everyone she meets, and in the synagogue as she cleans before Shabbat.

Katy was not raised in any particular religion, but she attended a Christian church for some time in her adulthood until she realized that what they were preaching did not quite align with what she was reading. Over a period of three years, she questioned and she researched. Then, she came across an online video of a man speaking about Judaism. As Katy described it, it was as if she had suddenly stepped into reality.

Transitioning into life as a Jew was not easy. On a practical level, it demanded a radical change in diet, which often meant giving up the convenience and enjoyment of buying food wherever it was available. On an intellectual level, it necessitated a realization that, as Katy put it, she had been "deceived" by other religions whose leaders insisted that they were teaching absolute reality.

At the same time, turning to Judaism felt like coming home in big and small ways. As she learned more about the religion, she discovered that many of her own family's traditions had Jewish roots, even if they were never framed in that way. Katy's mother, for example, had always taught her that pork was a rancid meat that was not to be eaten.

For Katy, the emergent community in Brasília is the bedrock and heart of her Jewish practice. While she is the only member of her biological family who practices Judaism, she speaks of the synagogue community as a family. When they first learned about Judaism, the group did not know how to take a single step into their chosen

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Becoming Jewish in Brazil, continued from previous page

religion, so they found educators who would teach them how to walk. Since then, each little step forward has been together.

Lynnclaire

Lynnclaire, daughter of Alice and Sean, is a twenty-year-old statistics major at the local university and the oldest of three sisters. She taught herself Hebrew and now serves as the community's chazzan. She hopes to move to Israel because, she told me, being Jewish and observing Jewish laws would be easier there.

Lynnclaire keeps Shabbat by refraining from writing and using electronic devices. Her Shabbat observance, in fact, sparked the community's establishment as a locally-registered organization, as she needed institutional documentation in order to reschedule her Saturday university exams. While she holds an astonishing amount of knowledge about Jewish traditions and rabbinical interpretations, it is in her practice of Judaism that she feels most alive. One day, while reflecting on the difference between her life now and her life before she found Judaism, she remarked to me, "I feel like I hadn't been living before."

I once asked Lynnclaire if she thought her community was different from other Jewish communities in Brazil or around the world. She thought a moment, and then, as any Jew might, responded with another question: "Na verdade, todas as comunidades têm suas diferenças, né? Don't all [Jewish] communities have their differences?"

Lynnclaire's wisdom echoed what anthropologists have been re-discovering since the birth of the discipline about a century ago: it is in our differences that we often find similarities.

One might see difference in Aberto, a Brazilian who proudly declares that he is as old as the state of Israel. But as he helps build a community of people who have uprooted and replanted their religious lives, he exposes a recognizable desire to be grounded in a sense of heritage.



Community members Betsalel, Rodrigo, and Davison taking a selfie

One might see difference in Davison, an Afro-Brazilian who leads Hebrew prayers. But in his self-conscious concerns about identifying as Jewish while appearing not to be Jewish, he reflects a familiar human anxiety about belonging.

While speaking with each community member, I was struck by how much laughter decorated their stories. It was a laughter that echoed the joy with which they live their lives, the deliberate happiness they bring into their practice of Judaism, and the genuine delight that has come along with it. Their laughter was the preface to the stories they are just beginning to tell.

The names included in this article are pseudonyms, most of which were chosen by the real people whose stories are told here. Thanks is due to the wonderful community that hosted me, to Kulanu board member Daneel Schaechter, and to a Field Research Grant from the Tinker Foundation and the University of New Mexico Latin American and Iberian Institute. The visit to Brazil—and this article—would not have been possible without them.



Meet Kulanu's Newest Communities

In Puerto Rico, Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Pakistan, and Indonesia

By Bonita Nathan Sussman

As vice president of Kulanu, my particular interest is in engaging new communities. This year has been a particularly fruitful one.

New communities come to Kulanu's attention in several ways: They contact us through our web site after doing a search, an academic has made contact with them and found that they want more Jewish connection, or travelers have come upon them. Sometimes a local resident tells us about a new community developing in the area and shares information about us. Once someone in the community contacts us, we do an investigation to be certain that they really are who they say they are and that they are not a messianic community. We send a questionnaire to get more information, ask for photos, and then add them to our web page.

We are proud to say that we are not missionaries; we do not go out and "look for" communities to become Jewish. Rather, communities come to us. When a community requests it, we send information, teachers, Jewish books, ritual objects, and Torahs when deemed appropriate. We link them with resources as well as with other Jewish communities. We have a technology fund that enable us to give the poorer communities internet access, computers, and, in some cases, help with electricity.

Puerto Rico



Puerto Rico is home to Kulanu's newest community which came to us in the last week of August 2018. This is a small community named *Congregacion Ahavas Torah de Puerto Rico*

that claims descendancy from crypto-Jews, and was established a decade ago by Rabbi Larry



The 6 AM special Rosh Chodesh minyan for the community in Jayapura, Indonesia. One of the teenaged boys said to the visiting Rabbi Keith, "We all want to be rabbis! Can you please tell us how we can do that?!"

Goldstein, a friend of Kulanu who passed away four years ago. They currently study with rabbis in New Jersey via Skype and visitors to their community, and they meet in various members' homes. They are struggling to survive after Hurricane Maria in 2017.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo



The Democratic Republic of the Congo's Luba tribe follows a strong Conservative practice.

We were introduced to this community through

Guershon Nduwa, another friend of Kulanu and the founder and president of the *Federation des Juives Noir* in France.

According to Kabuika, one of the leaders of the Jewish community, "Members of the Luba tribe are the Jews of Congo. Though it is the largest tribe and millions of the Luba people are aware of their Jewish roots, most feel disconnected and fearful of diving into their own heritage. The

continued on next page

New Communities: *continued from previous page*
religious environment here in the Congo is not very open to anything other than Christianity and so they feel trapped.”

Kabuika continues: “However, when you talk one-on-one with people, they do admit wanting to learn more about Judaism. Some are shy but come to attend Jewish holiday events—about fifteen to twenty families join together at these times. Others are passionate about their Jewishness but may not be Jewish in the open, as they live with Christian parents. Quite a few have decided they want to convert to Judaism. While we consider ourselves a Conservative community, we sometimes attend services in Bet Yaakov Kinshasa which follows a Chassidic practice. We are connected to Jewish groups outside of the Congo such as the *Federation des Juives Noir* in France, and others.”

El Salvador



El Salvador’s many developing Jewish communities have reached out to Kulanu recently and in the past. *San Salvador*, El Salvador’s capital and largest city,

is home to Comunidad Beit Israel. They hired Rabbi Elisha Salas who worked in Portugal for twenty-five years, supported by the Israeli organization Shavei Yisrael, as well as by the local community. This community has about two hundred members, and about one hundred members still want and need formal conversion. They are observant Haredi Jews. Genie Milgrom, our coordinator for El Salvador and newest board member, is in touch with the Beit Israel community. She says, “Rav Salas tells me that the community is under tremendous hardship because they are keeping all the laws and sleeping in the synagogue on mattresses on the Shabbat and the holidays. Some are in their seventies and eighties and it kills him to see this kind of sacrifice. They are a very committed and pious group.”



Praying in a shul in Armenia, El Salvador with Sefer Torah donated by Kulanu

The Batalia Shalom-Armenia community in *Armenia*, El Salvador has been helped by Kulanu in the past. Genie reports, “Rav Salas has been hired to take care of them as well. It is a forty minute drive from Beit Israel. The community members are humble, kind, and sincere. There are about one hundred to two hundred of them and they need conversions. Rabbi Salas is just beginning to work with them; in only three weeks he has been to see them three times and has given classes. Many quit their jobs so as not to work Saturdays, so poverty increases with observance. When I asked what they need, he said that Kulanu had already supplied all the siddurim and other Judaica items, and that they have a sefer Torah. He feels at first look that the ideal would be to try to open an inexpensive bakery in San Salvador. That would give jobs to at least eight to ten families.”

One and a half hours west of San Salvador, in *Cara Sucia*, is another small Jewish community. Maurilio Mejia is the community’s spokesperson, and we believe that there are twenty-three to twenty-five people, all un-converted as yet. We need to get more information but we know that they identify as Jews.

In *San Marcos*, El Salvador, there is a community of twenty to twenty-five people led by Mario Lara. While they see themselves as Jews, they are not engaged in Jewish learning at this time.

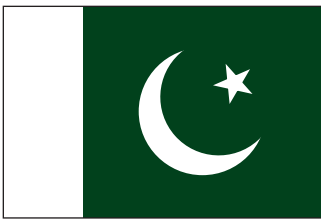
There is also the Shema Israel community in *La Libertad*. Genie reports, “I spoke to Jorge,

continued on next page

New Communities: *continued from previous page*

leader of the community, for over an hour today trying to understand. He was with the group of Beit Israel but separated. The community has about forty to fifty people. They identify as Jews, but none have converted. I asked him to talk to Rabbi Salas to get classes going. There is another community led by Jorge Isaías that has sent us lovely pictures of their community. They have the Kulanu contact information if they need our help.”

Pakistan



In Pakistan, there is a group of about two hundred families who come out of the Noahide movement (a group that practices the seven laws given to the sons of Noah

in the Book of Genesis). They are connected to Rabbi Yakov Cohen, director of The Institute of the Noahide Code, a United Nations-accredited NGO, which is dedicated to teaching Noahide practice, and to a woman in Pakistan who is connected to Rabbi Riskin of Ohr Torah Stone yeshiva in Israel. The community started in 1974, all the men are circumcised, and on Shabbat they come together regularly to study Torah.

Indonesia



Indonesia, the world's largest Muslim country with 220 million people, is home to three Orthodox Jewish communities. Jakarta has a small traditional group of Jews and

an Orthodox rabbi. On the island of West Papua in Timika and Jayapura are the synagogues of two fascinating, vibrant Orthodox communities. They claim descent from Anusim (crypto-Jews). According to their tradition, their families fled Peru after the long arm of the Inquisition found them. They took boats into the Pacific for the arduous journey, stopping in Japan before



The welcome party in Jayapura, Indonesia for Rabbi Keith and Nili (front right): The community took off work and school just to wait for their arrival from the airport. They sang, danced, and ate, but the community was especially eager to start learning right away. Diana, with the guitar, accommodates the entire community every Shabbat and holiday.

settling in Indonesia. They had a Torah with a silver crown. In the 1800s a missionary came, took the Torah and silver, burnt down the hut where they were housed, and left them with New Testaments. Today they have come back to Judaism and are practicing Orthodox customs. They are educated and all can read Hebrew and pray from the siddur and have even printed a translation of the Jewish prayer book. Kulanu has partnered with Ohr Torah Stone in Israel and has sent two couples to visit them. One couple visited for the month prior to and including Passover and Rabbi Keith and Nili Flaks B'Simcha visited for three weeks before Rosh Hashanah. We even managed to get them a Torah! They are serious, devout people who want nothing more than to rejoin the Jewish people.

We are delighted to connect with these blossoming communities and look forward to helping them learn and grow in their Jewish studies and practice.



"Make Your Own" Workshops: the Perfect Bat Mitzvah Project

By Joanie Levine



Racheal Nairima (in orange apron) helping women with sewing and snaps

Joanie Levine manages the Tikkun Olam Committee's Abayudaya (Uganda) Fund of Congregation P'nai Or in Portland, Oregon. This fund assists Abayudaya students in attending primary school through college. She and her partner Yehudah Winter spent three weeks with the Abayudaya in 2014, teaching them Compassionate Listening skills. This project, "Make Your Own" workshops, is the fruition of a shared dream of helping a group of Abayudaya women start a reusable sanitary pad business, a business made possible by the ongoing assistance of Days for Girls in Uganda.

Suzan Nakumiza and Racheal Nairima, two Abayudaya women living in the village of Namutumba, Uganda, are the owners of Namutumba for Girls, a subsidiary of Days for Girls, a non-profit which began in Kenya in 2008 to provide reusable menstrual pads and, later, empowering women to make menstrual pad kits as a business for women. DFG has now reached more than one million women and girls in at least 124 countries. Suzan and Racheal are sewing and selling colorful reusable sanitary pads and liquid soap using the Days for Girls templates and special materials.

Lorne Mallin (who long ago sparked my interest in this community) and I raised funds to send Suzan and Racheal to a two-week Entrepreneur Launchpad in the Ugandan capital, purchased two pedal sewing machines, chairs, tables, shelves, and rented a shop. Kulanu supporter Janet Lipsey generously donated funds for the women to conduct their first three "Make Your

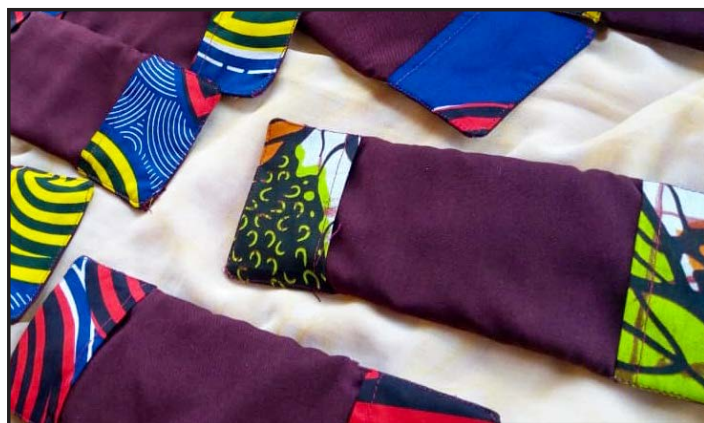
Own" workshops in Namutumba and at Hadassah Primary School in Nabagoya Hill. Kulanu is supplying the business with two phones and computer.

This product and workshop helps girls stay in school and attend classes while they have their periods, a serious problem throughout Africa. Our goal is to bring workshops to all of the Abayudaya villages and schools. "Make Your Own" workshops provide a comprehensive reproductive health session that includes sewing three parts of the Days for Girls menstrual hygiene kit—a shield, a liner and a cloth bag. The rest of the kit plus soap is provided pre-made to ensure that the girls and women have components that will last up to four years.

Consider helping Abayudaya women and girls for your bat mitzvah project! Choose a village or school and raise the funds necessary to bring "Make Your Own" to the girls and women. Contact Joanie Levine, Project Coordinator, at joanlevine@me.com or go to facebook.com/suzannakumiza for more information.



Suzan and Racheal working at their pedal sewing machines, preparing liners and shields for their workshops and for sale at their Namutumba store



Namutumba Days for Girls liners are intentionally bright and colorful so that when they are hanging on a line to dry they don't look like reusable sanitary pads.

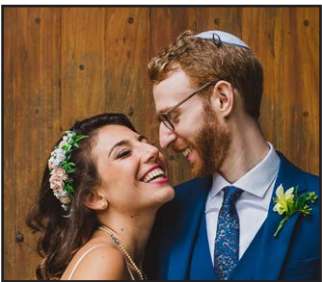
Kulanu Notes

Kulanu Tidings



◀ Welcome to **Jo Ann Friedman**, Kulanu's new Program and Fundraising Manager. Jo Ann is a graduate of Wellesley College, received a Master's Degree in Theological Studies from Harvard University, and graduated from Northeastern University of Law. She found her calling in the nonprofit world, developing the "Family to Family" program in Montreal and working to integrate refugees from the former Soviet Union into the Jewish community there, directing the Montreal Mizrahi Organization, and supporting Hesder Yeshivot. She remains very involved with the Jewish communities of Canada, where her family has been since the 19th century. We are delighted to welcome her to the Kulanu team.

▶ We also welcome **Molly Levine**, Kulanu's new Communications Director. She has an extensive background working in nonprofit communications, having worked with StrongMinds, The Partnership for Jewish Learning and Life, Global Nomads Group, Peace Corps, and Seeds of Peace. Molly holds an M.A. from Emerson College in Global Marketing Communications and a B.A. in Communication Studies from Ursinus College.



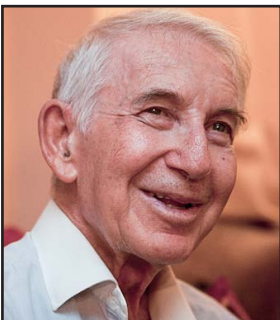
◀ Congratulations to **Daneel Schaechter** on his wedding to Bia Frankel in Brazil this past August. Daneel, now a Kulanu board member and Latin American coordinator, started volunteering with Kulanu in 2008 when he was 17 years old, and took the lead on building our relationships with communities all over Latin America. Harriet Bograd, Kulanu's president, and her husband Ken Klein were thrilled to attend the wedding in Rio de Janeiro.

▶ Congratulations to **Mili Leitner** on her wedding to David Cohen in Israel in September 2018. Kulanu community members Shoshanna Nambi and Sarah Nabaggala from Uganda joined the wedding celebrations. Mili started as a Kulanu intern in 2015 while a graduate student at the University of Chicago. She just stepped down from her position as Kulanu's Communications Director to work full-time on her PhD dissertation in ethnomusicology. We wish her well.



• The Staten Island Council of Jewish Organizations granted its Lifetime Achievement Award to **Boni Sussman**, Kulanu's vice president. They were impressed by her "continuous support of the Jewish community with endless love, support, and vision."

Congratulations to Boni for yet another recognition of your hard work.



◀ Refuah shlema to **Yacov Gladstone** (Yacov ben Sara) of Toronto. He has been reaching out to Jews of color, crypto-Jews, and African Jewish communities since before Kulanu was founded, and he has been a wonderful Kulanu volunteer. He recently underwent major surgery right around his 95th birthday, and has been able to enjoy himself at home.

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Notes: continued from previous page

Kulanu Presentations

► **Beit Shemesh, Israel: Mordy and Mickey Feinberg** (pictured with Shoshanna Nambi from Uganda, a first-year rabbinical student at HUC Rabbinical School in Jerusalem) spoke on behalf of Kulanu this past Sukkot to the cultural committee of the Feigenson Synagogue in Beit Shemesh, Israel. The pair are longtime Kulanu volunteers and this year's Tribute Journal honorees. They discussed their work and experiences supporting emerging and returning Jewish communities.



• **Salem, Massachusetts: Barbara Vinick** spoke to the Explorers Lifelong Learning Institute at Salem State University on October 19th. Her talk was on the Jewish community of Madagascar. Barbara was a member of the Kulanu delegation which traveled to Madagascar in the summer of 2016 to oversee more than one hundred conversions in partnership with a beit din.

• **Staten Island, New York: Boni Sussman** gave a presentation on October 22 to the members of Temple Israel in Staten Island. She was joined by her husband, **Rabbi Gerald Sussman**, to talk about "Lost Tribes and Spiritual Leaders: The Quest for Judaism in the Age of Globalization."

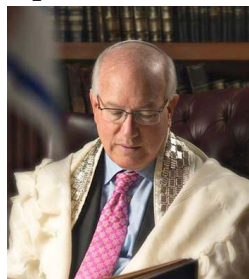
If you are interested in bringing a Kulanu speaker to your community, please contact us at kulanu.org/contact.

Special Projects

Thanks to enterprising community leaders, dynamic Kulanu volunteers, and generous donors, Kulanu is supporting many special projects this year.



▲ We're excited about new guest quarters at **Tikvat Israel Synagogue in Abuja, Nigeria**, donated by **Temple Emanu-El** in Providence, Rhode Island, in honor of **Rabbi Wayne Franklin** ► who plans to retire in 2019.



• We're still raising funds to furnish and equip a new social hall and kitchen at **Kehillat Kasuku Jewish community in Kenya**, supported by the friends and family of Wyatt who celebrated his bar mitzvah this fall. Wyatt and his parents received a rousing welcome when they visited the community in Kenya this summer. Details on page 4 and at bit.ly/kenya-social-hall.

• Volunteer **Joanie Levine** is spearheading three workshops in Uganda run by "Namutumba for Girls" to provide reusable sanitary pads so women and girls don't miss work and school when they have their periods. Using funds donated by **Janet Lipsey**, this project is affiliated with Days for Girls International. See page 16 for more information.

• Kulanu volunteer **Jerry Knoppow**, along with **Sadati Mulilo** and **Yoash Mayende** in Uganda, are organizing a new computer lab for the Tikkun Olam School in Namutumba village. This project is also supported by the **Otto and Marianne Wolman Foundation**.

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► **Jerry Knoppow** and **Sadati Mulilo** are also leading the planning for a developing program to teach computer coding to children at the Hadassah Primary School (unrelated to Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America), which is near Nabugoye Hill, near Mbale, Uganda. This project is inspired and led by bar mitzvah student **Logan Miller** (pictured) and funded by **Fred Miller and Bess Morrison**, and **Lisa and Robin Lissak**.



Kulanu Helps Bring Two Lemba Leaders to Study in Israel



George Zvakavapano (pictured right with Diane Zeller) and **Sheron Nzou Wuriga** (left) arrived in Israel on October 19 for three months of intensive study. Both are part of Zimbabwe's Lemba Jewish community. George will study at the Nidchei Yisrael program at Ohr Torah Stone yeshiva. His home community is the Harare Lemba Synagogue (HLS), where he leads agricultural and development projects in villages that are associated with the HLS. Sheron will learn at Midreshet B'erot Bat Ayin, a women's



Orthodox seminary located south of Jerusalem. She comes from Mapakomhere, Zimbabwe and is a member of the Great Zimbabwe Synagogue. Ohr Torah Stone has generously offered to pay both George and Sheron's expenses in Israel, and Kulanu is contributing their airfare, thanks to support from **Jack and Diane Zeller**.

Abayudaya Birthright Israel Trip

► Young adults from the Abayudaya community in Uganda had the exciting opportunity to visit Israel in August under the auspices of Birthright Israel, with assistance from the Masorti (Conservative) Movement in Israel and MAROM Olami. We are delighted that these young future leaders and community builders, some of whom we have known their entire lives, are experiencing Judaism in new ways in the Jewish state. They arrived in style at Ben Gurion airport with African drumming, Jewish song, dancing, and the blast of a shofar! Watch at bit.ly/ugandaIsrael.



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The First Bat Mitzvah On The Island Of Rhodes

Board member **Rabbi Barbara Aiello** has a track record of bringing progressive Judaism to Southern Europe, and this summer she officiated at the first bat mitzvah ever celebrated on the island of Rhodes, Greece (see photo on cover page). The Jewish community there goes back to the 2nd century BCE, but most of the community arrived from Spain to escape the Spanish Inquisition in the fifteenth century. The synagogue, Congregation Kahal Shalom, was built in 1577 and remained standing even after the population was decimated by the Nazis. The synagogue is now rarely used since most of its congregants were victims of the Holocaust, and bringing b'nei mitzvah students there has brought new life into a historic building. Some b'nei mitzvah families are descendants of Jews from Rhodes or nearby, making the connection particularly meaningful.



Bar Mitzvah Caden B. and his family enjoy a unique family simcha in Greece's oldest synagogue

Judaica Items Find New Homes Around the World

Kol hakavod to **Liz Lomotey Nortey** and her sister **Rachel Lomotey** for sending books to both **Ghana** and **Nigeria**. They did a major solicitation in the UK and shipped eight pallets of goods, a huge contribution to African Jewish learning for years to come. They then spent several weeks in Ghana, including visiting the Jewish community near Accra. Because the shipment didn't get released at the port in Accra until the last few days of their trip, **Moshe Avraham** from Nigeria came with a truck and delivered packages to many synagogues in **Port Harcourt** and **Lagos**. Liz shared with us that Moshe was "a real asset and taught and sang

beautifully in the synagogue." Kulanu was happy to help cover their expenses.

► Thank you to Congregation **Beth El-Keser Israel** in New Haven, Connecticut, which stored over 300 prayer books for us for over a year until we could arrange distribution. Thanks to **Rebecca Weiner**, who shipped some books directly to **Zimbabwe** and **Italy** and shipped others to US travelers. Thanks also to **Sara Feldman**, **Lucy Steinitz**, and **Janet Lipsey**, who carried suitcases of books to **India**, **Nigeria**, and **Uganda**!

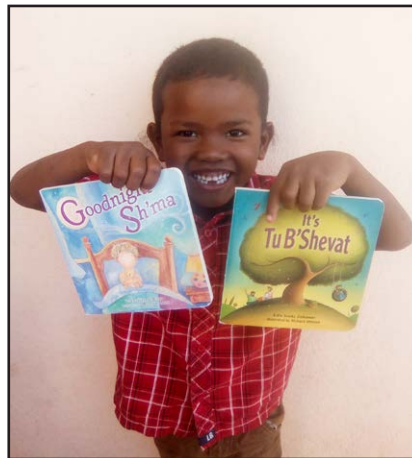


Machzorim donated by Beth El-Keser Israel, received by members of Bene Ephraim in India

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▼ **Madagascar's** Jews are the proud owners of new books and items donated by Kulanu, including a hanukkiya for the synagogue, Talmud volumes, books on women and Jewish law, French/Hebrew versions of Pirkei Avot and Rambam selections, and a shofar for each congregation. Thanks to **Eden Markus** for delivering these items safely from Jerusalem to their new homes. Thanks also to **Amy Degen** for shipping children's books to Madagascar. The community's rabbi, **Rabbi Moshe Yehouda**, personally delivered one or two books to each child in his/her home, and the children were thrilled.



Above left: Happy recipients of Judaica in Madagascar; above center and right: smiling Madagascar children with books recently delivered to them; below left: Rabbi Moshe Yehouda with some of the children to whom he delivered books



Judaica Items Needed

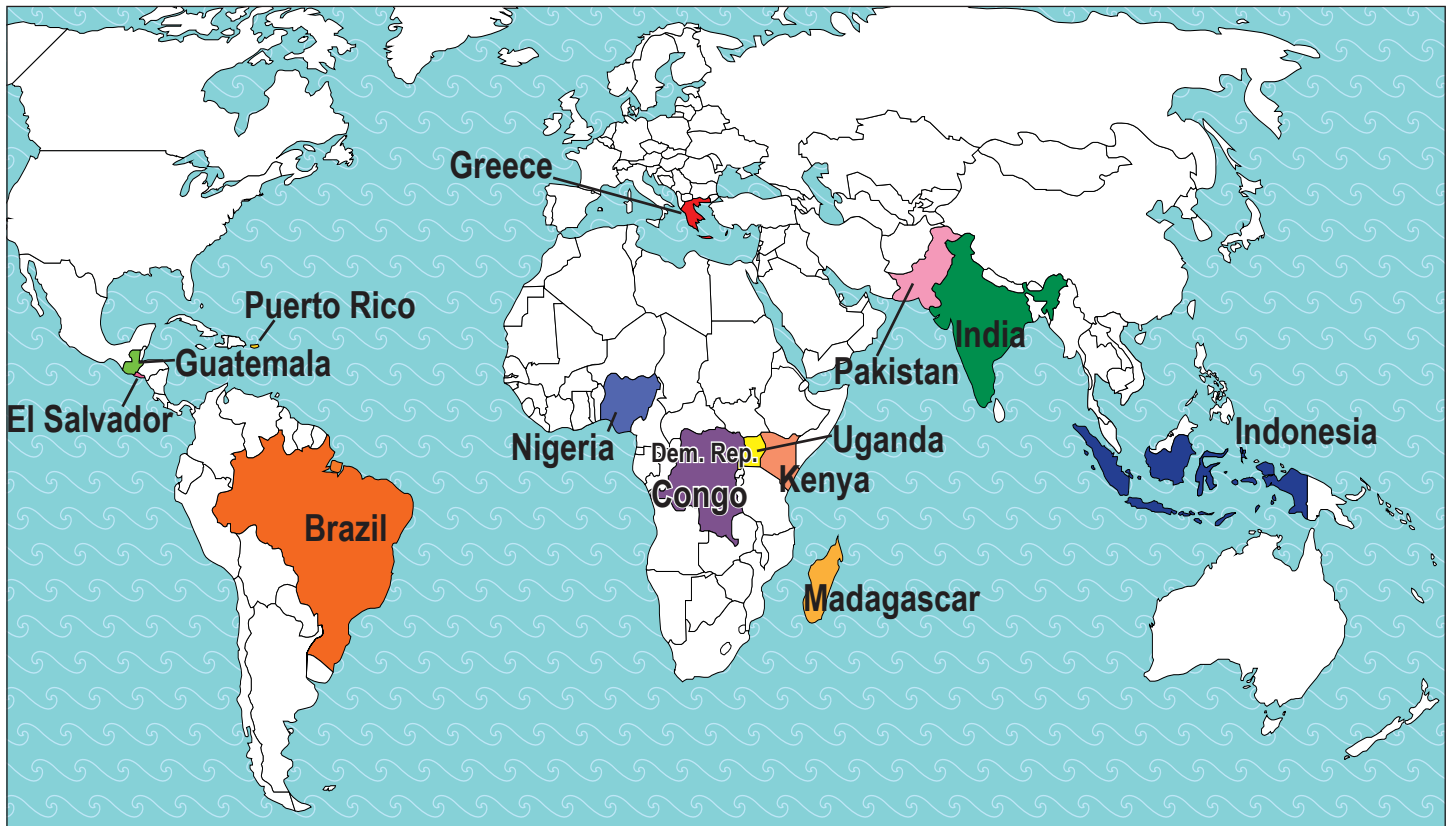
Kulanu supplies donated books and religious articles to our communities around the world. Some of our communities are geographically isolated, financially challenged, or both. This can make it impossible to get hold of even basic items that we might take for granted.

We are always on the lookout for travelers going to one of our partner communities. If you or someone you know is planning a trip and can take things with you, we can help you plan to take essential items to Jews who can't otherwise get them. Meeting the local recipients can be a rewarding experience. Write to us at kulanu.org/contact.

Also please go to kulanu.org/ways-to-donate if you have Jewish books, Jewish objects, or electronic devices that you want to donate. Tefillin and tallitot are currently in high demand!

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.



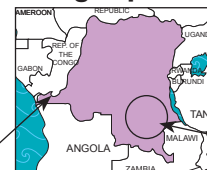
In Alphabetical Order:

Brazil, p8



Brasília,
capital and
home to
the Jewish
community

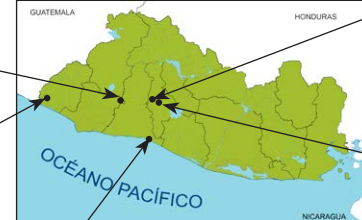
Democratic Republic of the Congo, p13



Kinshasa,
capital

Region of the
Luba people

El Salvador, p14



San Salvador,
capital and home
to Comunidad
Beit Israel

San Marcos

Batalia Shalom-
Armenia
community

Cara Sucia

La Libertad, home to
Shema Israel community

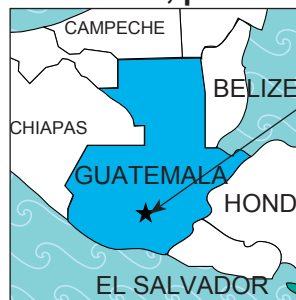
Greece, cover, p20



Athens, capital

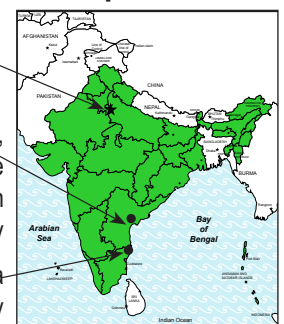
The island of
Rhodes, home
to Congregation
Kahal Shalom

Guatemala, p2



Guatemala City,
capital and home
of Adat Israel

India, p20, 24



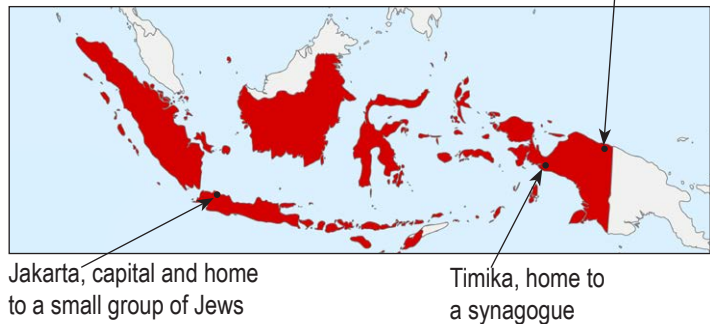
New Dehli,
the capital

Kottayreddypalem,
home of the
Bene Ephraim
community

Chennai, home to a
Jewish community

Map: continued from previous page

Indonesia, p15



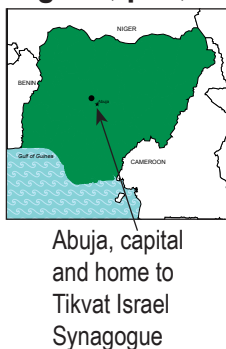
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Madagascar, p21



Nigeria, p18, 20



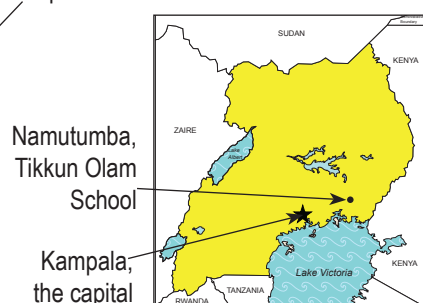
Puerto Rico, p13



Pakistan, p15



Uganda, p 16, 18, 19, 20



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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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A Pictorial History of the Jews in Chennai, India

The fascinating history of this Jewish family, who came to India in 1807, traces back to Amsterdam, Romania, Paris, Germany, Portugal, Iraq, Yemen, and Kerala, India.

Top left: Davvid Levi and his mother, Sarah, standing in front of a large cabinet in her home which displays Judaica items dating back almost 150 years. *Top right:* One of the shofars is from Burma and dated 1966. *Bottom left:* Reprints of the Livorno Haggadah of 1825 with Judeo-Spanish translations, and the Hamburg-Amsterdam Haggadah of 1728. *Bottom right:* Silver Yemeni dreidel made around 1880.



In February 2018, Judi Kloper, Kulanu board member and editor of this magazine, visited Davvid Levi, his mother, and a few other members of the Chennai Jewish community. She learned much about the Jewish history in this part of India.

Watch for the full story of Judi's compelling visit with Davvid, and about his family's history, in the Spring 2019 Kulanu magazine.