



KULANU

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Shalom from India

Text and photos by Judi Kloper

One week was too short for a return visit to the Bene Ephraim community in Kottayreddypalem, a village in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, where I was warmly welcomed as an auntie returning "home." We greeted Shabbat on Friday night, learned about that week's parsha during Saturday morning's service, and together we ended Shabbat with Havdalah. I was able to meet some of the people whom Kulanu, with your help, has assisted with their education and health care, and with many Judaica items, including siddurim, hanukkiyot, and mezuzot. This community continues to need our support for the education of its children—from elementary school to college—as well as emergency health care needs, and for the repair and possible rebuilding of the small synagogue. Currently we need to raise \$2000 for tuition fees, uniforms, and books for 12 of the Bene Ephraim children.



▲ Keziah and her mother Miryam welcome Shabbat. Keziah is teaching the Bene Ephraim children Hebrew blessings, the Hebrew alphabet, and about the different Jewish festivals.

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Your help goes a long way. Please consider contributing and go to bit.ly/beneephraim.

To learn more about this community, visit kulanu.org/communities/india.

◀ Moshe Kedari and his wife Malka with two of their grandchildren, Ruben and Deena, stand with Judi Kloper outside their home.

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◀ Sara Prasanthi, with her quiet demeanor and bright smile, is 17 years old, and with the help of Kulanu, just completed

her high school studies. In July she begins four years of studying toward an engineering degree. She enjoys helping her only brother, 10-year-old Daveed, with his homework. Sara extends thanks to all who've helped her, explaining, "We are very poor, so we need a good education. If we get a good education, we get good knowledge and we know about our community and being Jewish, about Israel, who we are, and to know all the world. I can get a good job, and help my family members of course. Thank you so much for doing what you are doing to help us." Mazel Tov, Sara Prasanthi! We are so proud of you!



◀ Some babies are not named until they are at least a few months old, depending on if the family wants to

have a celebration. This mom asked Judi to name her daughter; Judi was honored and chose the name Shira, Hebrew for "song." The child's name is now Shira Aksitha (Telugu name meaning "immortal"). The black dot on Shira's forehead and cheek is a Hindu custom that even non-Hindus in India have adopted, and is placed there to ward off the "evil eye."

▼ Moshe Korahi reciting the blessings before and after reading the week's parsha. The community comes together weekly to celebrate Shabbat and many in the community have a chance to read the blessings in Hebrew, transliterated into Telugu, their native language (though some can read Hebrew). This book that Moshe is reading from is a siddur translated many years ago into Telugu by Sadok Yacobi, leader of the community. Sadok's daughter Keziya is now transliterating brachot (blessings), Shacharit (morning prayers),



Mincha (afternoon prayers), Maariv (evening prayers), some psalms, and a few holiday services.

▼ David Rajasekhar is 20 years old and recently earned a diploma in elementary education. He hopes to be teaching a class between grades 1 and 5. David plans to eventually earn a Master of Arts in political science and expressed a desire to learn more Torah. David says, "I want to give great thanks to Kulanu for helping me



get an education to become a teacher. This is a big help to me and I will never forget."

► Victoria Miriam is reciting the blessings before and after the Torah portion. Though Victoria Miriam can read the



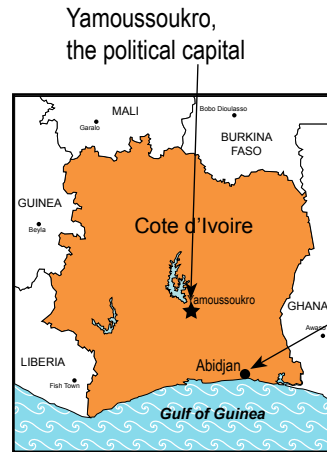
blessings in Hebrew, here she is reading from a siddur in which the blessings were transliterated into Telugu, the language spoken in this part of India.



▲ Ephraim, age 25, standing with the author, Judi, has been chanting the blessings before and after the Torah portions, and helps prepare for Shabbat at the small hall that serves as the community's synagogue. He finished 12th grade in 2012, and earned a Bachelor of Science degree in chemistry in 2015. He also finished training in electronics manufacturing and air conditioning and refrigerator repair to help him find sustainable employment. In 2016, Ephraim suffered from a dangerous intestinal blockage; with Kulanu's assistance, he was able to receive excellent medical care and regained good health. Ephraim is grateful to Kulanu for the support he and his community have received. *

Where in the World is Kulanu in this Issue?

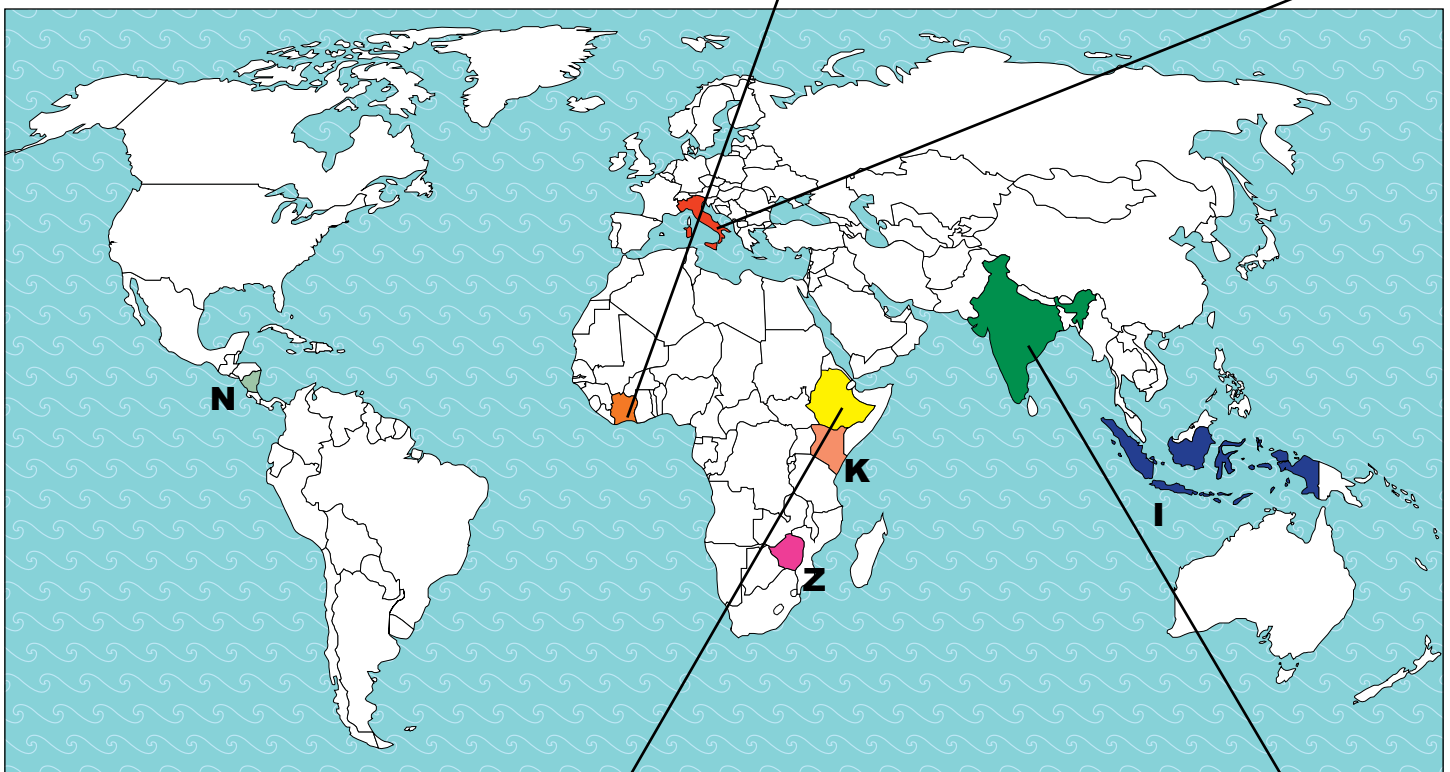
Kulanu is in touch with dozens of communities around the world. When we are contacted, we learn what their needs are and do our best to find ways in which to help them further their study and practice of Judaism and build their communities. You can see on this map where the communities featured in this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



Côte d'Ivoire, p10



Italy, p4



Notes, p14-15

Communities mentioned in Kulanu Notes:

Countries are notated by their initials on the world map

Nicaragua (N)

Kenya (K)

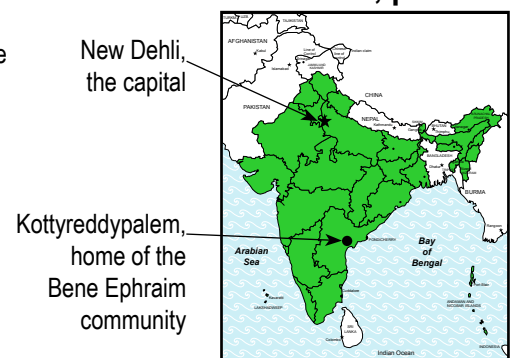
Zimbabwe (Z)

Indonesia (I)

Ethiopia, p8



India, p1



The Seder Hamishi

Italy's Crypto-Jews Revive a Secret Passover Tradition

by Rabbi Barbara Aiello

Some historians believe that the Russian painter Moshe Maimon's most famous work, "Marranos: Secret Seder," actually tells the story of the Seder Hamishi, a special Passover seder held not on the first or second night of Passover, but, as its name suggests, on the fifth night of the holiday. Legend has it that during the time of the Inquisition, first in Spain, then in Portugal, and finally on the islands of Sicily and Sardinia and into Italy's mainland, Jews who had been forced into Christian conversion (*B'nei Anusim*) were helped, surprisingly, by their Christian neighbors.

Neofiti, as these newly minted Christians were called, continued to arouse the suspicion of Inquisition authorities--so much so that gardeners, maids, cooks, and nannies who worked in households of converted Jews were offered a bounty if they could catch their employer cleaning the house of *chametz* (leavened bread), changing pots, pans, and dishes, or preparing *pane azimo*, or matzah, the unleavened bread eaten during the Passover holiday. And then, when the first night of Passover finally arrived, Inquisition soldiers, who laid in wait for the sun to set, would burst through the doors of what had once been Jewish homes, checking to see if any of these former Jews were "judaizing," in this case, making Passover in secret.

The First Secret Seders

Observing this injustice, some courageous Christians concocted a plan to help their Jewish neighbors. At great personal peril to themselves and their families (Christians who helped Jews were often tortured and murdered along with the Jews they tried to save), these Christians encouraged their Jewish neighbors to hold a seder, not on the first or second night but, in order not to arouse the authorities' suspicions, on the fifth (*hamishi* in Hebrew) night. Stories are told of Christian families who allowed Jews to sneak into their Christian *cantinas* (basement rooms), and under the cover of darkness, these Jewish neighbors first made the space kosher and then actually



Passing matzah head to head, a crypto-Jewish seder tradition. Photo by Dominick Pulice

observed Passover complete with symbolic foods, prayers and blessings.

Over the years, the fifth night seder became known as the Seder Hamishi--a doubly appropriate name since *hamish* is the Yiddish word for cozy, homey, and friendly.

Reviving the Secret Seders

Here in Calabria, in the deep south of Italy or

what we like to call "the toe of the Italian boot," our *B'nei Anusim* continue the tradition of the Seder Hamishi. In 2006, when Sinagoga Ner Tamid del Sud ("The Eternal Light of the South") first revived the Seder Hamishi in the town of Selinunte on the island of Sicily, friends and families, both Jewish and Christian, have gathered annually to celebrate this remarkable Passover event.

Each year we hold the Seder Hamishi in the Calabrian town of Lamezia Terme (formerly Nicastro) near to *Timpone*, the old Jewish quarter, that is still intact. Seder guests tour Timpone, lodged at the foot of the castle of King Frederick II, a monarch who recognized the valuable contribution that these Italian Jews made to the local economy and who offered them safety and protection. Following the tour, concert violinist Angela Amato, whose ancestors were forced into Christian conversion and who, along with her son, Alessandro, have returned to their Jewish roots, initiates this historic seder with musical selections in Ladino, the ancient Spanish-Hebrew language of the Mediterranean Jews.

Symbolic seder foods include the traditional shank bone, but for us *Anusim* it is coupled with the *bietola* (blood red beet), to symbolize the lamb's blood on the doorposts that saved the

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Italy's Crypto-Jews: *continued from previous page*

firstborn in Hebrew families. Locally grown romaine lettuce (more bitter than the American variety) replaces horseradish and pieces of celery stalk, rather than parsley, serve as *karpas*, the green vegetable that is dipped in vinegar rather than salt water. The traditional egg on the Italian seder plate is a rich brown in color, because it has been roasted for hours with onion skins, vinegar, and saffron.

The seder meal begins with a *primo piatto* of rice steamed with vegetables, because in our Sephardi or Mediterranean tradition, rice as well as other *kitniyot* are considered kosher for Pesach. Roasted lamb is a must along with *mina*, a layered lasagna-type meat, spinach, and matzah pie brought to Italy from Spain by our crypto-Jewish ancestors.

*...leading the Seder Hamishi...
is one of the most emotional
experiences of my rabbinic career*

Pesach *Anusim* traditions begin with the lighting of the memorial candle in honor of our “forced ones,” followed by the candle blessing for Shabbat and Yom Tov, sung in an ancient Ladino melody. The seder plate itself is actually a *ke'arah*, a woven basket-type tray covered with silk netting that makes a grand entrance to the seder table after the kindling of light.

At the singing of *Ha lachma anya*, the plate of matzah is passed shoulder to shoulder among the guests, a symbol of the heavy burden of slavery. A tin can placed at the head of the table takes center stage for the recitation of the Ten Plagues as a splash of wine punctuates each plague. When the can is filled, the younger guests carry the can into a far corner of the garden with the admonition, “May our enemies stay far from our door.” Then it’s a rousing version of *Dayenu* which features green onion stalks that guests use to tap each other, symbolizing the sound of the whips used to beat the Hebrew slaves.

For me, as a *Bat Anusim* or “daughter of the forced ones,” leading the Seder Hamishi each year in Southern Italy is one of the most emotional experiences of my rabbinic career. As we read the ancient blessings I recall my own family’s crypto-Jewish history when my *nonna* carried candles to the cellar to kindle the lights of Shabbat. Now as each Seder Hamishi brings with it the realization that fear and prejudice nearly extinguished our heritage, this understanding is coupled with a deep sense of gratitude to the nameless Christians whose courage helped preserve the very traditions that I am able to enjoy today.

This year in Calabria, we Jews, who were nearly robbed of our religion, our culture, and our heritage, bring the light of Pesach out of the *cantina* and into the hearts of our brothers and sisters who, after 500 years, now have a new opportunity to do as Torah commands and become “a light unto the nations.” The seder concludes with the traditional wish, “Next year in Jerusalem.” For me and my fellow *B’nei Anusim* whom I serve here in the deep south of Italy, we add *Baruch HaShem*, “Next year in Calabria,” too.

*Rabbi Barbara Aiello is the descendant of B’nei Anusim who escaped from Spain to Italy and practiced Judaism in secret as crypto-Jews. She lives and works in Calabria, Italy and is the founder of the B’nei Anusim movement in southern Italy. She is a Kulanu board member and a guest columnist for a number of Jewish newspapers in the United States. **



Left to right: Rabbi Barbara, Angela Amato, and Maria Miscimarra kindle the lights of Yom Tov. According to the Seder Hamishi tradition, one Jewish woman and one Christian woman stand together to light the candles. Maria represents the brave Christian families who risked their lives to share this secret seder. Photo by Dominick Pulice

Kulanu Community Twinning Initiative: Get Involved!

We are excited to announce a new opportunity to get involved with Kulanu in 2018! The **Kulanu Community Twinning Initiative** will allow synagogues to pair with one of our international partner communities with unique benefits to both. Details on how to inquire or sign up are at the end of this article.

Why Twin Communities?

For twenty-five years, Kulanu has been bringing Jewish education and resources to communities throughout the world. We welcome you to join us in helping to support an isolated, emerging, or returning community around the globe. Your support will allow a Jewish community in need to achieve their goals more quickly and effectively, whether by providing learning opportunities, developing a business, donating Judaica, and more. In exchange, you will have the opportunity to learn about Jewish diversity, to explore unique Jewish practices, and to form links with the community and individuals who live there. You will receive regular updates from your partner community and you will have the freedom to design and execute needed projects, knowing that Kulanu is available to advise you.

What's Required to Become a Twinned Community?

Twinning doesn't have to be a huge financial or time commitment to make a difference to a partner community. You can twin for one specific project--sending siddurim, chumashim, or a megillah scroll for Purim--or for a period of time, perhaps a semester for a Jewish day school or university Hillel, or a year for a synagogue. We also welcome ideas for long-term commitments.

Some kind of contribution would be required from the "donor" community. This could be a fundraising effort, but could also be a donation of your time or a donation-in-kind. For example, you might arrange for sets of tefillin or mezuzot to be sent to a community that doesn't have enough, or fundraise towards a community's first Torah scroll or an educational project like a

school computer lab. Those with strong educator backgrounds or a specific skill (small business management or agriculture) might offer free Skype consultations or mentorship relationships to the community.

You will be able to work directly with your partner community to decide what projects to undertake, and will work together on making them happen with Kulanu's guidance. In some communities you might be able to set up video or audio visits. Or you may be able to arrange in-person visits to or from overseas twinned communities.

Your "community" can be any kind of committed group, whether a synagogue, a social club, a university Hillel House, a Jewish day school, or a class from a school; we are open to any organization that is interested in getting involved.

What Similar Kinds of Projects has Kulanu Assisted in the Past?

Though the term "twinning" is new to Kulanu, we have a number of precedents for this initiative:

Led by Social Action chairpersons Jeanne Bodin and Roberta Roos, Woodlands Community Temple in White Plains, New York raised more than \$25,000 over eleven years for the Abayudaya Jewish community in Uganda. Their



Jeanne Bodin from New York delivering books that her granddaughter collected for the Abayudaya children in Uganda in 2012

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Twinning Initiative: *continued from previous page*

special projects included electricity provision, new water tanks, synagogue construction, support of the Abayudaya elementary school, books for girls, the “Mama in the Schools” program, and Women’s Association conferences. Jeanne and Roberta both visited the Abayudaya, and Jeanne did a huge book project with her granddaughter for her bat mitzvah. Their creative fundraising ideas included a \$50/year membership for their synagogue’s members to become Associate Members of the Abayudaya synagogue and making requests for donations in honor of Mothers Day.

In 2016, a Michigan community paired with Zimbabwe, Nigeria and two communities in Uganda to celebrate Purim together. Children and teachers at Beth Israel Congregation of Ann Arbor (bethisrael-aa.org), Michigan made masks, groggers, and hamentaschen, created videos and written instructions on how they celebrate Purim, and sent \$50 mini-grants to four different communities so that children there could upgrade their Purim festivities. The communities in Zimbabwe and Uganda sent back photos (bit.ly/hl-purim16) and videos (bit.ly/uganda-purim16-vids) to share how they celebrated Purim.

The Federation of Jewish Men’s Clubs (FJMC), and especially its Seaboard Region, has partnered with the Abayudaya Men’s Club and with the Abayudaya Elementary School. After raising

funds and providing mentorship and training in how to start a Men’s Club, they used Skype to teach a number of Men’s Clubs how to lay tefillin (see photo page 20). They also brought Aaron Kintu Moses from Uganda to two of their biennial conferences and to speak at individual synagogues. The Abayudaya men showed their appreciation by sharing a video of them singing Abayudaya music with skillful harmonies at a Men’s Club gathering. (You can listen to Psalm 150 and Psalm 136 at the top of the Uganda—Abayudaya Jews playlist on youtube.com/kulanuvideo.)

Students from University of Vermont Hillel visited the Sefwi Wiawso Jewish community in Ghana, and on their return to the USA organized an event that raised \$4,000 to help send a rabbinical student to Ghana for the summer.

Please share this exciting new initiative with your synagogue leaders, school and university contacts, Hillel House, community center, and anyone else who you think might want to be involved.



Jeanne Bodin and Israel Siriri, community chairperson and construction engineer, 2005, in the Abayudaya community in Uganda in front of a brand-new electrical pole supported by Woodlands Community Temple. Photo by Roberta Roos



Sarah Nabagala (now about to staff the Birthright Israel trip for 40 young Ugandans), Shoshanna Nambi (entering HUC rabbinical school in June, 2018), and Isaac Makidosi, all approximately 14 years old, using a computer donated by Kulanu in the Abayudaya community in Uganda, about 2005. Photo by Laura Wetzler

How Can My Community Get Involved?

We are looking for communities to join this initiative. To get started, fill in the short Google form at bit.ly/kulanutwin. If you know how you’d like to help, please be specific about what you’d like to donate: items, a skill, or a fundraising campaign. Then we will match you with a community that is looking for that kind of help. Or maybe you have decided on a specific community or area of the world where you’d like your efforts to be focused. In this case we can suggest projects in need of extra help in your area of interest. *

The Secret Jewish Communities of Ethiopia

By Reena Kronitz with Samuel Tadesse

Small communities, living in groups of fifty, sixty-five, or ninety people: these are the Beta Abraham Jews of the hidden synagogues of Ethiopia.

Westerners are most familiar with the Beta Israel Ethiopian Jews, the majority of whom were airlifted to Israel during the 1980s and early 1990s in Operations Moses and Solomon. There are varying theories about the origins of Ethiopia's Jewish community, although there is general agreement that they have lived in Ethiopia for millennia.

History of the Beta Abraham

The Beta Abraham are a splinter group that left the larger Beta Israel community in the nineteenth century. At that time, there was a substantial Jewish community centered around the city of Gondar in northern Ethiopia. In the 1850s, the future emperor of Ethiopia, Menelik II, was imprisoned in Gondar but ultimately escaped with the assistance of Beta Israelis he had befriended. His Beta Israel supporters followed him south to the Shewa region where he was crowned King of Shewa by then-Emperor Yohannes IV. Eventually, in 1889, Menelik himself became emperor.

Under Emperor Yohannes, the Jews began experiencing religious persecution. The emperor decreed that anyone who did not accept Christianity must be beheaded or enslaved. That decree caused the Beta Israelis to disguise themselves as Christians. They tattooed crosses on their children's foreheads and cheeks. The men pretended to be Christian priests and men and women began to attend church on Sundays. Their land was appropriated by the Coptic Church. However, many remained on their land and continued their Jewish tradition and rituals and met for Shabbat at the homes of the elders. Elders determined that outsiders should not have access to the community and prohibited members from providing information about the community to others, to prevent their exposure as Jews. Thus began the secret synagogues.

Subsequently, during the reigns of both Menelik II and, later, Emperor Haile Selassie I, the Coptic Church remained very powerful. The Church did not tolerate Judaism or other forms of Christianity. Consequently, the secret practice of Judaism which started during the reign of Emperor Yohannes persisted, continuing to this day. Many of the descendants continue their 3,000-year-old Jewish practices in secret while maintaining their Christian cover. Their synagogues, hidden in remote areas and unknown to most, remain a refuge. There are now only fourteen or fifteen such synagogues which house a largely elderly and infirm population living in abject poverty. Typically eating only one meal a day, they somehow survive--and survive as practicing, hidden Jews.

The Beta Abraham Community Today

Most of the Beta Abraham community now lives in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. They, too, have remained hidden, albeit within an urban context. Their ancestors followed Menelik to Addis Ababa when he moved his capital there, settling near the emperor's Grand Palace in the neighbourhood of Kechene. Today it is estimated that the Kechene Jews number approximately 150,000, although not all continue to actively practice Judaism. It is difficult to determine numbers and the nature of their practices accurately, given the secrecy of the community. It is only within the last twenty years or so that a small group of younger Jews in Kechene has gone public, revealing their existence to the world and attempting to connect with Jews in the West and Israel. Nonetheless, they continue to describe



Elderly woman in a secret synagogue in Ethiopia. Photo by Irene Orleansky

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Synagogues of Ethiopia: *continued from previous page*
persecution, and report that others believe they have the “buda,” or evil eye, and that they turn into hyenas at night. Indeed, I had a personal experience in which a driver refused to take me to Kechene; he was too frightened to go there.

The group has established a small synagogue in Addis Ababa that welcomes visitors, and whose community members are eager to learn about modern Judaism. The Judaism they have practiced has been pre-Talmudic, a continuation of the ancient religious practice of their ancestors. I was fortunate to join them for a Passover seder. It was a remarkable experience in many ways, enhanced when they showed me the spot where they sacrificed a lamb earlier that day and then pointed out the lamb’s blood spread around the door frame leading into the synagogue.



Elders of a secret synagogue. Photo by Irene Orleansky

Members of two hidden synagogues, together with the small group in Addis, were featured in a 2016 film, “Bal Ej: The Hidden Jews of Ethiopia,” directed by Israeli filmmaker Irene Orleansky. This film reveals the history, traditions, and plight of this community. Significantly, other hidden synagogues would not participate, refusing to reveal their existence, and believing firmly that it is only their secrecy that has allowed their community and their Jewish practices to survive.

How We Can Help

The Beta Abraham communities in the secret synagogues of Shewa live in dire poverty. Their Kechene cousins offer support, but they, too, are poor and have limited resources. Kulanu

provided funding for one hidden synagogue to purchase a mill (\$3,500), which allowed them to grind grain, providing both a relief from the drudgery of grinding by hand with stones and as a source of income, as they can now grind for others. This winter, we responded to a request for funding to help the same group purchase food. With reduced rains, food costs increased and the community indicated that food was a priority. They also revealed needs for clothing and roof repairs (\$2,300) so their synagogue will not leak during the rainy season. The two synagogues that participated in the Bal Ej film similarly are in need of food supplies. We are also working with them on developing self-sustaining initiatives. Specifically, we hope to fund the purchase of sheep and chickens (a flock of sheep costs \$525); these are good investments in rural Ethiopia for generating income, while the raising of such livestock is not too demanding for the elderly.

It is a fascinating and moving story. In their commitment to survive as Jews, the Beta Abraham communities have chosen to remain hidden for generations. Yet their devotion to Judaism and Jewish practice remains unwavering, even in the face of grinding poverty and fear of persecution. It is Kulanu’s hope that with our assistance now, these communities will become self-sustaining.

Your support is needed to help provide basic needs for these frail elderly communities. For specific needs, see kulanu.org/ethiopia-wish-list. Please donate at kulanu.org/donate, and write “Ethiopia” in the comments. To fundraise for this as your mitzvah project, contact us (kulanu.org/contact).

Reena Kronitz is a psychologist in Toronto, Canada, who periodically teaches at Ethiopia’s Addis Ababa University. She is one of Kulanu’s Ethiopia coordinators and a member of the Board of Directors of Kulanu Canada.

Samuel Taddesse is an Ethiopian-American who now works and lives in Ethiopia. He’s been one of Kulanu’s Ethiopia coordinators since Kulanu was founded.

✱

Jews In Côte d'Ivoire: An Untold Story

Text and Photos by Bonita Nathan Sussman

For about 20 years, a new Jewish community has been developing in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), a tropical country in western sub-Saharan Africa (see page 3 for map).

History of the Community

The community began fifty years ago as one of a number of International Kabbalah Centers and study groups that were seeded throughout Africa. The center was open to the public; everyone of every faith and belief was welcome to learn Kabbalah and meditative techniques that would improve the quality of life for the practitioners. The study of Kabbalistic texts promised to make people more aware, calmer, and better able to cope with the daily stressors of their lives.

In Abidjan, a group of practitioners, led by Alexandre Zouko, came to believe that to practice Kabbalah in the right way, one had to practice Judaism. Under Alexandre's guidance, they studied Hebrew, learned how to pray, and celebrated Jewish holidays. Some travelled to Israel to study with renowned Kabbalists and, despite some conflicts within the group, founded a community of practicing Jews in Abidjan.



Cornet Alexandre Zouko, developer and leader of the Jewish community in Côte d'Ivoire

It was Alexandre who originally got in touch with Kulanu. While some are poor and struggling, for the most part, unlike other groups of African Jews, members of the community are

middle-class. Many have college degrees and are professionals and academics.

My husband, Rabbi Gerald Sussman, and I visited this community in 2014 as volunteers. We were privileged to bring them a sefer Torah that was donated to Kulanu. We also added books of Jewish learning to their library of siddurim, machzorim, and other books of higher learning.

Beit Din 2017

In December, 2017, we again travelled to Côte d'Ivoire, this time with an Orthodox *Beit Din* (rabbinic court, necessary for conversion) which included three rabbis from The Rabbinical Court for the Diaspora of Israel, a group of independent rabbis which supports Kulanu's mission. In addition to Alexandre's congregation, among the forty-eight conversion candidates was a group called *Etz Chaim* who follow Sephardic practices, led by Abraham Yago. All of the candidates had been studying Judaism for years, and last summer benefitted from the visit of a rabbinical student, Eliyahu Friedman, who taught in Abidjan for a month through the Kulanu Global Teaching Fellows program.



The Beit Din (rabbinic court) interviewing conversion candidates

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Côte d'Ivoire: *continued from previous page*

The conversion process began with the candidates filling in questionnaires documenting their journeys to Judaism, including the impact on their families, and answering questions about holidays, life cycle events, and beliefs. A YouTube video shows Professor Marla Brettschneider, who accompanied us to Côte d'Ivoire, and myself reading some of the evocative answers: bit.ly/cdi-answers.



Rabbi and Bonita Sussman with Professor Marla Brettschneider and the emerging Jewish community in Abidjan

Candidates, separately or as a family group, met with the rabbis of the Beit Din who questioned them, looking for sincerity, knowledge, and commitment. The male candidates for conversion, who were already circumcised—a common practice in Africa—underwent *hatafat dam brit*, drawing a drop of blood as a symbolic circumcision. A rabbi of the Beit Din performed the first one on a leader of the community. After his conversion, the Beit Din trained the leader to perform this holy act on the other men in his community.

At the end of the conversion process, men and women immersed in the mikveh, the ritual bath. After several women had undergone the ritual immersion under the eye of a Kulanu representative, they were trained to oversee immersions of other women as “mikveh ladies.” To see a video of the women singing *Adon Olam* after the mikveh ritual in a natural body of water, go to bit.ly/cdi-adon-olam.



Some women of the Jewish community

Emerging Communities

All over the world, communities are emerging that long to convert to Judaism and become part of the Jewish people. They come to Judaism for many reasons: some claim that they descend from Lost Tribes or consider themselves Children of the Inquisition. Others come from rejection of Christianity and its association with imperialism, while others relate to the Jewish experience of persecution and the concept of redemption as seen in the State of Israel. Their members live Jewish lives and make many sacrifices to be Jews, often at a financial loss (since they do not work on Shabbat), and are often rejected by family and friends. Kulanu is proud of the work we do with these communities and now welcome the Jewish community of Côte d'Ivoire. To learn more about Kulanu's work in Côte d'Ivoire and view more photos and videos, visit kulanu.org/cote-divoire.

*



The private enclosure used for a mikveh built in the lagoon in Côte d'Ivoire where 42 people converted to Judaism. Photo by Sandy Leeder

Experiencing the Crypto-Jewish Journey through Art

Photos by Barbara Balkin

Jonatas Chimen's position as Kulanu's first artist/scholar-in-residence is off to a flying start with his trip to Temple Emeth in Teaneck, NJ from March 9-11 and United Synagogue of Hoboken, NJ the following weekend. Participants of the Temple Emeth weekend expressed great delight (see quotes).

Temple Emeth made the most of Jonatas' offerings, putting on a Friday dinner for donors, a Saturday lunch, and a Sunday brunch. Visitors enjoyed intimate guided tours of the 10 works in the museum, and talks by Jonatas on his personal quest, documenting his history, and about art history related to crypto-Jews. There were programs for young children and teens, as well as opportunities to examine *In Thy Tent I Dwell* and to discuss it with Jonatas.



Jonatas shares the history and symbolism of the paintings in his Journey collection to one small group at a time over the weekend.

“Meaningful and impressive”



Shabbat lunch with talk by Jonatas

“His creativity is astounding.”

“I am so grateful to have met Jonatas, heard him, and seen his beautiful work.”



Jonatas and Temple Emeth volunteers work together on Friday during the day to assemble the installation. Volunteers had borrowed the frame, bed, and lamps in advance.



Helping Jonatas set up the installation is a powerful experience.



Jonatas gives a scholarly lecture on “The Converso Heritage in the Arts.”

continued on next page

Experiencing the Crypto-Jewish Journey through Art: *continued from previous page*



Inside "In Thy Tent I Dwell"

“Jonatas did a wonderful job explaining his art and making connections with our Religious School students.”



Jonatas engaging the teens

“What a wonderful Shabbat we were privileged to have in Hoboken! Jonatas' shomer Shabbat-friendly presentations were spellbinding and so powerful. We are so glad to have hosted you.”
~Rabbi Robert Scheinberg



Children exploring the tent-like installation



Jonatas and Karen Rappaport holding the artwork that Karen and Phyllis Burman bought to give to the synagogue. The Phoenix of Abraham in the painting is a symbol of Jewish revival among the crypto-Jews. Karen chaired the event and masterminded all plans for this weekend. Sales of artwork benefitted Kulanu and the synagogue.



Kulanu President Harriet Bograd, Jonatas Chimen, and Rabbi Steven Sirbu. Rabbi Sirbu shepherded his community through all parts of this rich weekend experience. This is in the synagogue sanctuary where Jonatas spoke after Friday night services about his personal quest. *

See the back page to learn how to bring Jonatas to *your* community

Kulanu Notes

Our New Website

• Our new website is now live at the same URL as before: www.kulanu.org. We are especially proud of our new Jewish Online Resources page (kulanu.org/jewish-online-resources), which showcases free learning opportunities.

This helps our community members to find reliable information as they expand their Jewish practice and knowledge. Feedback is always wonderful as we continue to work out some kinks from the updates!

From Our Partner Communities



◀ Kehilat Yehudim Torat Chaim Synagogue in **West Papua, Indonesia** received a Torah scroll this past month, delivered by **Dalia and Moshe Sharon**, pictured with **Elisheva Wiriaatmadja**. Kulanu paid full airfare for one of the travelers to help make this happen.

► Pesach provided some of our remote communities with the annual challenge of fulfilling the mitzvah of matzah. We are grateful to donors who sent or hand-delivered boxes to communities, including **Nili and Rav Keith B'Simcha**, from Jerusalem, who sent supplies to **Zimbabwe, India, and Uganda**—including seder plates and maror! Other communities make their own matzah in order to become more self-sufficient, like the Beth Yeshourun community in **Cameroon**, pictured here.



◀ **Moshé and Jeanette Henríquez** from **Nicaragua** had a proud moment when their son represented the new Jewish community in Parliament on International Holocaust Memorial Day. Kulanu assisted their community in converting to Judaism just a few months prior.

► Three **Nicaraguans** competed in the **Maccabiah games in Israel** in July 2017, including two from Congregacion Israelita de Nicaragua. **Rebeca Moncada Bermudez** (pictured) represented Nicaragua in Junior-Swimming 100 and 50 meter Freestyle and **Siegfried Fried Orochena** played soccer (futbol) with the team from Colombia. We were happy to hear that they enjoyed their time in Israel sightseeing, making new friends from around the world, and, of course, participating in the games.



continued on next page

► The **Kenyan** community, Kehilla Kasuku, built a new synagogue and library. The project was led by **Yehuda Kimani**. Kulanu provided the chairs for the building.



Kulanu Outreach and More

• **Boni Sussman**, vice president of Kulanu, and her husband, **Rabbi Gerald Sussman**, spoke at the Freehold Jewish Center in Freehold, New Jersey in January. They focused on Kulanu's recent conversions in Madagascar, Nicaragua, and Cote d'Ivoire.

• In **Jerusalem**, we hosted a meet & greet dessert party in mid-April. **Howard Wallick and Freda Rosenberg** kindly offered their home for the event, and we were joined by dozens of friends from Israel, including board members, staff, volunteers, individuals from our partner communities, donors, and supporters. **Shoshanna and Shadrach from Uganda** shared a rendition of a psalm, and **Simcha from Zimbabwe** emceed the event alongside **Mili Leitner**, our communications director. We heard updates from individuals who recently traveled to various Kulanu communities, introduced new friends to our work, and premiered **Josh Kristal's** film on our Nicaragua conversions (see below).

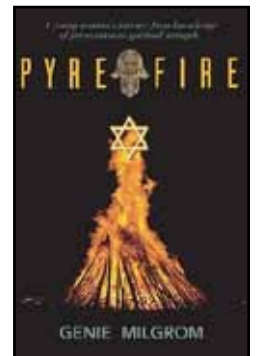
▼ **Josh Kristal's** 13-minute Nicaragua film, *Returning to Roots* is now available to view on Kulanu's YouTube channel at bit.ly/NicFilm.



• **Barbara Vinick**, board member, shared news of our conversion trip to Madagascar. She visited Congregation Sons of Israel in Peabody, Massachusetts.

► Mazel tov to **Genie**

Milgrom, Kulanu advisor, on the publication of her new book, *Pyre to Fire*. Genie discovered her crypto-Jewish (Anousim) heritage after growing up in Havana, Cuba. She has become an expert and advocate for those in a similar situation. This historical fiction book follows one Jewish girl's journey from the Spanish Inquisition to Miami, dealing with many themes and issues common to crypto-Jewish or Anusim individuals.



Be a Kulanu Intern!

Volunteers are essential for all of Kulanu's work. Our three part-time staff assist numerous volunteers and community members who make things happen in Africa, Latin America, Europe, and Asia.

We are seeking committed interns to help us reach the next phase of our development. As a Kulanu intern you will always be doing something different and working with people all over the world through our professional development program. If you can give 10+ hours a week for 3+ months, we'd love to hear from you. Learn more at kulanu.org/volunteer/become-an-intern. *

Thank You Donors

Donations listed below were received between May 1, 2017 and April 30, 2018. Please contact us at 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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Anonymous; Dennis and Jane Carlton; David Holtz and Diane Glatt; Marcia Kaplan; Jerry and Sharon Knoppow and Miriam Saperstein; Stuart "Sandy" Leeder; Janet Lipsey; Cherna Moskowitz; Ryia and Mark Peterson; Jordan and Rahel Rosner; San Francisco Jewish Teen Foundation; Seaboard Region Federation Jewish Men's Club; Drs. Alan and Rena Steinfeld; Karen and Andrew Thorburn; Louis Weider; Otto and Marianne Wolman Foundation; Jack and Diane Zeller

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Mazel Tov!

Mazel Tov to Jonathan Popper, who is raising money on behalf of Congregation Adat Israel in Guatemala for his bar mitzvah (bit.ly/jpoppermitzvah).

Today rabah to everybody who donated to Kulanu!

*

Book Review of *New Children of Israel: Emerging Jewish Communities in an Era of Globalization*

By Nathan P. Devir

Reviewed by Lior Shragg

Assured in tone and ambitious in scope, this volume on emerging Jewish communities signals the arrival of an important foray into the “new” global Jewish community. It is apparent within the first few pages that Nathan Devir has a sophisticated understanding of how his work fits in with existing scholarship. Through extensive fieldwork and research, *New Children of Israel* ambitiously tackles issues that so-called “emergent” Jewish communities face in a period of globalization. The book is organized into three captivating parts, each with its own case study as the lens for Devir’s arguments and observations.

The first section is titled **Structuring Nostalgia in Akanland: The “House of Israel” of Ghana**. In this part, Devir explores how memory and space contribute to developing Ghanaian Jewish identity, and what exactly it means to be a Jew in “Akanland.” Touching on important themes such as “lost-ness,” “normative Judaism,” and “inter-ethnic and religious relationships,” this primary case study is an excellent stepping-stone to the rest of the book.

The second section, **Online Spiritual Volition: The “Internet Jews” of Cameroon**, offers a critical addition to prior scholarship on Afro-Judaic communities. Through Devir’s clever examination of the role of technology in emerging Jewish communities, we learn about the Beth Yeshourun of Cameroon and their chance discovery of Judaism through the internet in the late 1990s. In a departure from the previous chapter, Devir focuses on a Jewish community that does not claim ancestry from the Lost Ten Tribes of Israel. He shows the link between this new Cameroonian Jewish community and other African-Christian movements.

The last section is titled **Political Revivalism as Religious Practice: The “Children of Ephraim” of India**. In it, Devir explores

the complex identity of the Bene Ephraim community in relation to other Indian Jewish communities, as well as to other ethnic and religious groups and their social place in India’s caste system.

This book is a must-have for anyone interested in global Jewish communities. Scholars as well as casual readers will delight in the personal ethnographic nature of Devir’s writing, along with citation of secondary sources and references to related fields. Devir’s case studies “dive right in,” so to speak, and some readers may find themselves disappointed in the lack of rudimentary surface-level information. Readers seeking more in-depth information on the histories of these communities may also be disappointed. Nevertheless, Devir’s engaging and thoughtful treatises are of critical importance to the continued study of these communities. The field of Jewish studies is indebted to Devir for his contribution as the gateway to the next critical era of global Jewish study.

Lior Shragg is a Chicago-based ethnomusicologist, percussionist, and composer. His current research focuses on the musical practices of the Zimbabwean Jewish communities. He has conducted fieldwork in Ghana, Nigeria, and Jamaica.

*Professor Nathan Devir is an expert on isolated and emerging Jewish groups from the developing world and is the chair of the Kulanu Academic Cohort (kulanu.org/kulanuacademiccohort). He teaches Jewish Studies at the University of Utah and is the director of the university’s Religious Studies program and the Middle East Center. **



Kulanu and Computer Technology

By Mili Leitner, Kulanu Communications Director

Since the end of the twentieth century, computer technology has spread throughout the world, profoundly affecting opportunities for Kulanu's isolated, emerging, and returning communities. With Kulanu's help, communities from Latin America to Africa have benefitted from online Jewish learning, access to resources which could help their communities, and improved communication with Kulanu and each other. Our emphasis on technology is due in large measure to the expertise and interest of Kulanu's president, Harriet Bograd, who is constantly learning the newest online tools to meet the needs of our communities and to keep Kulanu running behind the scenes.

Harriet's Initiatives

Harriet was an early adopter of technology, buying her first computer in 1983 and putting it to use in order to lead recruitment efforts for the Abraham Joshua Heschel School in New York City. By the mid-1990s, she was creating online mailing lists, including one on "nonprofit cyber-accountability" that advocated for people to view Form 990 of U.S. non-profit organizations on the internet. Harriet found herself coaching state regulators of charities on how to use email groups and to start using the internet.

When Harriet first got involved with Kulanu in 2001, she visited her daughter who was



Harriet Bograd, now Kulanu president, meeting with women in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana in 2001, using a computer that Kulanu donated to the community.

a volunteer teacher for Kulanu in a Jewish community in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana. She brought a laptop computer and taught the community how to use basic software for Jewish and general learning. During this trip, Harriet spent a lot of time at the new computer, inviting anyone who was interested to join her and learn how to get the most from this new technology. Some community members went with her on a two-and-a-half hour journey to the city of Kumasi, the location of the nearest internet cafe. There, they created an email address for the community, as well a Yahoo group so that people who supported the community or who had visited could communicate with each other. (That group, bit.ly/ghana-shalom-group, still exists today and now has 257 members.) Harriet also used the laptop to take minutes of the first meeting of a co-op for the community's economic development projects. They needed to create this co-op in order to open a bank account. Since 2001, Kulanu has sent this community \$56,000 from sales of their beautiful challah covers and tallitot (kulanuboutique.com/sefwi-wiawso-ghana). This business wouldn't have been as successful without email communications.

In 2004, Harriet took her first trip to visit the Abayudaya, Uganda's Jewish community, where she brought donated computers and accessories and taught interested community members how to use them. During a return trip in 2012, she led a technology workshop to ensure that the community would stay on top of technological developments and maintain their own computers. One of the attendees, Sadati Mulilo, became the director of the UTouch computer center in the main village of Nabugoye Hill. Sadati also directs the community's Hadassah Elementary School computer lab, supported by Kulanu with the amazing leadership of Jerry Knoppow.

Two years ago, Kulanu facilitated conversions in Madagascar, and once again Harriet jumped

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Computer Technology: *continued from previous page*

at the opportunity to share her expertise. In contrast to the trips a decade earlier, a number of individuals in Madagascar already owned laptops and knew the basics of using technology. Harriet donated a Chromebook to Touv'yah, one of the community's leaders, to help fulfill their goal of spreading the word about their new Jewish community. She then led a workshop with this goal in mind, focusing on using email, Facebook, YouTube, and Smugmug (the photo-sharing service that Kulanu uses). One of the attendees wanted to see how other communities around the globe had been inspired by Judaism, so Harriet showed them some of the original music coming out of Cameroon, Uganda, Zimbabwe, and Brazil's Jewish communities. A workshop member told us that he also had written original liturgical music, and Josh Kristal, Kulanu's volunteer videographer, filmed this man and his music, and we uploaded it to our Youtube channel. We now have a YouTube playlist called "Kulanu in Song" where everyone can experience these beautiful melodies (bit.ly/KulanuSong). Harriet recalls: "I gave up a day at a lemur park to lead this workshop, but it was one of my favorite days working with Kulanu!"

Progress in Kenya

Community leader Yehuda Kimani has worked with Kulanu to make computer technology an essential part of Jewish life in Kehilat Kasuku, a small Jewish community established 15 years ago in Kenya's central highlands. Sarapage Podolsky, who is featured in this issue's Volunteer



From Kenya, Yehuda Kimani and his father Yosef Njogu appear via Skype in Florida for a World Wide Wrap tefillin event.



Children in Kehilat Kasuku, Kenya, using laptops donated by Kulanu

Spotlight (see the article immediately following this one), has played an important role in developing internet and technology literacy in this rural area.

Yehudah writes: "Before we knew Kulanu, there wasn't any kind of advanced technology in the village. We had only a basic mobile phone that we used for writing emails and connecting with people via Facebook. But even to view or send photos, we had to travel 30 kilometers to the nearest town to use a computer with a better internet connection. This was tiring and time-consuming."

When Harriet donated a laptop to Yehuda's community, Kulanu helped choose a local internet service and has paid for their internet connection ever since. We also donated a printer and a camera.

Yehuda affirms that the internet has transformed the community's ability to study texts and to learn about Jewish life. He can now use Skype, Facebook, email, Google Hangouts, and other software that require a strong internet connection, and he is in contact with other Jewish community leaders in remote places. He regularly emails us at Kulanu with updates and shares wonderful photos which he uploads directly to our specialized photo server. He is a master at using Facebook and has close to 3000 Facebook friends from around the world.

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Computer Technology: *continued from previous page*

Yehudah, describing some of the ways his community has utilized access to the internet, states: “Kehilat Kasuku has been able to connect with a lot of people from around the world who have visited the community and helped in various ways--especially with Jewish education. This increased our fundraising capacity and allowed us to complete a library project to store the books that visitors have donated. Kulanu has been very helpful regarding technology for our community, and we are thankful and appreciate their work.”

In the Kulanu Office

Not only do we take technology around the world, we also work hard to share knowledge among our staff and volunteers. Earlier this year we unveiled our new website, which not only looks fresh and modern but also allows our staff to update it regularly without needing to learn special code. Just a couple of hours of training is enough to accomplish basic updating tasks.

We designed the new website with our partner communities in mind, making sure that it will work successfully even on computers in remote places that are slow to connect with the internet. A new “Jewish Online Resources” page is full of links to a wide variety of specific Jewish topics. We believe that this will be useful for adults on the path to conversion, people returning to their Jewish roots, bar/bat mitzvah students,

and anyone who wants to add to their Jewish knowledge and practice.

Forging Connections

We are delighted that spreading technology to our communities allows Kulanu leaders to work with our staff and volunteers around the globe to create links between “all of us.” One important way in which we do this is via international Skype conferences, when community leaders from around the globe come together a few times a year to discuss issues that are relevant to isolated, emerging, and returning communities. Often, board members, staff, interns, and volunteers join these conferences, as they offer opportunities for community leaders and Kulanu workers to virtually meet each other. A dedicated Facebook group run by Kulanu also allows community leaders to exchange ideas and information and to work directly with our staff.

We are exploring increased use of the internet for Jewish learning and to share news about Kulanu’s work. In 2016, President Harriet Bograd met with school children in Michigan via Skype to answer their questions about Kulanu, as part of their Purim mitzvah project. Recently, Kulanu Vice President Boni Sussman used Facebook Live to share a class taught by her husband, Rabbi Gerald Sussman. She announced the class on Facebook and more than 240 people viewed the class, including Kulanu friends from Nicaragua and Kenya.

How to Help

You can help the technology program in many ways. Volunteer “photography mentors” can help local leaders share their stories more effectively. We welcome donations to the Kulanu Technology Fund, or in-kind donations of electronics in excellent condition, including laptops, unlocked global smartphones, tablets, or digital cameras. To offer in-kind donations, please visit kulanu.org/ways-to-donate. *



Abayudaya girls' magazine staff get a laptop. Photo by Barbara Rachlin

Volunteer Spotlight: Sarapage Podolsky

Technology Director



Sarapage Podolsky, Kulanu's technology director

Volunteer Sarapage Podolsky has been instrumental in helping Kulanu's communities and their members gain technological skills that have connected them to the rest of the world. Read how Sarapage has made a difference!

Sarapage Podolsky first discovered Kulanu when her family was looking to donate Judaica items that had belonged to her grand-uncle when he passed away. The

family wanted to make sure that his tefillin, tallit, and other pieces would be put to good use, and Kulanu found them a new home in an isolated community in El Salvador. Sarapage started to donate to Kulanu after this first encounter, but wanted to find a way to contribute on a more personal level. In 2014, she wrote to Harriet Bograd, president of Kulanu, from her home in Israel and asked about volunteer opportunities.

When Harriet discovered Sarapage's technical expertise—she holds a degree in electrical engineering and worked in the hi-tech industry—a perfect match was made that would change the way Kulanu communities functioned from then on. Sarapage was excited to find a way to take her skills to communities around the world, where in many of the Jewish communities that Kulanu supports there are great needs for better technology.

Sarapage writes: "For many of the Kulanu communities, internet access has been very limited; individuals had to travel long distances to use internet cafés for a few minutes. It has been my privilege to work with many of the communities to determine their technical needs and offer solutions. Some communities need devices with large screens that everybody can gather around for a Skype lesson with a rabbi. Other communities need a device that is as small as possible so that it can be carried to a charging location. Many of the communities

have unreliable power, so battery life is of utmost importance. In some cases, the internet will be used by one device in the community, and in other communities everybody will share from one wifi hotspot. I consider these factors, and many others, each time I make a recommendation for a device or internet plan."

Thanks to Sarapage's efforts, Kulanu and our partner communities have been able to use technology as a key communication and education tool. Communities are now able to access online learning materials, which has led us to revamp our website's Online Jewish Resources page to assist communities in finding the information that they need to live Jewishly. We regularly receive photo updates from community leaders around the globe sharing their progress and stories with us. Being able to receive high quality pictures and frequent updates is important for our outreach; we share these on social media and email to our many supporters to demonstrate that donations go to good use and reach the communities who need them.

Sarapage has seen transformations in the eight communities where she has been the key player in providing internet access:

"It really excites me to see the impact that internet connection has had on these communities. I've been sung to over Skype by Kenyan youth who didn't have access to Skype before. Many of the communities have been able to start their own GoFundMe campaigns to raise money for community needs outside of Kulanu's scope. The Tikvat Israel community opened a small internet café in their synagogue. Community leaders are able to more quickly respond to emails from outside organizations that Kulanu has partnered them with, or that they have found on their own. I see many individuals with thriving Facebook pages making connections with friends from around the world. I am so proud to have played a part in enabling the global connectivity

continued on next page

Volunteer Spotlight: *continued from previous page*

and technological learning of these communities.”

We are also delighted to see individuals developing new

technical skills under Sarapage’s guidance. Some have learned to use spreadsheets for budgeting.

Harriet Bograd, Kulanu’s president, affirms Sarapage’s transformational role in Kulanu’s work with technology in our communities: “Over the years, my delight in Sarapage’s contribution has grown and grown. She helps assess each community’s resources and needs, helps shop for just the right device for each situation, helps communities assess how much internet service they are likely to need, or when solar power might be appropriate. Introducing technology to communities that are new to it and that have limited electricity can be very challenging. Kulanu is so proud to be able to introduce new communities to Sarapage to help them get started, and to introduce more advanced computer users to her for more advanced help. Sarapage approaches each person she helps with patience and respect, and adjusts to each person’s skills in English, computers, spreadsheets, and budgeting, and she communicates with people using whatever technology is comfortable and available to them, making her broad experience invaluable.”

Technological improvements can touch all areas of an isolated Jewish community’s life, from ritual practice to business management. It also helps the Kulanu office to spread the word about our work and about the self-driven efforts of communities. Thanks to Sarapage, our online network has been enriched! *



In Ghana, rabbinical student Loren Berman uses a donated laptop with Jewish community members in 2017. Sarapage assisted this community to access technology.

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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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Supporting Isolated,
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around the Globe

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Your Own Crypto-Jewish Experience Through Art

Turn your community space into a living museum and art gallery for a weekend.

Kulanu Artist/Scholar in Residence, Jonatas Chimen, is available to share with you and your community a variety of his artwork alongside his tent-like installation, "In Thy Tent I Dwell." Jonatas, a compelling

speaker, talks about broader experiences of Jewish identity, immigration, and exile. His famous tent-like installation is a huge collage of letters, photographs, and documents from his family history, as well as a quarantine room that exiles were put in, and contains sounds and smells from the places Jonatas' ancestors lived. Assembling the tent is a powerful experience for event participants, whose input makes the tent a collective project.

"Jonatas is charming and his story is both surprising and compelling. We are still discussing his tent and its history."



This Kulanu event can be hosted in houses of worship of any religion or denomination, or a university or community organization. We encourage co-sponsorship to spread the costs and responsibilities.

"Jonatas' stories and art make an infamous period of Jewish history fascinating, personal, and alive."



Jonatas Chimen

grew up in Brazil with many Jewish practices, but it was only when he moved to Miami at age 16 that he started his quest to discover his origins. Jonatas learned at

18 years old that he is a crypto-Jew, and traces his family history back to the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition. He marked his embrace of Jewish practice through a special Orthodox return ceremony

rather than a conversion, since his ancestors never abandoned their faith even in the face of persecution. He earned a Master of Fine Arts from Florida International University.

Next Steps:

Visit kulanu.org/jonatas-chimen-speaking-tour for more information about how to bring Jonatas and this memorable experience to your community.

See pages 12-13 for a recap of one community's journey with Jonatas.

