



Elysha Netsarh

Kulanu is excited to announce that our 2016 Kulanu-Madagascar speaking tour will feature Elysha Netsarh. Elysha met Kulanu during a Kulanu group journey to that far-away island country off the east coast of Africa. Kulanu's group was immediately struck by Elysha's outgoing personality, her intellect, and her command of English, as she interpreted for us from her native Malagasy language and French.

Elysha, a researcher and teacher who earned a PhD in plant chemistry at the University of Paris, was raised in Antananarivo, Madagascar's capital city. At a young age, she became interested in probing her country's history, as well as the history of her own family, who, in response to colonial pressures, practiced Christianity along with the majority of the country's residents. When her grandfather revealed the family's Jewish origins, she began to study Judaism in earnest. Her formal conversion in May was the culmination of her search for identity, the fulfillment of a "permanent spiritual thirst."

As a leader of the Jewish community of 150 people deeply committed to Jewish practice, Elysha is in the process of preparing a Hebrew-Malagasy prayer book and compiling a Hebrew-Malagasy Chumash. The distinctive headscarf she wears elicits questions from students and colleagues at the University of Antananarivo, allowing her to share her Jewish beliefs.

Married to a researcher on soil management, Elysha has high hopes for her new-born community, as she contemplates establishing a Hebrew school for children and inaugurating chevruta (partnered) study of Jewish texts.