

# Kulanu

"all of us"



*Helping Lost Jewish Communities*

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## Meet the Abayudaya of Uganda

*By Aron Kintu Moses*

*(Editor's note: the author is secretary of the Abayudaya Congregation, "Moses Synagogue," in Mbale, Uganda.)*

The history of Abayudaya dates from 1919, when an eastern Uganda governor, Semei Kakungulu, read the Bible and realized nothing but Judaism from his study. He circumcised all his sons and followers and had himself circumcised on the same day. He opened a collective settlement for 3000 of his followers, who declared themselves "Abayudaya," meaning "descendants of Judah" in a native language. According to Samson Muyombe, one of his followers, Kakungulu was influenced by Isaiah 56:1-8 and Ezekiel 47:22-23.

Kakungulu met in Kampala, Uganda's capital, with Yosefu, a Jew believed to have come from Israel, and obtained instruction from him. As a result, the nascent community began observing Pesach, Sukkot, Shabbat, etc. According to Mubale, one of the 3000 followers, 10 lashes were given to anyone found violating the Shabbat, such as by lighting a fire thereon.

I'm personally very confident to write that our fathers were very serious concerning their Judaism, given the fact that 1919 was a period when Jews in many countries were persecuted and hunted. Even though they were called "Christ killers," such danger could not threaten their unity.

As for my generation, we are Abayudaya as a tribe and nothing else. We are linked with different customs

*(cont. on p. 6)*

## TEGEGNE, CORDEIRO VISIT

### *Kulanu's Big Weekend*

*By Karen Primack*

October 14-16, 1994, will go down in the annals of Kulanu history. It was the weekend when two extremely distinguished international visitors came from afar to Washington, DC, to brief Kulanu members, the community, and the press about their respective causes. Truly an embarrassment of riches!

Under Kulanu auspices, the two guests, Ethiopian Orit leader Muse Tegegne and Brazilian Marrano leader Helio Daniel Cordeiro, spoke following Shabbat services at Tifereth Israel congregation in Washington and at a Kulanu meeting open to the public on Sunday. Also, interviews for both visitors were arranged by Kulanu with the *Washington Jewish Week* and *The Washington Post*. In

addition, Kulanu facilitated meetings with Dr. Will Recant of the Joint Distribution Committee, Warren Eisenberg, vice president for international affairs of B'nai B'rith, and, for Dr. Tegegne, Norman Rosenberg, executive director of the New Israel Fund. Home hospitality for the visitors was supplied by Kulanu members, and the visitors' requests to see local kosher markets and Jewish bookstores were also satisfied.

Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, Dr. Regina Igel, and Rick Kulick, all Kulanu officers, supplied foreign-language interpretation for Cordeiro.

As I sat through many of these talks and interviews, I was struck by the obvious differences between the two guests -- race, religious practice, country of origin, culture, history. Neither knew much about the other's milieu. Each was usually present at the other's presentations, outwardly listening patiently while pondering his own pressing agenda. I wondered what one thought of the other. I had my answer when the two said their farewells to each other at the conclusion of the weekend. The sincere embrace conveyed Kulanu's message of Am Yisrael. We are, indeed, different from one another, but we are One People.

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### **Helio Daniel Cordeiro,**

31, has been called THE leader of Brazilian Marranos. Founder of the

*(cont. on p. 4)*



*Dr. Muse Tegegne.*

## WHAT IS KULANU?

Kulanu ("all of us") is a tax-exempt organization of American Jews of varied backgrounds and practices

## Arrival in Belmonte

By Eytan Berman

*(Editor's note: Second in a series. In the last installment the author described his motivations in visiting Portuguese Marranos, who had been separated from mainstream Judaism for 500 years, and his arrival in and explorations of Oporto, Portugal.)*

I took taxi and bus the rest of the way to Belmonte, not knowing when we would arrive. Two or three passengers smiled wide, toothless grins at me. It was a sunny day and the hills were decorated with olive trees and huge boulders. It reminded me of Israel. As we approached I saw the mountain and someone pointed out the town perched on top. Belmonte means "beautiful mountain."

Slightly intimidated by this new Old World, I got off the bus and threw my bags on the ground. Later I learned that everyone in town knows each other, and I must have stood out like a zoo exhibit. I walked up the street, exhausted and not knowing where to find a pensao or the Jews. I called my mother and grandmother in Holland to tell them I had arrived safely.

I went into a little cafe and thought the proprietor and his daughter were Marranos. I didn't want to ask them, although I was convinced they had Jewish blood. It was the way the man behaved and his clothes. He wore a jacket and slacks, yet he only ran a cafe. He wore glasses and still had trouble seeing. After I had my coffee I went on my way.

I then saw an old man with a hat and old slacks; he didn't have too many teeth. I don't believe he understood me very well, but he understood the word "Judeo". He pointed at me saying "Judeo" and I nodded. He quickly led me to his home and told me to wait as he went inside. The man then led me around the corner to a fabric store. A telephone call was made, and within a couple of minutes the bearded young rabbi of the community drove up in his new Honda. I wasn't sure what language to speak. I started with Portuguese, then switched to Hebrew and English, and finally settled on a combination of Hebrew and Portuguese.

world. At his apartment I met his beautiful wife. She lit the Shabat candles and we enjoyed a wonderful meal as we discussed the Jews of Belmonte. It became clear to me that the rabbi and his wife were not sent to Belmonte to uphold the status quo. Their mission was to lead and teach the Marranos in Orthodox Judaism.

They are both young Israelis, he of Moroccan birth and she a Sabra. He leads the congregation, teaches the adults how to live as Orthodox Jews, converts Marranos to Judaism and oversees the kosher slaughtering. She teaches the children Hebrew and Judaism. A new synagogue and mikvah are in the planning stages. They told me all the Jews are in the clothing business, some rich and some poor. They tend to be rough and dirty because of long hours in outdoor markets.

We discussed the question What is a Jew, and this led to some lively debate. I was told there are only 70 or so Jews, while I knew 10 percent of the town's 2000 people were Marranos, who I considered to be fully Jewish. My definition of a Jew was different than the rabbi's wife's. She required the strict definition of a Jew to be applied: A clean Jewish motherline, circumcision and the study and practice of Judaism. I wasn't as rigorous and stressed the feeling of Jewishness.

After dinner we went to services. I was simply dressed and arrived in synagogue with the rabbi. We waited for the minyan. People came in slowly, touching the mezuzah when they entered the synagogue. Each man carefully shook my hand. The women entered an adjoining room. All the men greeted the rabbi with "Shabat shalom, Rabino." The services started. The congregants followed the rabbi's lead with hands raised to the Torah. All were involved in the service. They were equals during the service, rich and poor.

They talked to me a little but didn't completely open up until the rabbi left; then their curiosity was unleashed. One man asked if I was Judeo. I nodded. Then if I was Sephardic. They wanted to know what Judaism is like in the United States and what I thought of them. They wondered if

## Help Kulanu Enter the 21st Century!

Needed: Someone with computer abilities to get Kulanu on to the Internet and tell the world what we are doing! Do you know how to place information on the Internet? Should we place Kulanu information in an existing Jewish discussion group or bulletin board, or start our own? If any reader is computer-literate enough to help us out, please phone Bob Lande at 301-585-5229.

## Next Kulanu Meeting

Kulanu's next meeting will be on Sunday, January 15, 1995, at 1 pm at Jack Zeller's house in Silver Spring, MD. Phone 301-681-5679 for directions.

## Speakers Available

Kulanu's speakers' bureau continues to be active. We have a group of knowledgeable people who will speak to public groups about the Lost Tribes and other little-known Jewish communities around the world. Speakers can be heard in a variety of formats -- one-time lecture, discussion, or class. If you are a member of a synagogue, Jewish organization, or non-Jewish organization that might be interested in a speaker, please contact our coordinator, Jonina Duker, 301-530-2361 (afternoons and evenings only).

## KULANU OFFICERS

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## Converting Inca Indians in Peru

By Rabbi Myron Zuber

(Editor's note: This is the first of two parts.)

It all began in 1966, in the Peruvian city of Trujillo, with a man called Villaneuva, a good Catholic who frequently attended church. It was customary for the people to sing a psalm en route to church. On that particular Sunday they were singing Psalm 121, "I will lift my eyes to the hills..." When he came to the fourth verse, "Behold, the Keeper of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps," he

began to ponder, why shouldn't he join that group of people who have 24-hour Divine supervision?

Discussions with his priest could not reconcile his difficulties. After a period of time Villaneuva came to the conclusion that the Catholic Church could not satisfy his spiritual search; he decided to embrace Judaism.

However, in a staunchly Catholic country like Peru one cannot offhandedly dismiss the religion of the country and become Jewish without encountering severe obstacles.

Villaneuva was excommunicated from the Church, which posted a sign proclaiming that no one could socialize with him or marry into his family. Villaneuva remained undaunted. The following week, more extreme measures were employed, and Villaneuva discovered that he had no electricity or plumbing. Still he refused to capitulate.

Villaneuva's children were afraid that the tension would erupt into physical blows so they encouraged their parents to go to Spain. While there, he studied Rambam and Abarbanel in Spanish and visited the small Jewish community in Madrid to acquire as much knowledge as possible. After six months, the furor dissipated and the parents returned to Peru.

**In the interim, the priest was defrocked by the bishop for having**

(cont. on p. 8)

## Belmonte (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 2)

air was thick with Judaism. They permeated of Judaism and savored it in every breath.

I was impressed. The Belmonte Jews were like disorderly troops who needed an Orthodox rabbi to straighten them out. To learn the Orthodox way there is relatively little questioning or interpretation; you take it or leave it. These people learn quickly because they are like sponges -- truly interested in learning. There are advantages and disadvantages with an Orthodox rabbi, as there would be with a Conservative or Reform rabbi. To me, one of the greatest disadvantages of this particular rabbi's interpretation is that some Marranos were not accepted for conversion. They don't have proof of Jewish maternal ancestry or don't live in a Jewish community such as Belmonte with access to a synagogue and kosher meat.


The next morning I went to Shabat services. Among the 60 people were three or four male teenagers and four or five toddlers. The young boys loved seeing me there because they feel accepted if an "outside" Jew joins the service. The older men felt a sense of attachment and looked into my eyes to consummate the connection from the past. They didn't say much, but the look was apparent: "It's good to be back." Some of the men were tanned and wrinkled from exposure to the sun. They are very motivated. They follow the rabbi's instruction and ask many questions. They also kissed the Torah the same way the rabbi did, with all four corners of the tallit.

Portuguese translation. (These can be purchased in Brazil.)

I was fortunate to meet at the house of an ex-Marrano (converted) couple a woman who was introduced to me as a Marrano (not yet converted to Judaism.). Her name was Helene. She was kind and offered to show me around Belmonte. I agreed, not yet appreciating that she was one of the experts on the Marranos of Belmonte. She is involved in several Jewish organizations and has an intimate knowledge of the Jews' problems and needs. Ironically, she is not accepted by the rabbi as Jewish because she lives in the neighboring town of Covilha, 20 kilometers away, a town without a Jewish community, kosher food, or synagogue.

Helene gave me an insider's tour of Belmonte. From the shul we walked up a winding path along the edge of the mountain that separated the sloping meadows from the walls of the fortress perched atop the hill. The gravel path soon took us past the beginning of old houses cradled together along the side of the mountain. This was the old Jewish Quarter.


The Jews of Belmonte at one time lived only in this part of town. The houses are old, built from stone and mortar. They are simple squares with orange tile roofs. The houses are distinguished from other homes in Belmonte by their prominent display of a cross scratched into the outside wall. The Marranos who lived in these houses were terrified of being found out as Jews. They overcompensated in their outward display of Catholicism. Inside the



**Kulanu**  
*Helping Lost Jewish Communities*

Gratefully acknowledges a  
generous gift from

in memory of



Kulanu is a charitable organization dedicated to finding people with potential Jewish ancestry throughout the world and helping them return to Judaism.

Attractive 8"x11" color certificates are now available to honor special occasions (birthdays, anniversaries, bar or bat mitzvahs) or in memory of a friend or relative. To order a certificate, please send a minimum \$18 donation to the office, indicating your name, recipient's name and address, and



(cont. from p. 1)

## Kulanu's Big Weekend (Cont.)

four-year-old Society for the Study of Marranism, he corresponds with hundreds of Marranos throughout Brazil, sending information about Marrano history, Jewish traditions, and ways to re-enter the Jewish community. Cordeiro himself is a Marrano who was raised with the knowledge of his background, but his family observed no religious practice. While he studied theology in his 20's, Cordeiro's interest in Judaism grew. In 1988, with the help of Rabbi Henry Sobel, an American-born Liberal rabbi in Sao Paulo, he formally re-entered the Jewish community. Together with his wife, Dora, who accompanied him to Washington, Cordeiro publishes *Israel*, a monthly Jewish magazine in Sao Paulo.

Cordeiro likes to remind his audiences that some 15 million people in Brazil -- 10 percent of the total population -- are of Marrano origin. Although he does not expect most to return to their Jewish roots, he does see his role as a source of information for those interested in exploring their backgrounds. Following prominent articles last year in the *Los Angeles Times* and a popular Brazilian magazine, he received letters from 200 Marranos, and followed up by answering their questions and sending printed information. He wrote a booklet based on his responses to questions Marranos frequently ask, and Kulanu approved a \$1000 donation to have the booklet published. He would like to write another book profiling some of the fascinating Marranos he has come to know. Cordeiro's previous publications include an early book on humanism and a recent volume on prominent Brazilian Jews.

"Marranismo," the Marrano phenomenon, began with the Spanish Inquisition of 1492, when Spanish Jews were given the choice of converting to Christianity, execution, or leaving the country. About 150,000 fled to Portugal, which welcomed them until 1496, when it had its own Inquisition, forcing a choice between conversion or death (emigration was not permitted). Some became sincere converts, but others outwardly became New Christians, but continued to practice Judaism secretly as "Marranos" -- and do so to this



Participants in Kulanu's "big weekend" included Jack Zeller, president, Helio and Dora Cordeiro, Muse Tegegne, and Jan Sedaka, journalist.

necessary for them to continue to practice their Judaism in secret. Ashkenazic Jews from Eastern Europe emigrated to Brazil in the 20th century, primarily between the World Wars.

In Cordeiro's city of residence, Sao Paulo, there are 100,000 "mainstream" Ashkenazic Jews. According to Cordeiro, the Orthodox congregations are unwilling to recognize Marranos or to accept them for conversion. The Liberal congregations are more welcoming, but their rabbis are too occupied with their congregations' affairs to make any major effort toward Marrano outreach. Cordeiro would like to see the hiring of a rabbi whose main responsibility would be to travel to the Marranos in communities throughout Brazil, educating them in Judaism and officiating at conversions when appropriate.

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### Dr. Muse Tegegne, 42,

an Ethiopian Jew living in Geneva, represents the four million *Orit* (the Ethiopians' traditional term for Jew) presently living in Gojjam (meaning "heathen," a perjorative for the land of the Orits, who refused to accept Christianity), a fertile area at the source of the Blue Nile in western

University of Geneva. He lived in Israel for four years and speaks fluent Hebrew, English, and several African and European languages. He was forced to leave Gojjam during the 1974 revolution in Ethiopia.

Guihon (the biblical name for Gojjam) is mentioned as one of the four branch rivers that "compasses" Eden, the one that flows through the land of Cush (Genesis II,13). Tegegne teaches that the Guihon is the Blue Nile and Cush includes the part of Ethiopia encircled by the Blue Nile at its source: the present region of Gojjam. Thus, he concludes, Guihon is the western border of Eretz Yisrael by biblical descriptions. The people of Guihon consider their land within the prophetic Israel and have no need or desire to make aliyah to the present-day Israel, although they would like to have relations with Israel and come and go often. The fertility and wealth of the land is another reason why emigration is not sought.

The Hebrew legend of Solomon and Sheba adds a further claim on the Guihons' ties to Judaism. As the story goes, Makda, the 23rd Queen of Sheba, traveled to Jerusalem to meet the celebrated King Solomon. A son, Ebna Hakim, resulted. King Solomon recognized him as a son, gave him a copy of the Holy of Holies, and sent representatives from among the 12



FROM THE PRESIDENT

## A Scare Tactic

By Jack Zeller

Recently, Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail has been rudely charged by a few members of the established Jewish community in Israel of planning to bring millions of African and Asiatic Jews to Israel. This charge, totally untrue, was an ugly scare tactic -- used by those who want to change the Law of Return -- which has no applicability to the Shinlung (Tribe of Menashe) immigrants from India to Israel.

Whatever merit there may be to changing the Law of Return, it is not served by lies and racial innuendoes. But the worst aspect of the criticism is that it distracts Rabbi Avichail from his efforts on behalf of 53 Shinlung who are ready and waiting to make aliyah. These individuals and families have been **so carefully and individually screened** that upon arrival in Israel it is assured that they will be motivated to work and study and qualify for conversion at the end of a year.

The Shinlung (also referred to as the Chikimi) do not get any support from the Jewish Agency and do not sit idly in absorption centers, the victims of government maladministration. They work and study and make the most of what they have, which is breathing the spirit of Jewish life and aspirations.

And, contrary to the scare tactics message, these are not impoverished people seeking economic asylum; to the contrary, they are middle class and educated members of Mizoram who are making well-informed choices, including a diminution of their living standard and often a change of professions.

It requires remarkably little to absorb the Shinlung. But that little amount (\$3000) is still more than Rabbi Avichail currently has to bring over the remainder of the group that is waiting in Mizoram. These and other needs are mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter. **We urge you to show your support for the Shinlung at a time when they are shamefully maligned. And, at the same time, you will send a message to those who use deceit to humiliate themselves, the Shinlung, and the Jewish people in Israel and the Diaspora.**



UNLESS YOU WANT TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE...

## Don't Read This!

By Robert Lande  
Kulanu Treasurer

Kulanu has aspirations that can only be described as extremely ambitious, perhaps even as outlandish.

We want to help those Shinlung, descendants from the Ten Lost Tribes in India, who wish to return to Judaism. Many of them also want to make aliyah, and we want to help them do this and support them in Israel until their conversions are complete.

We also want to aid interested havurot and individuals who are crypto-Jews of Marrano descent to regain their Jewish heritage, including those we have visited and made contacts with in Brazil, Mexico, Peru, and Portugal.

We also want to help the 15 million Pathans in Pakistan and Afghanistan understand that they are of Jewish descent (to further Jewish-Muslim relations, not to convert), and to help Jews in Ethiopia.

But we have almost no money.

Kulanu has been in existence for only half a year, and during this period we have been concentrating on defining and building our organization, finding and coordinating volunteers, educating ourselves, and letting people know that we exist. In fact, since we are still, organizationally, in our infancy, these will have to be our highest priorities for the coming year as well. But we also want to continue and improve upon our token starts towards achieving our substantive goals. Although all of our workers are volunteers, this requires a significant amount of money.

Since Kulanu was formed, it has received \$7773 in donations. We have spent \$4000 to provide transportation from India to Israel for seven Shinlung (Tribe of Menashe) immigrants, \$1000 to print a booklet on Judaism for Brazilian Marranos, about \$800 on newsletter printing and mailing, \$500 on the IRS fee for tax exemption, and approximately \$750 for shipping supplies to India and Mexico, long-distance phone calls, and copies of our literature for distribution. Our current balance is \$553.52.

This does not include tens of thousands of dollars of donations to Amishav USA, Kulanu's predecessor organization. Virtually all of the money donated to Amishav USA was spent helping the Shinlung make aliyah.

Please give generously. You may designate how you would like your contribution to be used and we will faithfully honor your request. If you have been thinking of joining or renewing your membership, now is the time to do it. If you can afford more than the basic membership, this would be greatly appreciated. Thank you.

### KULANU PARTNERSHIPS

#### Join Our Congregation Match-Up!

Yes, money is important. But many of the isolated Jewish communities Kulanu wishes to assist could also be helped immeasurably by simple contact with other Jewish communities.

Perhaps your synagogue, havurah, service organization, Hadassah chapter, school, or social group would enrich itself -- as well as others -- by matching up with one of these dispersed communities, helping it to define or continue its practice of Judaism.

We're not talking about money (although that *would* be appreciated in many cases) as much as we are talking about communication, friendship, and moral support. Establish correspondences and send holiday cards, inexpensive children's Chanukah gifts, a few kipot, a book or musical tape. Exchange photos. *Arrange visits!* Help take these groups out of their loneliness and isolation.

There are many geographic and halachic choices. Select a Mexican havurah of Conservative converts, the Orthodox Inca community in Peru, or vet-to-be converted groups in Brazil, India or Uganda. There's no reason why one foreign

## Meet the Abayudaya (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 1)

and traditions from those of our neighbors. We are criticized because of this, and yet we don't have or need any alternative.

During the '60's and early '70's, when Uganda shared diplomatic ties with the land of Israel, the community received many Israeli visitors, among them Arye Oded, the first secretary of the Embassy of Israel to Uganda. He wrote the history of the community and made plans for two of our youths to go for a rabbinical course in one of the yeshivahs in Israel, but this plan was frustrated by Idi Amin, who took over in 1971 and the following year declared the expulsion of all Israelis within 48 hours.

Presently a few of our youths make gradual visits to both the synagogue and the Israeli embassy in Nairobi. Ambassador Arye Oded has promised to visit our congregation. The association for righteous proselytes in Israel has promised to take the youth to study Judaica, but Uganda's relationship with Israel doesn't permit the process. At present no one from the community has ever been there.

Following the Ethiopian airlift to Israel, the Abayudaya gained hope also to migrate and thus fulfill what was said in Isaiah and Ezekiel.

We observe Rosh Hashanah. Tekiah is read by the reader and repeated by the congregation, but we lack the shofar. The service for Rosh Hashanah is read. On Sukkot we build the sukkah and services for Sukkot are read from the sidur. On Simchat Torah we dance around the synagogue and rejoice for the completion and beginning of the Torah (although we lack Sifrei Torah). On Chanukah we light the candles, one every evening, and we sing Chanukah songs taught to us by Douglas King (an English Jew). On Purim, following the fast of Esther, the

Megillah is read and whenever Haman's name is mentioned the congregation shouts "Akolimirwe," a native Ugandan word meaning "accursed be he." We celebrate when the Book of Esther, 9:27 is read -- "and the Jews vowed to celebrate Purim together with those who join them."

On TuBeshevat we plant trees at the synagogue and around our homes. On Pesach we make the seder. It was only last year that we received matzot from the Israel Embassy in Kenya; otherwise we have been making our local unleavened bread. The searching of the leaven is also done. We eat the bitter herbs, and leavened bread is not found in our homes from the first night (15th of Nissan) through the seven days. We read the Haggadah in both English and Hebrew. On Shavuot we eat fruits, as it is a season of mangoes, oranges, guavas, and jack fruits. Also these are brought to the synagogue and members celebrate the giving of the Torah with joy; the Ten Commandments are read while the congregation is standing. "Chag Ha-azmaut" is realized, and prayers for the welfare of the State of Israel and the IDF are read.

We have a tape with two compositions, one ours and the other of a London Jew, Douglas King, who visited our community one Chanukah. We also have music from our youth group.

During the past, the congregation lost most of its numbers due to intermarriage. In a meeting of Abayudaya elders, held in August 1989, it was resolved that he who marries outside will be denied the right to be a Muyudaya, a Jew, and I can assure you that we are quite serious with the whole issue; even our young men and women are gaining interest in this. Polygamy has been utterly discouraged.

The other information I can include is that we are facing some small-scale persecution. Words like "Abayudaya batta Yesu," meaning "Jews are Christ killers" are always directed towards us. During the Gulf War, Moslems around us were saying, in native language, "Israel will be smashed together with Abayudaya community." In 1988 our youths organized themselves in a kibbutz program and were making bricks for our new synagogue. They faced torture, imprisonment, extortion, blackmail and harassment by the local authorities, mounted mainly by Moslems who had planned to confiscate their bricks and convert the synagogue land to the neighboring school authority. But, fortunately, the government in power is behind religious tolerance for all beliefs and, after appeals by our youths to the high authorities, this crisis was cooled. The government is planning to give us a certificate of registration soon.

Our knowledge of Judaism is limited due to lack of instruction. We believe with perfect faith that if instructed and with continued efforts to curb isolation, we shall enjoy more experiences in Judaism than at present. No step has been made possible for our group to convert officially. It was only in 1991 when Rabbi Moshe of Nairobi Hebrew Congregation made a formal invitation of the group to go to Nairobi (Kenya), but due to lack of travel documents, this process was not effected and Rabbi Moshe did not stay long in Kenya. I can assure you that we long very much to convert and any effort to do so is much welcome with great appreciation by members of the community.

## The Amazing Abayudaya

By David Levine

(Editor's note: The author served as a Peace Corps Volunteer near Mbale, Uganda through July 1993.)

I attended Shabbat services with the Abayudaya a number of times and tried to help raise money for the completion of their synagogue.

The Abayudayas' devotion to their faith is truly amazing considering the isolation from the rest of the Jewish world that they face and the persecution that they face -- though this is less pronounced than it may have been during Idi Amin's time.

The Abayudaya are seeking ways of furthering their religious education and are hoping for the prospect of conversion and acceptance by organized Jewry. Though the Abayudaya may not be officially converted or as steeped in tradition (through centuries of Jewish practice) as other groups, their story should be told for their steadfastness in their belief in Judaism, their eagerness to learn more, to become converted in Judaism, and to get in contact with the worldwide Jewish

# The Abayudaya Changed My Life

By Matthew Meyer

*(Editor's note: Following are excerpts from an address Meyer gave at Beth Shalom Congregation in Wilmington, Delaware, in 1992)*

A little less than a year ago I stood on this same bimah to talk about why I had decided not to make practicing Judaism a great priority for me. Well, upon attending Yom Kippur services in Nairobi, Kenya, where I've been studying this past semester, my eyes have been opened to a Jewish community that has inspired me and shaped much of my thinking about all sorts of things in my life. The Shabbat I spent with the Abayudaya community of Mbale, Uganda, a little over a month ago is one that has changed my life. I hope the story I relay to you today will in some way change yours as well.

What both Julia (another American student) and I saw in Uganda was unquestionably a Jewish Friday night service. The service itself was magical. When I heard their Lecha Dodi in services, I was quite moved. It was simply one of the most beautiful tunes I had ever heard in a synagogue. I wanted every Hebrew school teacher, fellow BBYOer, fellow Jew throughout the world to hear the Abayudaya version of Lecha Dodi. It was the magical mix of being Ugandan and Jewish simultaneously that so few Jews in the world have seen previously.

The next day was just as amazing. Julia and I both took part in the Sabbath morning service -- I got to have an aliyah and we both later addressed the congregation. We met with the elders of the community and walked through a second synagogue, of the four total in the community. We celebrated Havdalah together and Julia taught some Israeli dancing.

As you all know, for an eight-year period in the '70's, a ruthless man named Idi Amin served as Uganda's head of state. The horrors of Amin have been well documented in terms of Entebbe and Indians being expelled from the country, among other incidents in his reign of terror. Amin also leashed his reign of terror against the Jews of the Abayudaya. All prayer books were confiscated (many were hidden), their synagogue was leveled, destroyed. The people were given three choices: Muslim, Protestant, or Catholic. As Jews, they were forced into hiding, unable to practice without seriously putting their lives in jeopardy. Under Obote, who followed Amin, they rejoiced. They were allowed to practice, but there was certainly plenty of anti-Semitic feeling.

In 1984, a member of the community traveled 12 hours to Nairobi, having heard there might be a synagogue there. He found the synagogue and explained his story. The Jews of the Orthodox synagogue were indifferent and offered nothing -- not even a bed to sleep in. The visitor from Uganda slept outside in a park for two nights.

In 1988, Abayudaya youth developing a kibbutz were beaten and tortured by local groups; there were two other anti-Semitic incidents in 1988-89 committed by local groups and officials, causing many in the Abayudaya community to disperse from living around the synagogue.

These anti-Semitic incidents show the need to bring this community out of isolation. There is anti-Semitism in Mbale, Uganda, because there is a very successful

learned in Hebrew school that we now have organizations to look out for these things and as long as world Jewry keeps its eyes and ears open, there can never be another Holocaust. That need to bring the community out of isolation is probably the single most important thing bringing me before you today.

Next, it is necessary for me to address whether or not these people are actually Jews. Basically, a community leader in Mbale in 1919, Semei Kakungulu, rejected Christianity, learned of Judaism, circumcised himself, and basically proclaimed himself a converted Jew. He later trained others. That is the foundation of the Abayudaya Jewish community. Now, my Dad has been bugging me that such a conversion would not hold up in any Jewish court of law. But months ago, my Mom told me how she believes we are descendants of a group of people called the Khazars from Eastern Europe who were self-proclaimed converts to Judaism in the 11th century. So how am I any more Jewish than Gershom (an Abayudaya), who knows far more than I about the religion itself, and practices far more frequently than I do?

Regardless, if we don't consider the Abayudaya community Jewish, it is merely a technicality in my mind. Let's just send a rabbi there to convert them. If any of you were there rather than here for this Shabbat, hearing the same Haftorah that Dave read for us today, hearing the day read according to the lunar calendar and hearing a sermon on the morning's passage of the Torah, you would have little doubt that the Abayudaya are Jewish.

I have shared with you only a fraction of the details and stories of one of the most amazing experiences of my life. If you are more interested, please talk to me. Or even better, go and see for yourself one of the most phenomenal and unknown Jewish communities in the world, the Abayudaya of Mbale, Uganda.

## JOIN OUR KULANU MISSION TO UGANDA!

One of Kulanu's rabbinical advisers, Jacques Cukierkorn, is organizing a study tour next spring or summer to visit the Abayudaya congregation in Mbale, Uganda. Participants would help give a sense of support to this isolated community as well as knowledge of Judaism, since Rabbi Cukierkorn hopes to involve Kulanu travelers in giving seminars on various facets of Jewish life. He envisions this to be the first of many contacts, including future exchanges of study materials.

We are attempting to keep the total cost below \$2000 per person. We are also looking into the feasibility of an optional add-on portion to visit the Orit in Gollam, Ethiopia.

If you may be interested in participating, or if you have suggestions or questions, please call Rabbi Cukierkorn during business hours at 703-370-5191.

If you have a sense of adventure and a love of Judaism, you will appreciate this most unusual



## Converting Inca Indians (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 3)

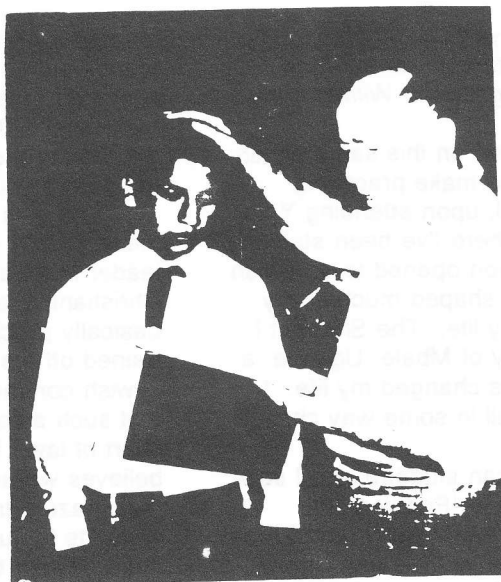
failed to adequately guide his flock. Villaneuva wasted no time and immediately set about educating his contemporaries with his newfound knowledge. It did not take long for him to amass 500 people who also wished to convert to Judaism. Now he faced the problem of what to do with all these people who wished to become Jewish. The small Jewish community in Lima, composed of post-World War II refugees of Polish and Hungarian descent, callously looked down on the Inca Indians as social inferiors. If the Indians attended shul, the Lima Jews would intentionally exclude them; they gave no encouragement, no aliya, no honors. Nobody was receptive to them, nobody invited them to a home or helped them in any way. The Indians returned to their homes totally disheartened.

Villaneuva tried to obtain Spanish siddurim and, not being cognizant of the correct dinim, constructed his own tephilin out of wood. (Incidentally, this unusual pair of tephilin, a labor of love and self sacrifice, is presently housed in the Museum of Jews of the Galuth in Israel.) For 20 years Villaneuva struggled single-handedly for the solution to his dilemma.

In 1985 he contacted the Lubavitcher Rebbe, and Lubavitch Rabbi Chadakov immediately got in touch with me since he said I was "proficient in the laws of ritual slaughter and adept at mingling with people." I agreed to travel to Peru to aid these Inca Indians in their quest to become Jewish and immediately enrolled in intensive Spanish studies.

I arrived in Peru in 1988 and discovered that the people were genuinely committed. They davened every day, but, due to the scarcity of tephilin, Villaneuva wore the tephilin first, and after his turn a big line formed and people took five-minute turns using the tephilin.

On Shabbos the entire community got together at long tables for a meal of fish and vegetables. There is an obvious absence of meat or poultry in these people's diet because nobody there knows how to properly slaughter an animal according to Jewish law. Trujillo is 11 hours from Lima, so



Rabbi Zuber blessing Pedro, an Inca bar mitzvah.

women baked their own challah and participants are generally optimistic and jovial.

The Jews in Lima displayed unwarranted prejudice in their refusal to allow these people to use their mikva. Therefore the people in Trujillo use the ocean as a mikva, and the Jews of Cajamarca, further inland, use a nearby waterfall.

Although I was most interested in instructing the congregation about practical matters such as kashrut or Shabbat, they were especially interested in more esoteric concepts such as gilgul (reincarnation) and Mashiach. These people were extremely self-sacrificing. They constantly thought about being Jewish and were prepared to offer all their possessions in order to practice Judaism properly. For example, one woman sold all her jewelry at the market in order to obtain money to pay for tephilin for her son on his bar mitzvah. The woman's husband, who usually finds work only two days a week, traveled to Ecuador to work in the mines so he could obtain enough money to purchase a new suit for the child and a new dress for his wife.

Villaneuva traveled to Lima in order to have a bris. The mohel was

The people would gather around a table each Sunday to discuss the Sidra and Villaneuva would lead the discussion. One time during the Sidra discussion a person interrupted to comment that he was having car trouble. Villaneuva immediately stopped the trivial side issue and insisted that a table was comparable to an altar; therefore, only holy ideas could be expounded in its presence. On another occasion it was discovered that a man had profaned the Shabbos. Villaneuva immediately excommunicated him despite the man's tears and protest.

The situation came to a head. What would become of these people? It was not possible for them to achieve their potential as Jews if they continued to live in these isolated conditions. The community decided that they would have to relocate either to the United States or Israel. Villaneuva opted for Israel and everyone agreed to abide by his proposal. He was extremely respected in the community and his advice was always taken.

A Bals Din from Eretz Yisrael came to Peru and converted many of these people. Then two groups of approximately 380 people emigrated to Israel and settled in Elon Moreh, on the West Bank. Most were young people, the older ones being only 43 years of age. They rapidly integrated into Israeli society, far more successfully than the Russian or Ethiopian Jews. Some Inca Indians joined the Israeli army while others found jobs and became productive members of society. They managed to merge into Israeli mainstream society and settled down to a relatively comfortable lifestyle.

After this mass exodus took place, I was under the false impression that there was nothing left of Inca Jewry in Peru. A small number of individuals had chosen to remain because of their jobs. Others voluntarily chose to stay because they felt incapable of starting over and relocating to a foreign country. In no time at all, more people became interested in the Jewish phenomenon and soon there were 200 people who joined the group of committed Jews.

## FOCUS ON MEXICO

### The Frustrations of a Founder

By Ignacio Castelan Estrada

(Editor's Note: Kulanu's Rick Kulick last visited this community on May 31, 1994 bringing with him 30 kipot and cash donations for 20 siddurim. This article is translated by Mr. Kulick.)

I was born in 1943 in Mexico City, as the eldest son of Eligio Castelan Calderon and Juana Estrada Mendez. In those years they identified as Catholics, and a few months after my birth we moved to the provinces to live with my paternal grandparents, Ignacio Castelana Herrera and Juana Calderon Carcamo. There we lived until I was 18 years old, and I learned some of the Jewish dietary laws, not to eat pork, observing the Sabbath on Saturdays, and some of the other festivals of the Torah. One day my father informed me that he had gone to Mexico City to talk with a rabbi, to arrange for my conversion, but I heard nothing more after that, as he told me that the requirements for conversion could not be fulfilled at that point.

When I arrived in Puebla to study engineering, I encountered a group called the Church of God Israelite, in which my grandparents were also believers, and was told that they followed the Jewish people in many aspects. However, after some time in association with this movement, I began to understand that they actually had very little to do with the Jewish people, and so I decided to leave the organization (at this point, I met my wife Mary, who then was a professing Catholic). In the intimacy of our home, with our children Ada, Abner, Yemima and Hartus, we have always practiced Jewish ritual: receiving Shabbat and lighting candles, guided by some Jewish books I purchased in Mexico City such as the *Shulhan Arukh*.

Under these conditions, we began visiting other persons of our ancestry who knew of our desire to serve the Eternal, and also understood the meaning of the Shema, and we began meeting in each others' homes to celebrate Shabbat. Some time after this, as we became better integrated as a group, we acquired some land, where we have constructed a modest synagogue. However, at this point I felt some degree of disquiet with the degree of support I was receiving from my community, and did not feel that I was developing sufficient Jewish background with the books of Torah I had, so I made contact with the offices of Keren Kayemeth in Mexico City.

Meanwhile, our small community was growing with ceremonies for births, marriages, deaths and illnesses all falling on my shoulders to conduct, which I accomplished as best I could in my ignorance. Finally, I managed to make contact with the director of Keren Kayemeth, then Isaac Saad, and I spoke of my community's situation. He then attempted to put me in touch with Rabbi Abraham Bartfeld of the Nidche Israel Ashkenazi synagogue, but I never managed to make contact with anyone other than his secretary, who provided me with some books the rabbi had written.

In another meeting with Mr. Saad, he recommended I meet with Rabbi Abraham Palti of the Monte Sinai synagogue, who received me with my son Abner. We spoke of our community's need for spiritual guidance, and while he said he thought the situation of our group was interesting, nothing more happened than a second meeting. I later returned to Keren Kayemeth to make a donation to support Israel during the Gulf War.

I attempted to meet with Mr. Saad one more time, but could not make contact, but I did meet Manuel Levinsky, president of Keren Kayemeth in Mexico, who set a date to visit with us in Puebla. He also put me in touch with Rabbi Samuel Lehrer of the Beth Israel Community Center, who met with me that afternoon. Rabbi Lehrer asked me many questions, and also set a date to visit with me in Puebla.

Mr. Levinsky and his family then visited our community for Shabbat on May 29, 1993, and an article about this was published in Mexico City's Jewish weekly newspaper, *Kesher*. Many blessings on Mr. Levinsky and his family!

However, the greatest moment in my life as a Jew joined with the house of Israel was being able to receive Rabbi Lehrer in my humble home. May God bless him and keep him in good health! This meeting took place on Sunday, January 30, 1994, or 18 Shevet 5754, here in Puebla. Rick Kulick from KULANU was also present.

We hope to construct a new synagogue building for Beth Schmuel, Puebla Community, in the near future. We have a total of 12 families in our community, including 36 adults and 23 children. At this point we don't have enough financial resources to have a budget per se, but we do have a funding committee, chaired by my daughter Ada, which equitably distributes any resources which we may come across.

(Donations to Kulanu may be earmarked for the Puebla community. See application on page 11)



## Weekend (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 4)

claim to be direct descendants of Solomon.

The Sephardic Rabbi of Israel, Ovadia Yoseph, recognized the Orits as one of the Twelve Tribes of Israel (Dan), and the "Falashas" (Orits who had been dispossessed of their lands during hundreds of years of military incursions and lived in poverty) were admitted to Israel under the Law of Return. Tegegne refers to some of the Orits, left behind because they had adopted some Christian practices for their survival, as "the crypto-Jews of Abyssinia, like the Marranos of Spain."

About 98 percent of Guihon's 4 million inhabitants are Orits. About 10 percent of these live in urban areas, where the government-sponsored Christianity requires everyone to attend church and observe certain Christian practices in order to retain their jobs and education opportunities. The remaining 90 percent in the Guihon countryside practice biblical Judaism scrupulously, ceasing work on Shabbat, leaving fields to lie fallow during the seventh year, welcoming strangers in the manner of Abraham, and operating schools where young children memorize the Psalms of David.

The Orits of Guihon live difficult lives, under constant government-inspired violence, and are no longer recognized as a cultural entity; their region has been eradicated from the modern map of Ethiopia. What do they seek? Respect of their identity, their land, and their traditions, and control of their destiny. They do not, Tegegne explains, seek emigration, but rather, recognition and the realization of their rights to religious freedom and basic human rights in their own land, Guihon.

(Editor's note: Tegegne was in the U.S. to attend the bar mitzvah of his young cousin, Semahegn Kassahun, the first such ceremony for an Ethiopian Jew in the Washington area. Semahegn, incidentally, is the son of Kassahun Teffera, Kulanu's vice president for African affairs.)

# India's despised lovers of Zion

Myer Samra

The recent arrival of 57 potential immigrants from Manipur and Mizoram in northeast India and applications for visas from another 60 has sparked a hysterical reaction among public officials.

The Indians, who have been living as Jews for a generation, believe they are descendants of the lost tribe of Manasseh, and will be undergoing formal conversion to Judaism in Israel.

Fears have been expressed that the floodgates will be opened to some 300 million more such people seeking entry into the country under the Law of Return.

Such people from Third World countries, it has been suggested, are undesirable since they are likely to be "economic refugees" using Israel as a pathway to the West.

It is a pity that our leaders can voice such opinions when a visit to Manipur and Mizoram — such as I made in 1990 and 1992 — and an examination of the lifestyle followed by the Bnei Menashe would quickly dispel their fears.

Mizoram has a total population of 700,000, while Manipur has close to two million inhabitants. While the Chin-Kuki-Mizo (Chikimi for short) ethnic groups from whom the Bnei Menashe have sprung constitute the majority of the population in Mizoram, they represent only 20% of the people of Manipur. A further 500,000 of them live across the border in Burma's Chin State.

These states are simply too tiny to contain the supposed 300 million it is feared will want to come to Israel.

The majority of the Chikimi are devout Christians. The 3,000 to 5,000 Bnei Menashe are distinguished from the rest by the practice of Judaism and their rejection of Jesus. Since 1974, Bnei Men-

ashe families have sent their children to Jewish schools run by ORT in Bombay, where they have been able to study Judaism while learning a trade.

Even among Christian Chikimi, love for Israel is widespread. One magistrate told me how he and a colleague had sought to volunteer to fight for Israel during the 1967 Six Day War; a headmaster of a Christian school in Mizoram told me of a survey he conducted among children in kindergarten, who expressed admiration for Israel more than any other country. And when I entered a dry cleaning shop, the girl behind the counter was reading a translation of Eli Cohen's biography.

Like the Bnei Menashe, some of those who follow Christianity also believe they are descended from either the tribe of Manasseh or Ephraim. The Ephraimites are content to remain where they are, believing the Chikimi lands will be the safest place on earth as the war of Armageddon plays itself out. Indeed, I have been asked to tell all the citizens of Israel they are welcome to take refuge with them until the Messiah arrives.

THE BNEI MENASHE have been worshipping and living as Jews for a generation. Had they been living in the West, they would have been able to undergo formal conversion long ago. This is not possible in India, where no rabbis are to be found. Consequently, they are obliged to come to Israel.

Rabbi Eliahu Avihayil of Amishav, a group working on behalf of the Lost Tribes, has been in contact with the Bnei Menashe since 1979. He has provided them with spiritual guidance, and helped

members of the community come to Israel for conversion.

Unfortunately, because they do not come as fully recognized Jews, the Bnei Menashe have not had many of the benefits given to other immigrants. Many have been obliged to live beyond the Green Line, because they could not find work and accommodation in religious kibbutzim inside Israel.

Far from being economic refugees, dependent on the state, Israel the Bnei Menashe have proved righteous converts, living here as Orthodox Jews. Many have studied in yeshivot and working in jobs beneath their level of education and experience.

The Chikimi have the second highest literacy rate in India, many have achieved positions of status and power. Several distinguished and wealthy individuals in Manipur belong to Jewish congregations there.

Before the arrival of the late group, around 90 Bnei Menashe young adults had settled in Israel, the first coming in 1989. They have willingly served in the army, one joining the Golan Brigade. A number of the women have married Orthodox Israelis. The more recent group is different from previous ones in that it included married couples and their children, now living and working in Kiryat Arba.

The next group, whose visit have been jeopardized by hysterical and inaccurate publicity, will include the parents, brothers and sisters of people already settled. To thwart their entry at this stage would be inhumane; more so since the relatives who wish to come are already living as Jews, and doing nothing but to continue to do so.

The writer teaches in Sydney University's Department of Anthropology.

Jerusalem Post, June 28, 1994



# The Jews of Cape Verde

By Louise Werlin

(Editor's note: The author is a country development officer with the Agency for International Development's Office of Sahel and West African Affairs.)

The names Lopes, Mendes, Pereira, Cardozo and Levy sound like the ship's manifest of the "St. Charles," the ship that brought the first known Jews to New Amsterdam and began American Jewish history. But they are also the names of many people in the country of Cape Verde, off the west coast of Africa.

Cape Verde consists of several islands. When discovered by the Portuguese in 1463 during the Age of Exploration it was completely uninhabited. It was a Portuguese colony from 1463 to 1975 and was an important port of call, first during the slave trade and later for whaling vessels, especially those from New England.

Most of the people (370,000) are Afro-Portuguese, and many have definite Semitic features, probably inherited from Portuguese Jewish and/or Arab forebears as well as through contact with North Africa. Because of the poverty of the island, many people have emigrated and there are as many Cape Verdeans in the United States as in Cape Verde, mostly in southern New England.

Most Cape Verdeans are Catholic. Although none seem to be practicing Jews, many are aware both of their own Jewish ancestry and the history of the Jewish presence in Cape Verde. Jews settled there very early, particularly on the island of Boa Vista. There were Jewish settlements on other islands, and a town on the island of Santo Antao is called Porto Sinagoga. Other Cape Verdeans trace their ancestry to Jews or Marranos who fled or were expelled from Portugal over the centuries. During the 19th and early 20th centuries additional Jews came to Cape Verde from Morocco.

Following Cape Verde's independence from Portugal almost 20 years ago, more Cape Verdeans are taking an interest in their history and ancestry. Unfortunately, little has been written down, perhaps because of colonial Portuguese pressure. The only physical evidence of the Jewish presence seems to be the cemeteries with gravestones that often show the evolution of the community; inscriptions occur earliest in Hebrew, then in Portuguese, and finally with crosses. There is currently interest in restoring these cemeteries, both to help preserve an important part of the country's history and perhaps to help encourage tourism.

While little has been written, fascinating oral accounts have been told to me by Cape Verdeans. One man said that he thought his father was Jewish. The evidence? "He and some other men would get together, cover their heads, and read a language that looked like Arabic. Also, he told me to be skeptical of what the priests told me." Another remembers a family story of a great grandfather, a "New Christian" who was forced to become a priest. He mutilated his hand on a sewing machine so as to be unable to conduct the mass and escaped to Cape Verde. Finally, one man told me of relatives who were picked up by German submarines during World War II and deported.

These people and others want to know more about their background, have scholars come to Cape Verde to conduct their research and have exchanges with Israelis and American Jews.

These people are not looking to "return to their roots" or become Jewish. What they want, and what should be of interest to the world Jewish community, is to rediscover their past. This should be of special interest to American Jews. As one Cape Verdean told me after I presented him with a copy of Stephen Birmingham's book *The Grandees*, about America's Sephardic elite, "My God, these are all our names!"

(Editor's note: Interested scholars should contact Jack Zeller, 301-681-5679.)

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## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

☐ I/We would like to become a Member of KULANU, 1211 Ballard St., Silver Spring, MD 20910

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Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone(s): ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ day ( ) \_\_\_\_\_ evening \_\_\_\_\_

Interests and affiliations useful to Kulanu's work \_\_\_\_\_

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\$ \_\_\_\_\_ for a specific project: \_\_\_\_\_

## LETTERS TO KULANU

### Amishav Update

*Shalom u'vracha!*

Thank you for your precious contribution of about \$4500 that we here at Amishav are going to use to bring the next group of 53 Menashe to Israel, and I also thank you for the Kulanu newsletter.

As you might have seen in the newspapers, we are having a problem regarding the visas for the next group. I hope you can help us to change attitudes that disparage the Menashes' aspirations to come to Israel. We had hoped to bring them this year, but now I hope it will be next January. We need around \$3000 more for their aid.

There are currently 152 Shinlung in Israel. Seventy-one comprise families, and 81 are single young men and women who are studying in yeshivot. I will be happy to give names and locations in the event a visit to Israel is planned. I can think of nothing more valuable than to make a visit and send a story to your local Jewish newspaper.

Blessings and truth be with all the supportive members of Kulanu.

*Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail  
Jerusalem*

### Are the Abayudaya Jewish?

To the surprise of many congregants, I once preached that I wish I had been born a gentile, so that I could choose, out of my own will, to be Jewish -- since in my opinion being Jewish is such a wonderful thing.

Apparently the Abayudaya congregation of Mbale Uganda agree with me. They are the most unique of all Jewish groups I have ever dealt with. Basically because they do not have, nor claim to have, Jewish ancestry. Their connection with Judaism, the Jewish people and the one and living G-d is purely spiritual. After studying the Bible, they chose to follow the Jewish religion, because they realized that it is the one that would bring them closer to the Creator.

Answering my original question: No, the Abayudaya are not Jewish. However, they are thoroughly motivated to become full Jews. They have already started living as Jewish a life as they can. They still need a lot of support in educational material, prayerbooks and other religious objects. The ultimate support they need is a rabbinic conversion, which I would consider officiating upon after careful examination of each individual case.

A first step towards helping the Abayudaya is to make their story known. I believe that if some of us could go to Uganda and document their story and lifestyle, it would be a great push to their cause. (Please see the notice on page 7 of this newsletter on a trip we are planning.)

In their search for a Jewish identity, the Abayudaya are a source of inspiration for all of us. They reaffirm the beauty of the Brit, the covenant between God and the Jewish people.

*Rabbi Jacques Cukiernik  
Beth El Hebrew Congregation of  
Alexandria*

### Another Lost Tribe?

In 1986 Michael Asher, a 33-year-old English Jew, together with his wife, traversed the Sahara Desert in North Africa from west to east by camel and on foot, a distance of 4500 miles. His book *Impossible Journey* (published by Penguin in 1988) identifies a Jewish tribe in Nigeria, the IDDAO ISHAAK, living in the valley of Asakrei.

Asher recounts the incident of meeting with these six tribal leaders who, coming out of their leather tents, "looked dangerous, dressed in their long, dark gandourahs, their faces hidden by veils. They carried daggers and axes and wore thick skin sandals. They were inscrutable under their headcloths and came on with the dreadful steadiness of an army. Suddenly Sidi Mohammed (Asher's native guide) said, 'Don't worry: these aren't Tuareg. They are Iddao Ishaak. They are of Jewish origin. They are rich in camels, but they aren't warlike.'"

In subsequent conversation with these six members of the Jewish tribe, Asher was told about the terrible drought of 1985. The Iddao Ishaak spokesman remarked that "the only thing that saved us was God....The government gave us no help. They still take from us the animal tax for animals we haven't got!"

*Warren Freedman  
Boynton Beach, Florida*

Deadline for next issue: January 15, 1995

Karen Primack, editor

**Kulanu**  
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