



A New Look at the Portuguese Marranos **My Trip to Belmonte**

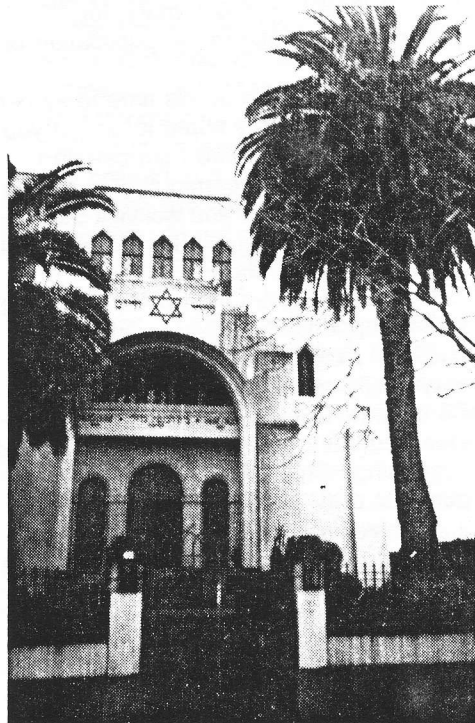
By Eytan Berman

(Editor's note: This is the first installment in a three-part series.)

Vibrant is the only way to describe Belmonte's Jewish community, the only native Jewish community of Portugal. From the smallest boy to the oldest man, when they prayed they shouted in the small one-room shul. They didn't miss a word. They tried to catch up with all they had missed over 500 years. I couldn't stay on the wrong page in the siddur for more than two seconds without being corrected. They watched me furtively for signs of approval. It could be confirmed that, yes, I was one of them. I could pray with them and the wide smiles on their faces affirmed this.

When they took off their tallitot they suddenly looked like Portuguese villagers, dressed in dark jackets and pants of 1940's vintage. I have never seen anything like it. These are the last small-town Jews in the world.

(cont. on p. 3)



The grand Kadoorie synagogue in Oporto.

Are the Balembas "Jewish"?

Perhaps "Balemba" will one day be part of the everyday Jewish vocabulary. This tribe in southern Africa, numbering 100,000-150,000, believes it is descended from the ancient Israelites and has, in recent years, stepped up its observance of Jewish practices.

An article by Immanuel Suttner in the *Jerusalem Report* of July 15, 1993, which reached us belatedly, notes that the tribe's Jewish-like practices were "discovered" in the 1850's by Robert

Moffat, a Scottish missionary. The name "Balemba" means "those who refuse to eat unclean things," and the Balembas do not eat animals, such as pigs, that lack split hooves. In addition, they practice circumcision and require that cattle be slaughtered by a circumcised man and that their blood be allowed to drain into the ground. The Balemba also perform ritual washing of the hands before eating. Balemba women do not touch men while they are menstruating, and are

(cont. on p. 6)

The Shinlung Are Growing!

By Eliyahu Avichail

A second group from the Tribe of Menashe of northeastern India has arrived in Israel, 20 families comprising more than 100 individuals. They will be given lessons in Judaism and Hebrew and aided in their adjustment to their new home, a settlement north of Beer Sheva. Families will be working but will also need financial assistance to supplement their learning schedule of 20 hours a week. They will also need medical insurance, furniture, blankets, etc., at a cost of \$2500 per family for the first year.

By the end of their first year in Israel all will have finished their conversion to become completely Jewish, accepted by all as Jewish and entitled to rights as new immigrants. Each individual in this group has been carefully selected in their desire to resume their "lost" Jewish heritage and rejoin the Jewish People and her land. Now, with the approval of chief rabbis and key government leaders, all are extremely enthusiastic for the program's success.

The project has been assisted by a few very generous individuals -- Dr. Irving Moskowitz of Miami, Simon Wapnick of New York, and A. Sabah of Netanya. Another \$15,000 is needed for the trip alone. The implications of our work are staggeringly profound, and we appeal to you for your support.

(Donations to Kulanu may be earmarked for Shinlung immigrant assistance. See application form, p. 7.)

WHAT IS KULANU?

Kulanu ("all of us") is a tax-exempt organization of American Jews of varied backgrounds and practices dedicated to finding lost and dispersed remnants of the Jewish people and assisting those who wish to rejoin the Jewish community.

Kulanu is a part of the Israeli organization Amishav. Kulanu is

LETTERS TO KULANU

An Appeal from a Scholar in India

I have the honour to state that I felt a great necessity to do research in the origin of the Mizo Tribe (also known as Tribe of Menashe or the Shinlung) in the State of Mizoram, India. Hence I began the work from 1983. I have gone through many books and read vast literature concerning Mizo Tribe. I have covered the whole State of Mizoram with various contacts of different peoples who could enlighten me in the research. My research paper **Israel-Mizo Identity** was published in 1990 in English and Mizo. The English edition was distributed to many scholars, historians, writers and educated persons of Israel, America, India and others. The Mizo edition was widely distributed among my people, Mizo.

To go deeper in the research I have proved that going to China and Burma is a must; because they are the ancient home of our ancestors. History proves that the Mizo people inhabited our present Home State only in the 16th century. All before, they lived in China.

A Mizo colleague who lived in China for the last two years visited the Kaifeng Jews and their rabbi and understands that there are great similarities in our languages. In addition, some Mizo underground people who went to China during the Mizoram insurgency met one tribe who resemble Mizo in their way of life and language; some of their words are the same as Mizo's.

This information makes research more interesting and challenging, as some of the left-over tribe still seems to exist there.

My financial position does not permit me to travel to China and Burma for further study and research. I have no other alternative but to ask you for financial help. The estimated expenditure is about \$10,000 for four months.

May you find some individual persons who can generously donate this amount for the noble cause.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Yours faithfully,
Zaithanchhungi

Invitation and Message from Brazil

(Editor's note: The author, president of the Ass. Religiosa Israelita Marrana in northeastern Brazil, described his community's history, activities, and desire to build a community center in our last newsletter.)

Thank you very much for publishing my letter in the publication of Kulanu.

I would like at this time to extend the hospitality of my home to any of you who care to accept and I am certain I speak for all in this community in hoping that some day soon you will visit us and share in our enthusiasm for the potential outcome of our efforts.

I want you to know that we have had an opportunity to revise our needs cost and have found a house that could very easily be turned into the kind of Community Center we wish for. It is ideal regarding location, construction and everything. The house can be purchased for approximately \$50,000 and the refurbishing carried out by ourselves at our own expense. What we need is a loan, which we would be prepared to refund at a monthly rate or as rapidly as funds would become available.

At this time I want to go on record that none of my efforts would have been possible without the able assistance of my beloved wife, Myra.

With best personal regards and a sincere wish for success in your endeavours,

Julio D'Gabriel

Publicity Needed

Many people who hear of us are interested in our work. But no one can join us if they haven't heard of us.

Recently the *Jerusalem Report* ran a small news item about our formation. Perhaps other publications will do the same. Does your synagogue or Jewish organization ever run short items titled something like "New Group Forming" or "Group Formed To Search For Lost Jews"? If they might run such an item, could you please take the box on the front page of this newsletter titled "What Is Kulanu?" and send it to them, along with the address on the masthead on the

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We need fundraisers, publicity experts, researchers, translators who know Hebrew, Portuguese, Pushto, or Spanish, speakers, educators, and people with contacts in the State Department, foreign countries, synagogues, and Jewish organizations

JOIN US!

Sister Publications

Do you wonder whether there is a Chinese abridged version of the *Encyclopedia Judaica*? How the Jews of Burma or Indonesia are doing? Who is studying the Bukhara Jewish community? Whether their are minyans in Bangkok and Tokyo? If so, you may want to join the Sino-Judaic Institute and receive its newsletter, *Points East*. Contact the Institute at 2316 Blueridge Ave., Menlo Park, CA 94025.

Do you lust after information on the Marranos of Portugal, the Jews of Spain, and the history of Jews in the New World, including the southwestern US? If so, the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies is for you. Membership includes a subscription to their quarterly newsletter, *HaLapid*. Write to the Society c/o Gloria Trujillo, 2000 Brooklyn Ave., Monterey Park, CA 91754.

Kulanu's Dialogue with Manipur

Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail le alawi haw mithum Rabbi Jonathan Segal, Eli Yona chule Ilan Joel Jerusalem kuonim 10-4-94 nin Imphat-a ahung lhungun 13-4-94 nin Mizoram juon in akilekit tauve.

So begins an article about Rabbi Avichail in the latest issue of *Quol Ha-Shofar*, a publication of the Menashe Tribe in Manipur, India, written in the local dialect and distributed free of cost to Jewish communities in northeastern India and to their members in Israel.

Quol Ha-Shofar plans to translate some articles from the Kulanu newsletter in their next issue.

By the way, an appeal for Hebrew-English prayer books, educational materials, and ritual items (kipot, tallitot, mezuzot) in our last newsletter yielded two shipments of books. Further materials are still needed, as are cash donations for postage. Call Jack Zeller at 301-681-5679.

(Editor's note: Donations to Kulanu may be earmarked for supplies for or shipping to Manipur. See membership application

Trip to Belmonte (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 1)

I had been in Belmonte for a couple of days, so I had met many of the people. This is a fascinating piece of Jewish history, and a miracle. There are about 250 Jews in Belmonte, and the Jewish movement is strong. There has been an Orthodox rabbi and his wife from Israel in the town for one year. The Jews refrain from work on Shabbat, eat kosher, and attend services daily in the small shul. One Shabbat there were 50 people (35 men and 15 women) in attendance; approximately 75 Marranos have been converted to Orthodox Judaism and many more are preparing to be converted. Some Marranos who practice Judaism with devotion do not qualify for conversion under the rabbi's interpretations because of a non-Jewish maternal ancestor. Others are not interested in religion, are intermarried, or still practice Crypto-Judaism in private with the old customs (more about this later).

The community of Belmonte started 500 years ago when six or seven poor families arrived from Spain's Seville and Cordoba. They couldn't leave Portugal during the expulsion because of poverty. For 500 years the families intermarried among themselves. Now they are all related. Some can't see at night because of vision problems due to inter-family marriages. Most are obese or very thin.

Some of Belmonte's Jews look like American Jews. Others look like Portuguese peasants, their clothes and culture unmistakably Old World European. The old women dress in black and have dark skin like leather. The men dress in dirty dark jackets and wool pants.

Why did I go? A responsibility to witness a miracle and ... curiosity. What would these Jews be like, separated from mainstream Judaism for 500 years, the only community of Jews in mainland Europe unscathed by the Holocaust? This was a peek into the past, opening a history book to the year 1500. Could I answer their questions on Judaism? Are they better left undisturbed?

My Yiddishkeit weak, and with no planned agenda, I took the 36-hour train ride from Amsterdam to Oporto, Portugal, arriving at 7 a.m. on a workday. I was delirious from the

the narrow, busy street to a corner where I could eat my sandwich.

Rejuvenated with food and caffeine, I began my learning curve for Portugal. A new country always presents challenges -- new language and money system, where to sleep, eat, and be safe -- the basics that most of us take for granted. I changed some money and found a reasonably priced pensao. It was wonderful to be freed of my baggage. I wanted to explore immediately. There was much to do in Oporto. I couldn't waste time as it was already December 21 and I wanted to be in Belmonte by Christmas to observe any unusual Marrano practices relating to this most important Christian holiday.

Why Oporto? Because it was the home of Artur Carlos de Barros Basto, a highly decorated, influential officer in the Portuguese Army during World War I. His family, like other Marrano families, practiced Judaism in secret, but his Jewish feelings prompted him to expose his religion to the public. He was, in a sense, the first Marrano to "come out of the closet." He worshipped publicly in synagogue with the Jews of Lisbon, and the existence of Marranos in Portugal became known. Although he was humiliated in the Catholic press and lost his military rank, Barros Basto was a charismatic leader who traveled to Marrano villages and encouraged many others to follow his path. He attracted international headlines and funding from the Jewish community in England and the wealthy Kadoorie family in Shanghai. When a bitterly anti-Semitic right-wing dictator, Salazar, came to power in the late 1920's, the Marranos were driven back to their secret ways; Barros Basto died a broken, poverty-stricken man whose vision never came to fruition.

What to do first in Oporto? Many of the books mention Amilcar Paulo as the most prominent Marrano after Barros Basto. Paulo, once a young student in the synagogue yeshiva Barros Basto built in Oporto, discovered Basto's papers years after the leader's death and devoted his life to recording Marrano history. I looked him up in the phone book and was surprised to find him listed. I called and a woman answered. She turned out to be his wife, Lourdo Paulo. To my great disappointment I learned

Meeting Four Brazilian Marranos

Our last newsletter contained a report by Julio D'Gabriel, president of the Ass. Religiosa Israelita Marrana (ARIM) describing the history of the Marrano community in Natal, Brazil, and ARIM's desire to build a community center (see his letter on p. 2 in this issue). This report now continues with the stories of four descendants of Brazilian Marranos active in ARIM.

Ivan Birnbaum

Since my childhood I was conscious that my relatives were of Jewish ancestry. My mother, Maria de Carvalho, was a Marrano; my father, Joaquim Bento Birnbaum de Souza, from German/French/Marrano ancestry. I grew up knowing in my mind that I was of Jewish blood but I had very little teaching about Judaism up to 1957, when I entered the Brazilian Navy. Since then I increased my knowledge of Judaism with other Jews I met.

I arrived in Natal in 1975 and discovered a Marrano called Joao Medeiros who had assembled other Marranos and Jews together, among them Willy Daube and Clara and Kalma Roetz. I and my family joined with them and in 1978 we numbered 52 people including the children. Joao Medeiros was a lay rabbi and we would gather at his home. The number of people who attended the Shabbat services and "Chagim" days would vary naturally, but there would usually be at least 35.

In 1989 a "chaver" from Canada, Julio D'Gabriel, joined us and brought a new dimension to our community; he was elected president twice for the years 1990 and 1991. Under Julio's leadership we rescued the old building of the original Centro Israelita do Rio Grande do Norte, and the membership

increased. Then two new families came to Natal from Belem and introduced new criteria in order to be considered a Jew; the membership vanished, decreasing from 52 to 10, and now stands at 6.

To save the community, three former presidents, myself, Julio D'Gabriel and Roberto Dias, founded ARIM to recongregate the members scattered by the prejudices of the new arrivals and bring in new members who wish to join.

Joaquim Galvao

Since childhood, I remember my father speaking of our heritage, descendants of Marranos from Portugal and Holland. He was proud of his genealogy, always seeking his ancestors. We had to read the Old Testament, keep the Mosaic laws and be selective in our eating habits, shunning the pig, crustaceans and fish without scales. All meat had to be bloodless.

Around Easter we drank wine and ate crackers without leavening. Saturdays we dressed in our best clothes and went for a stroll. We were not to say "adore" -- you adore G-d! We were not baptized and during the first week of life the males were circumcised. We kept a Star of David and a psalm behind the entry door.

When I became an adult, following my parents' teachings, I confirmed my ancestry and heritage. I concluded that we were indeed different. Christians considered us "atheists and communists." The celebrations we had were our Pesach and the psalms behind the entry was our Mezuzah and the Star of David our badge of honor.

Today we no longer hide nor improvise; we follow our heritage. We have "returned" as did the prodigal son. It is usual to find the names of my family in the history of the Marranos.

No amount of discrimination will turn me or ours from our chosen return. We are here and back to what is ours.

Eder Barosh

From my childhood I had the consciousness that my family came from ancient Jewish ancestry. I had very little education on Judaism yet I always knew that I was a Jew descended from Marranos who came from Portugal.

I was not very concerned about this, but in 1989 I met the Jewish Community of Natal which was open and tolerant. My arrival coincided with that of Julio D'Gabriel's and his taking over the presidency, and with him I learned about Judaism in depth for the first time. When the people from Belem arrived, I was expelled from the community along with other members. I founded the Ben Abraham Foundation, dedicated to the memory of the Holocaust. When my first-born was eight days old I made his Brith Milah and I am very proud of this. Now I am a member of ARIM and helping to rebuild our community.

Roberto Dias de Oliveira

Since I was a young boy I was aware that I was a Jew. My father, Sinesio Dias de Oliveira, a medical doctor, and my mother, Naisa Pereira Dias de Oliveira, are both of Portuguese-Marrano ancestry. I have received very little education on Judaism, but I have found something very important -- the certainty of knowing that I am a Jew.

In 1981-82 I made my first contact with the Hebrew language and studied for two semesters at the Federal University in Natal. In 1989 I was elected president of the Centro Israelita and I fostered and continued the traditions of being an open and tolerant community. Now I belong to ARIM.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE:

Conversion of Inca Indians in Peru

By Myron Zuber

Update from Puebla, Mexico

By Rick Kulick

The Jews of Cape Verde

By Louise Werlin



**Three generations of
Incan converts to
Judaism light
Shabbat candles**

Why I Joined Kulanu

Genealogy on a Grand Scale

By Jonina Duker

I teach Jewish genealogy. No matter what flavor my talk is in -- whether I'm entertaining elderly Jews for an afternoon or teaching serious students for six weeks -- the title is always the same: Jewish Genealogy: Reconnecting the "Clal". I am trying to inspire as many people as I can to trace their family histories. If enough of us do it, then we will be able to put back together what the world keeps splitting asunder, generation after generation. We Jews are connected to each other by many bonds; I believe that being able to describe those links more concretely strengthens the bonds.

To me, it seems obvious that Kulanu's work is merely Jewish genealogy from another perspective. Kulanu is Jewish genealogy on a larger scale. Look at large groupings of family units of similar ethnicity and figure out how and when a group "split off". More importantly, help the descendants reconnect with the Clal Yisrael (the entire Jewish people) in whatever form they want to reconnect.

I believe that issues of Jewish genealogy and continuity are fundamental to Judaism. A basic tenet of our faith has to do with the respect we owe our ancestors: "Honor thy father and thy mother that you may long endure ..." If you honor your ancestors by passing on what they cared about, you will teach your descendants by example to honor you by doing the same. That is the only way an individual human being can endure -- by passing on what matters to him or her.

As a human being, I do not deal well with loss. I think of those who struggled and suffered to pass on Judaic traditions and values and how the sacrifices they

made were not always enough to ensure the continuation. I feel as if something has been stolen personally from me. That is why I feel a personal sense of deprivation when I hear about a group of Jews that has been lost or dispersed. Correspondingly, that is why I feel a personal sense of victory when I hear about someone returning -- yes, we've gotten one back! -- one who had been tragically lost to us as a people. We are reclaiming our own.

When people ask me when I first became interested in genealogy I always answer "I was born that way." The same answer therefore applies to Kulanu. At family gatherings I always listened to groups of older relatives telling family stories and talking about who does what and why. As a child I always had the comforting feeling that certain deceased ancestors of scholarly persuasion were with me. They looked over my shoulder and it was my obligation to ensure that my behavior would fit with what they would want for their descendants, given the new frame of reference for the Judaism of the time.

There is a famous story about a rabbi who would travel into the woods to say a prayer on a particular occasion. After his passing, his followers only remembered where to go but not what to say. After their passing, only the memory that someone would go somewhere remained. I feel as if we, through Kulanu, have been given an opportunity to help others find the place in the woods and remember what to say again. Kulanu will help us make the words of Joel (1:3) live again for those who were lost for generations:

*Tell your children of it,
And let your children tell their children,
And their children another generation.*

Ethiopian Jewry Update

By Edward Eitches

(Editor's note: The author is president of the Washington Association for Ethiopian Jews.)

Some think the Washington Association for Ethiopian Jews (WAEJ) has gone out of business. We often wished we could have done so. Unfortunately, there are serious unresolved problems in both Ethiopia and Israel. Thousands of Jews are left behind, languishing in Ethiopia for dubious reasons. This complex situation will be the subject of another article.

Until quite recently, Israeli government funds to help new immigrants start businesses have been directed almost exclusively to Russian immigrants. Now a newly formed group, the Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews (IAEJ), will help Ethiopian immigrants gain access to these resources. IAEJ is also participating in the formation of an Ethiopian education organization that will work with the Israeli education ministry to address the plethora of problems Ethiopians face in trying to succeed within the Israeli school system. The IAEJ also facilitated meetings between two Israeli

objective of increasing the participation of Ethiopians in decision-making for absorption projects in the cities.

WAEJ is still quite active, at least in the distribution of funds that we receive. In March, we had approximately \$7200 in our treasury. We decided to give all of it to three deserving beneficiaries:

\$3500 to IAEJ for its critical advocacy work in small business development, housing loans, educational opportunities, and adult literacy.

\$3000 to the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jews to provide a "beautiful, exciting, and heartwarming Passover for 400 Ethiopian Jews in Addis Ababa."

\$500 to the Yemin Orde Youth Village in Israel, a shining example of how Israel can motivate young Ethiopian immigrants to higher education and leadership.

Because we have disbursed all of our funds, we are presently unable to fill another important request: **To sponsor the first Ethiopian to attend the Conservative Rabbinical Seminary in Israel.** A generous response to this article would allow us to

BOOK REVIEW

An Important Book on an Important Subject

By Douglas L. Rathgeb

Lawrence J. Epstein's *Conversion to Judaism: A Guidebook* presents stories about converts, gives practical advice about such matters as emotional conflicts, parents, and discussing conversion, and presents a brief introduction to basic Jewish thought, history, and practices.

Dr. Epstein writes in a very welcoming, accessible way. This book is very clearly written and will be extremely useful to those considering conversion, those studying for conversion, and their families. And, in this age of widespread Jewish ignorance, the book will also be valuable to born Jews, for the introduction to Judaism in this book takes no knowledge for granted.

Because conversion to Judaism is emerging as so important a subject in Jewish life, it is becoming important for all Jews to learn about converts and their contributions to Jewish history and contemporary Jewish life. Such readers can do no better than to turn to this excellent book.

Although Dr. Epstein writes about conversion in the United States, his discussion of the subject in Jewish history and his presentation of how conversion should be offered will be valuable to those people who consider how conversions to Judaism should take place around the world. In this sense, those interested in the work of Kulanu will find this book an important primer on the steps needed to return the Lost Tribes to Judaism.

The book can be ordered from the publisher, Jason Aronson Inc., by calling 1-800-782-0015.

(Douglas L. Rathgeb is a writer and librarian living in California. Lawrence J. Epstein, an English professor who writes extensively on conversion, is a Kulanu board member. Epstein's article "In Search of the Ten Lost Tribes" appeared in Jewish Action.)

Speakers Available

Kulanu's speakers' bureau is now functional! 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-affiliated speakers are already booked for talks on a variety of topics in the Washington area.

Brazilian-born Jacques Cukierkorn, a newcomer to the Washington area, has recently assumed his post as assistant rabbi at Beth El Hebrew Congregation in Alexandria. He will give a series of four lectures on Jewish Life in Latin America, Oct. 16 and 30, Nov. 13, and Dec. 4. All lectures begin at 11:30 a.m. at Beth El in Alexandria. He will also lecture on the Lost Tribes of Israel at a Beth El brotherhood brunch on Dec. 11 at 10

a.m. The lecture is free; there will be a nominal charge for the brunch. Call 703-370-9400 for details.

Kulanu archivist Joe Hantman will continue his active class schedule with a 6-session course at Congregation Beth El of Montgomery County on Jewish communities around the world. The course can be attended Tuesday mornings beginning Oct. 4 or Wednesday evenings beginning Oct. 5. Call 301-652-2606 for details. Joe will also give a Wednesday morning course at the JCC of Greater Washington in Rockville. Call 301-881-0100 for specifics. Joe's courses discuss specific communities in China, Ethiopia, India, and Latin America, including history, practices, and current developments, as well as broader topics such as the Persian diaspora, conversions to Judaism by Gentiles stimulated by Bible study, and Kulanu's work.

Over the summer Joe spoke to a group of summer interns of the Jewish Campus Activities Board on the Crypto-Jews of New Mexico, following his recent trip there.

Balembas (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 1)

considered ritually impure after giving birth.

Although some might ascribe their practices of circumcision and pork prohibition as emanating from Islam, Balemba oral tradition speaks of Abraham and his covenant with the creator, and of Moses, but not of Mohammed.

Tribal lore tells that Balemba ancestors left Israel after the destruction of the First Temple, wandered southward through Yemen, and worked their way, never fully assimilating, to their present locations in southern Africa -- Zimbabwe, Malawi, Mozambique and Venda.

Although many Balemba are unaware of or uninterested in their possible Jewish roots, many are becoming increasingly interested. Reform rabbi Wally Blumenthal of Johannesburg, who died in 1987, taught tribe members about Judaism. Modern additions to their practices include adoption of the Star of David as a symbol, increased use of cloth skullcaps (use of these was noted 30 years ago by a South African Jew), and selection of eight days, rather than

Balembas are often members of the professional, business and government class in their respective countries. For example, Ephraim Selamolela, of Venda, who was born on a farm and banished from schooling during apartheid, started out in the taxi business and now owns a shopping center. His four children are all at universities, technical colleges or private schools. And Matshaya Mathiva, one of the first blacks in South Africa to become a professor, and whose children are all doctors, lawyers and academics, illustrates the tribe's emphasis on education.

Judaism is a cultural, rather than a religious, affiliation to many Balembas, who have adopted Christianity as well as traditional tribal beliefs. Are they Jews? Who knows? Suttner's assessment skillfully addresses this question:

"Whether that belief (in Jewish descent) has any basis has been a matter for debate among outsiders -- churchmen, anthropologists and archaeologists -- for 150 years, and the mystery remains unsolved. What's clear, though, is that many of the tribe's customs bear a fascinating resemblance to Judaism, its traditions speak of Abraham and Moses, and

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-

White Jews, black Jews, brown Jews, new Jews

"And Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman."

(Numbers 12:1)

What if one of the leading rabbis of our generation divorced his wife and married an Ethiopian immigrant, her mahogany skin a sharp contrast to his paler features? Would there be an angry uproar, endless gossip in religious circles?

If we want to imagine the quality of the reaction, all we have to do is turn to the end of this week's portion of *Behaalotkha*, where we read of the gossip surrounding the marriage of Moses to a Cushite woman, and the punishment of leprosy meted out to Miriam because of her role in the slander.

The commentators discuss the identity of the woman Moses married. Rashi identifies her as Tzipora, the wife with whom he had stopped living the moment he became a prophet. From this perspective, Miriam and Aaron did not yet understand that the Tora wishes mankind's spiritual leaders to be part of the world – and to sanctify it. Moses finally does understand this, and returns to normal married life.

Others, like the Ibn Caspi, claim that Moses actually took a second wife, a black Cushite – Cush being the biblical name of Ethiopia. Miriam and Aaron portray Moses as an ordinary husband who divorces or abandons his first wife in search of

someone more exotic. "Is it to Moses exclusively that God speaks? Doesn't He also speak to us?" (Numbers 12:2)

Upon hearing their words, God rebukes them, explaining the enormous difference between the immediacy of the prophecy of Moses and that of the other prophets, who receive their messages in visions or dreams. In the end, the leprosy dispensed to Miriam is limited to seven days because of Moses' intervention: "Please God heal her now." (Numbers 12:13)

The fundamental moral message of this account is the evil of slander. However, there is a sub-topic of extreme contemporary interest: Moses is condemned by his sister and brother (according to Ibn Caspi) for taking an Ethiopian – black – wife! I have already performed a number of marriages between "white" Israelis and "black" Ethiopian Israelis. What is the Tora view of inter-racial marriages?

I cannot emphasize too strongly that Judaism is color-blind! After Jacob receives the new name of Israel for wrestling with the angel, God blesses Jacob: "I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a congregation of nations will come into existence from you." (Gen. 35:11)

Perhaps it took more than 2,000 years of Jewish wandering for this verse to be seen in its simplest meaning. Arriving in Israel after

our long exile, we Jews are not only a nation, but a congregation of nations. There is no color line; there is a color continuum, starting perhaps with fair-skinned, often blond Scandinavian Jews, moving on to the slightly darker Russians, Eastern Europeans, Moroccan, Yemenites, Indians, and finally the black Ethiopian Jews.

Jews have a natural rainbow in their very own garden, but it's something we didn't always understand when we were growing up in the sheltered living rooms of Newark or Newcastle or New Haven. We are a lot more diversified, exotic and strange than we might imagine.

The exodus of thousands of black Ethiopians, many robed in white, clutching canes like prophets, the white-turbaned priests carrying their Bibles in the Gez language, the women with heads covered and long robes, strange tattoos on their faces or arms, should easily convince the most resistant that there is more to this people, nation, religion, than meets the eye.

Moreover, Operation Solomon was the first time in history that people from Africa were transported to another country, not to make them slaves but to make them free! So much for "Zionism is Racism."

The only issue which must interest us is the religio-legal one: are the Jews of Ethiopia halakhically Jewish?

More than 1,100 years ago, Eldad Hadani reported on the existence of Jews in the land of Cush. According to his account, these Ethiopians were from the tribe of Dan, famed as warriors.

When the ten tribes of Samaria rebelled against Rehoboam, son of King Solomon, in an attempt to crown Jeroboam as king, they wanted Dan to fight with them, but the idea of fighting against the grandson of King David was anathema. Many of the tribe solved their dilemma by escaping, and that's how Dan ended up in Ethiopia.

An accepted halakhic authority, Eldad Hadani is cited by such towering authors of *Responsa* as Rav Tzemach Gaon, Rabenu Hananel, Rashi, and other early authorities. On this basis Rabenu David ben Zimra, 16th century chief rabbi of Egypt, responding to a query about an individual who bought two slaves who claimed they were Ethiopian Jews, ruled that the buyer must free them, since they were Jews and could freely marry Jews. (*Responsa Ridvaz*, Part 4, Siman 219)

Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook (in his *Igrot Hareiyah*, Part 2, Siman 432), and former Chief Rabbi Hakham Ovadiya Yosef have both ruled that the Ethiopians must be seen as Jews, our brothers.

At times it may seem that the Ethiopians are the weakest link in our congregation of nations, since

their language and customs are not quite like ours: they were, after all, separated from the Jewish mainstream for thousands of years. This makes their acculturation to Israel more difficult.

However, they are really our strongest link; their very appearance should fill all of Jewry with an awe-inspiring humility.

What does it mean that a tribe from the days of Solomon has managed to survive in a hostile environment? Their strength of character – maintaining laws of Sabbath and family purity despite persecution and alienation – is an example for all who are ready to abandon the basic tenets of Judaism at the first invitation to a Sabbath bar-b-que.

Is it not a beautiful irony that this part of Jewry – weak, poor, black – is the one that may strengthen us the most, particularly in those parts of the world where Jews see themselves as too bourgeois?

What the Ethiopians can tell us about God and Israel and Jerusalem, about the Ingathering of the Exiles, the return of the Ten Lost Tribes, the miracle of Jewish survival and what it means to be a Jew, ought to turn our hearts to our own faith, and to the Divine guarantee of Redemption.

Indeed, we are a nation and a congregation of nations!

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Riskin, dean of the Ohr Tora institutions, is chief rabbi of Efrat.

SHABBAT SHALOM / Shlomo Riskin

Happy New Year

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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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Interests and affiliations useful to Kulanu's work

Trip to Belmonte (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 3)

meet me that evening to discuss his work. Through bus, walking, and finally taxi, I arrived at her apartment on Rua de Covelho. The city is rather large, Portugal's second largest.

When Ms. Paulo opened the door I knew it was worth the effort. She had a lot of old treasures in the house. Her English was broken, so I used my broken Portuguese mixed with some English. We managed to understand each other. She told me about her husband, his work, his trips to Israel, and the existence of other communities of Jews in northern Portugal. She showed me his library, once the world's center of research on Portuguese Marranos. Her husband's study was very interesting. She showed me a lamp that the Jews had used as their Sabbath candles. She discussed the synagogue, the intermarriage problems, and the emigration of Jews to find work in other countries. We went out to eat and had fish for dinner.

After meeting Ms. Paulo, there really was only one other important thing to do in Oporto, and that was to visit the Kadoorie Synagogue. Named after the famous Kadoorie family of Shanghai, who donated the

funds in 1933, the synagogue was so large and extravagant, its pews could hold hundreds. This was necessary at the peak of Barros Basto's success in leading 15,000 Marranos back to

mainstream Judaism. Unfortunately the revival was short-lived. The synagogue only filled up on its inauguration in 1938 and was used by Marrano youth, such as Amilcar Paulo, who learned in its yeshiva. Later the synagogue was used by Jewish refugees who had fled Germany in the 'thirties.

By the time I had arrived at the synagogue only ghosts remained. The most troubling aspect of the synagogue was the silence. Synagogues are not built to become museums. Oporto does not have enough active Jews to maintain a minyan, and there isn't a rabbi for hundreds of miles. The synagogue is cared for by a non-Jewish woman, and a dog protects the fenced-in property, from what I do not know. The synagogue is in a nice neighborhood but is still disproportionately beautiful. A synagogue this large, surrounded by palm trees, belongs in Beverly Hills!

As the Jews of Belmonte struggled for funds to build their own synagogue they joked about moving the Kadoorie synagogue. As the woman escorted me through, I was awed by the concept of a structure so Jewish in the middle of a population so Christian. This was different than in the rest of Europe, where the Jews were always known as Jews. The Marranos had acted as Catholics, so when they reverted to Judaism in the '20's and built a great synagogue, it must have been quite sensational. The Portuguese knew little about Judaism and some mistook it for a church.

The synagogue was sad to see me go. The Kadoories still pay for its maintenance and the woman probably takes good care of it, but for the last 50 years it has remained a shell, a reminder of the missed potential of the Marranos of northern Portugal. How long would it be before another Jew came to visit?

(In the next installment: Arrival in Belmonte)

Deadline for next newsletter: October 1, 1994

Karen Primack, Editor

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