

# Kulanu

"all of us"



*Helping Lost Jewish Communities*

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## Coming Out of the Marrano Closet

By Brian P. Haran

I was terrified at the thought of going before a Bet Din, a group of rabbis who would question my Jewishness, my sincerity...things that touch very close to home! Little did I know beforehand that one of my "inquisitors," Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn of Kulanu, would have more than a passing interest in my story and the story of my family.

When I was about 12, my father told me that we were really a Jewish family. I then realized that my family name "Haran" was not Irish and that we were somehow special. According to family lore we went to Ireland via Spain. There is a tradition of speaking some Spanish in the family, and quite honestly most of my father's family looked Spanish, if not Mediterranean. I'll probably never know for sure if the Harans actually landed on the west coast of Ireland with the ill-fated Spanish Armada. Many Marranos did travel with the Spanish fleet. Perhaps they made their way to Ireland with

(cont., p. 10)

**Join Kulanu's  
Study Mission to  
Uganda!**  
(See pp. 6, 7)

## Cordeiro Publishes



Helio Daniel Cordeiro's new book was released in Brazil in January 1995. Subsidized by a grant from Kulanu, its publication will enable Brazilian Marranos to learn about their Jewish roots. The book is dedicated "To Friends of Kulanu in the USA who, with wide vision of the meaning of Judaism, collaborated in the publication of this book." An English translation of the title: *The Marranos and the Sephardic Diaspora -- Introductory Study About the Crypto-Judaic Ethnic Identity.*

## The Case of San Nicandro, Italy

By Joe Hantman

There is nothing very unusual about non-Jewish individuals converting to Judaism. Such conversions take place for a variety of reasons, ranging from deep religious conviction to family reasons. However, when communities or groups of non-Jews decide collectively that they wish to be and/or consider themselves Jewish, there is invariably an intriguing story to be told. One such story concerns the converts of San Nicandro, Italy.

Esther and Eleazer Trito live on a small kibbutz near the town of Biryia in the Galilee, not far from the holy city of Safed. They and many of their friends and neighbors of the original group that emigrated from Italy to Israel in

(cont., p. 10)

## NOTICE!

**For financial reasons, Kulanu is forced to purge its mailing list of individuals who have not demonstrated interest in a monetary way. If you would like to continue receiving this newsletter and other mailings of special events, PLEASE make a modest (or generous!) contribution TODAY!**

## WHAT IS KULANU?

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

## KULANU BRIEFS

### Next Kulanu Meeting

Kulanu's next meeting will take place on April 2 at 2 p.m. at the Silver Spring, Maryland, home of Aron and Karen Primack. (Call 301-565-3094 for directions.) Guest speaker will be Rabbi Myron Zuber, a Lubovitch rabbi who converted several Inca Indians in Peru to Judaism and plans future contacts in Mexico.

### Igel Book

Dr. Regina Igel, Kulanu's vice president for Brazilian affairs, is putting finishing touches on a comprehensive book on Brazilian Jewish writers. The book, *Jewish Immigrants -- Brazilian Writers*, will be published first in Portuguese; an English edition will follow.

Igel is a Professor at the University of Maryland's Department of Spanish and Portuguese

### Certificates Available

Attractive 8"x11" color certificates are now available from Kulanu to honor special occasions (birthdays, anniversaries, bar/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 whether it is "in honor of" an occasion or "in memory of" someone.

### 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.

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 front page?

### Photos, Slides Needed

Kulanu is seeking good quality photographs and slides of Jews in dispersed and isolated communities around the world for our slide-lectures. A generous grant from Dr. Jules Harris of Chicago is making it possible for us to make slide copies of your materials and return the originals to you. Please send your pictures to the Kulanu office and indicate whether they need to be returned. If you have questions about the suitability of your material, please call Jonina Duker, 301-530-2361 (afternoons and evenings only).

### Help!

Rabbi Avichail needs an influential contact in Pakistan to facilitate his proposed trip there. Please call Jack Zeller (tel 301-681-5679 or fax 301-681-1587).

### Upcoming Visit to Israel?

Kulanu needs several people to take photographs of the Shinlung (Menashe) immigrants in Israel and to interview a number of them. We need stories on their life in India, their oral history, family traditions, how they came to know of their Jewish heritage, Jewish practices in India and Israel, conversion in Israel, and other experiences in Israel.

It is also anticipated that we will start a pen pal program with American teenagers, so let us know if you find any Shinlung teenagers in Israel with some English skills who might be interested.

Your visit to the Shinlung will also be helpful to them. It will dramatically remind them that, although some in Israel oppose their entry, they do have many friends in the United States who wish them well.

If you would like to help Kulanu in this important project, or if you have relatives or friends in Israel with good photographic and

### Voice of America Airs Interview

Voice of America journalist Sam Iker conducted a lengthy interview with Bob Lande about Kulanu's work, and a segment was aired on January 19 to various foreign posts.

### 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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## RABBI AVICHAIL REPORTS

### Update from Amishav Israel

To all my friends in KULANU: Shalom u'vracha. I am happy to tell you about the latest news from Amishav Israel.

#### **Menashe.**

1. After some problems, we are able to bring the second half of the new group from the Bnei Menashe in India (Shinlung) to Israel. Many from the first half of this group, in Jerusalem, are already converted and are studying in Yeshivat Nahalat Tzvi (boys) and Yeshivat Maayan Bina (girls).
2. Among the families in Kiryat Arba, all have jobs and the children are studying in schools. They already speak Hebrew, the community loves them, and they are always the first for prayers and lessons in the synagogue. One of the families has already been converted.
3. There has been a lot of progress by four of our families who now study to become the owners of a number of greenhouses in the village of Bedolach.
4. We have had two births, a *brit milah*, and a *pidyon haben*.
5. In the village of El David we now have three families, one of which made their wedding there. All the Bnei Menashe came to the wonderful wedding of David and Rinah Menashe. We are now waiting until next month, when another wedding will take place.
6. We now have families in the following places throughout Israel: six in Kiryat Arba, three in El David, three in Ret-El, two in Ofra, four in Bedolach, one in Jerusalem, and three in Elon Moreh. We have 11 youth studying and working in Neve Dokalim, three in Maalo Chever, two in Kiryat Arba, and all the others in Jerusalem.
7. The new families need help with furniture and other household appliances. We welcome your assistance.

#### **Pathans**

1. As you know, we have published a new book about the Pathans, which is the abridged version from my book *The Tribes of Israel*. This book has been published in the Dari (Persian) language, translated by the former ambassador of Afghanistan. Our friend Susan Pollack worked hard for this publication and raised the money for its translation, and I thank her very much for her work. We published it here in Israel.
2. The book was distributed to the Pathans that we know in the US, and to Pakistan and Afghanistan, with the help of Bruce Terris.
3. I have been trying to get a visa to visit the Pathans in Pakistan this year. If somebody could help me with this, please get in touch with Jack Zeller, president of Kulanu (301-681-5679).

#### **Other Matters**

1. Three months ago I was in Portugal for my latest research in the city Braganza and the village Villarino dos Ballagos, assessing whether descendants of these past Marrano communities are interested in returning to Jewish life. I feel that there is not much chance to do anything, as they are too far away from that heritage.
  2. We want to publish a new edition of my book *The Tribes of Israel* in Hebrew and English. If we can raise the money, we will add new chapters to the book. If you can help us, it would be very appreciated.
- (Editor's note: Donations to Kulanu may be earmarked for Menashe settlers' furnishings or for publication of the new edition of Rabbi Avichail's book. See application form on p. 11.)

## Kulanu Officially Enters 21st Century!

By David Turetsky

Kulanu-L is a listserv facility accessible via Internet. It reflects the community of interests of American Jews of varied backgrounds and practices dedicated to establishing links with lost and dispersed remnants of the Jewish people and assisting those who wish to rejoin the Jewish community.

By subscribing to Kulanu-L, you can automatically receive copies of Kulanu's publications as soon as they are published and without any delay due to mailing. You are also free to write to Kulanu-L and your remarks will automatically be distributed to all subscribers.

To subscribe to Kulanu-L, send E-mail to "listserv@ube.ubalt.edu" with the body of the transmission "subscribe kulanu-l firstname

The subject title of the E-mail transmission is ignored. You will receive an acknowledgement of your addition to the subscriber list.

To transmit E-mail via Internet to Kulanu-L for distribution to subscribers, address transmissions to "kulanu-l@ube.ubalt.edu".

Earlier publications and transmissions are archived and may be accessed by sending to "fileserv@ube.ubalt.edu" the following text: "send kulanu-l.yyyy-mm" where yyyy=year and mm=month.

To remove your name from the Kulanu-L subscriber list, send E-mail to "listserv@ube.ubalt.edu" with the body of the message: "unsubscribe kulanu-l".

Refer any technical difficulties to "dturetsky@ubmail.ubalt.edu".



# Converting Incans in Peru

By Rabbi Myron Zuber

*(This is the concluding segment of a two-part article. In the last issue the author began the true tale of a Catholic priest in Trujillo, Peru, who embraced Judaism in 1966. The author arrived in Peru in 1988 to prepare the community for conversion. An Israeli Bais Din came and converted hundreds of individuals; 380 emigrated to Israel, but some remained in Peru.)*

A neighborhood of about 30 Jewish Inca Indians also grew in Lima, and they experienced difficulty with the other Jews of Lima. One problem was that the excellent school established by the Jewish community refused to register a seven-year-old child of a Jewish Incan mother, saying the tuition was too expensive (the mother thought the real reason was that they were prejudiced against her Indian status). The school had accepted two Catholic girls, children of the vice president of the country, and hired a Catholic teacher to provide them with religious instruction. I was extremely upset that the Jewish school was more prepared to provide for Catholic hierarchy than for their own Jewish brethren, who happened to be Indians. I approached the staff of the school and was adamant until they finally relented and admitted the Incan child.

The Lima Jews do not permit the Inca Jews to enter their synagogue, even though the Incans were converted by a Bais Din of Israel.

One day I was approached by a group of women in Trujillo who wished to speak with me privately about *nidah* (family purity). I was embarrassed by the subject matter and relatively unfamiliar with the intricate details. I decided to suggest that in the future a husband and wife team should visit the Inca Indian Jews, so the woman would be available to discuss matters pertaining to women.

On Shabbos the children sang beautifully, songs they already knew, and other *smiros* I taught them. Each week somebody would come to the community as a curious observer. One week a man by the name of Serna, a professor of French at the University of Trujillo, came. Extremely impressed by the

regarding the occasion. However Valderama, Villaneuva's successor, refused to allow this. He did not think it a good idea for the Jewish community to be in the limelight; that this would promote antagonism and foster ill feeling.

Before my departure, I helped the group organize *shiurim* on the weekly Torah portion. I was happy to note that these people are thinking individuals able to figure out resolutions to questions. I invited them to call me collect if they ever encountered questions they were unable to resolve.

**I encouraged them to sing and dance, and advised them to incorporate their Indian melodies to Hebrew songs. I taped a beautiful Indian melody used to sing Psalm 121, "I lift up my eyes to the mountains." I did not want them to abandon their culture, but to merge it and make it a part of their new-found Judaism. I encouraged them to dance Indian dances for Yiddishkeit enhancement. Trujillo had a community of 180 when I left.**

I traveled to the small community in Cajamarca to make my farewells

and planned to stay only a few days. The people were disappointed and asked me what it would take for me to stay. I replied that they only numbered eight, not enough for a *minyan*. However, if two additional people would agree to have themselves circumcised, I would remain. Two people immediately agreed to this proposal and traveled to Lima to have the operation performed. I extended my stay. The community of Cajamarca eventually plans to go to Israel but the Israeli government wishes to verify their commitment to Judaism. If they are still Jewish after a two-year waiting period Israel will accept them.

Each Incan Jew has taken a new Jewish name to augment his Jewish identity. However, many still retain their Spanish names. One man, ironically, is called Jesus, and it is amusing to comment that Jesus read the Torah portion nicely today. It takes a while to make a total switch from the old Spanish names to the new unfamiliar Jewish names.

**Villaneuva changed his name to Tzidkiyahu and is revered as a prophet and leader in Israel. His presence commands respect.**

*(cont., p. 5)*



Rabbi Zuber with a Jewish Incan family.



## Jewish Incans (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 4)

Valderama, his successor, longed for a sefer Torah for his shul. He approached the shul in Lima with his request but the Jews refused to give him anything, even though there are a large number of sifrei Torah decomposing in the basement of the Lima shul. I opened one at random and was shocked to witness the escape of numerous cockroaches. The sefer Torah is permitted to house repulsive insects but is forbidden to the Inca Indian Jews.

Undaunted, Valderama set about making his own sefer Torah. Unfamiliar with the dinim entailed in writing a sefer Torah, he proceeded to painstakingly photocopy each page from the Chumash on to parchment. He then sewed the pieces of parchment together to form a Torah scroll. An Israeli museum requested this sefer Torah for purposes of display because they were impressed with this effort.

I always tried to be accommodating and flexible in trying to merge the two cultures. When a congregant asked if he should sit shiva for his Catholic mother, I compromised by telling him that he could sit for one day. Another asked if he should continue placing fresh flowers on his mother's grave. I responded that since flowers are expensive it is more productive to convert this expenditure into tzedakah and give charity in her honor. I sympathize with these people and tried to satisfy their old ties so long as it did not interfere in their Jewish affiliation.

I have been back in the States for a few years now. I remain in telephone contact with my friends in Peru, and my wife visits twice a year to help the women. I spend much of my time speaking about these courageous Jewish Incans, trying to raise donations for their many needs.

**I am always soliciting tephilin, taleisim, mezuzahs, and money for Spanish-Hebrew prayer books (these can be bought in Mexico or Argentina). I also collect cash donations for the people to buy appropriate clothing (I do not ship clothing donations). Poverty permeates the community to such an extent that women quite frequently had to wear the same dress for an entire week. In order to have a change of garment for Shabbos, the women would turn the garment inside out so that it would not appear identical to the dress she wore during the week! The women would also love to have silver Jewish charms, like stars of David or mezuzahs, for their necklaces. Money for food is also desperately needed. I can be reached at (914) 425-6213.**

I am happy about my work. Isn't it marvelous to hear a fantastic tale of mass conversion when there is 82 percent intermarriage among mainstream Jews of Lima and 52 percent intermarriage in the United States?

**(Contributions to Kulanu can be earmarked for Rabbi Zuber's Peru project. See application form on p.11.)**

## Marrano Jews of Braganza

By Warren Freedman

In the northeast corner of Portugal, at the Spanish border, is the city of Braganza, where many of Portugal's estimated one million Marrano Jews (one-tenth of Portugal's population) reside. (In central Portugal, also near the Spanish border, is another Marrano center, Belmonte.)

Braganza is the site where only a few years ago I had the pleasure of meeting with Ephraim Eldar, Israel's ambassador to Portugal, who was similarly visiting with the Marranos. I was then a visiting journalist accompanied by an official Portuguese guide from New York for the purpose of studying the Marrano presence in Portugal.

It was momentous that the State of Israel was *then* "interested" in recognition of the Marrano Jew, although subsequent events brought forth little success. In point of fact, I had offered one-way plane tickets from Lisbon to Tel Aviv to the Rodriques family, only to have Israel's Minister of Immigration and Absorption turn down the request for acceptance under the Law of Return.

During my visit to Braganza I was aware of the fact that Jews first settled in Portugal long before 1492, when the Jewish population was strikingly increased by the arrival of thousands of refugee Spanish Jews who had crossed the border to escape the Inquisition. But the Portuguese Inquisition in 1547 by Pope Paul III brought death to 30,000 Jews, but kept alive thousands of others who accepted conversion and continued to practice secretly in their homes their Jewish religion.

Thereafter, except for the transients during World War II, Portugal never had more than a thousand Jewish citizens. These secret Jews or Marranos maintained their religion these many years only to come forth in numbers in 1948 with the birth of the modern State of Israel.

The Marranos are distinguishable from other Portuguese by (1) possession of Hebrew writings, Hebrew prayer books, religious objects, art and miscellany; (2) circumcision on the eighth day; (3) Friday night ceremony for lighting candles; (4) separation of meat and milk foods; (5) observances of Jewish holidays, to wit: (a) 10 days after the new moon in September, a day of fasting is observed; everyone dresses in white clothing; (b) eight days after the new moon in February a fast is observed, probably Purim and the Fast of Queen Esther; (c) on the 14th day of the new moon in March, Passover is observed; for two days no bread is eaten, but on the third day unleavened bread is eaten, and a whole lamb is roasted; (d) on the Sabbath cooking of food is not permitted; and (e) meat and poultry are soaked and salted; (6) after a funeral the mourners sit on special low benches in their homes for seven days and burn a special oil lamp; and (7) the wedding ceremony includes a blessing in the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Join KULANU



See the world!

## **Who Are the Abayudaya?**

The Abayudaya are a group of native Ugandans (Baganda tribe) who have been practicing Judaism since 1919, when a local warrior and governor, Semei Kakungulu, studied and meditated on the Old Testament, adopted the observance of all Moses' commandments, including circumcision, and suggested this observance of all his (formerly Christian) followers.

In 1926 a Jewish trader named Joseph, passing through Uganda, met and befriended Kakungulu and agreed to stay in his home in Mbale, Uganda, for six months to instruct the Abayudaya community in Judaism -- keeping the Sabbath strictly (transgressors were severely punished), recitation of prayers and blessings, head-coverings, ritual slaughter for meat, and some Hebrew. Although Kakungulu did not force Judaism on his subordinates, those who accepted Judaism enjoyed certain civic advantages.

Kakungulu was further educated in Judaism in 1927 by Isaiah Yari, a Jewish foreman working on the Uganda railway. Isaiah was transferred after it was discovered that he refused to make the Abayudaya work on Saturday.

The Abayudaya regarded themselves as Jews, using the Old Testament as their guide; they observed every law, fast, prayer and festival they read about. They had circumcisions, built succot, practiced ritual slaughter, ate only unleavened bread during Passover, held a harvest festival on Shavuot, fasted on Yom Kippur. A 20-acre site was set aside for the synagogue and school, and a modest wood and plaster building was constructed for Sabbath and festival services.

The community, then numbering 2000, fell into disarray after Kakungulu's death in 1928, as some converted to Christianity and others intermarried. In 1961, when they numbered about 300, the Abayudaya succeeded in making contacts with world Jewry, and the community was strengthened. One of the visitors was Arye Oded, first secretary of the Embassy of Israel to Uganda. He wrote the history of the community and made plans -- later prevented by Idi Amin -- for two Abayudaya youths to study for the rabbinate in Israel. By 1971 they numbered 500.

Today the community has a new synagogue, built largely by their youth in a "kibbutz" program, and have added such post-biblical festivals as Chanukah, Purim, TuBeshvat, and Yom HaAtzmaut to their calendar. They have developed a repertoire of songs and prayers set to Western and African melodies, thanks in part to a visit by Douglas King, an English Jew.

Now numbering 500, the Abayudaya are anxious to come out of their isolation and to officially convert to Judaism.

## **Why Visit the Abayudaya?**

This trip promises to be one of the most meaningful trips of your life. It's hard to put into words the thoughts, love and excitement you will feel towards the Abayudaya. **Julia Chamovitz, American who studied in Kenya.**

They deserve our attention. Anything we can do to relieve their isolation will help them become stronger in their faith. Any assistance we can bring to them will be received with a sincerity and joy that will surpass expectations. **David Levine, former Peace Corps Volunteer in Uganda.**

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 is one that has changed my life....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. **Matthew Meyer, American who studied in Kenya.**

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....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. **Aron Kintu Moses, secretary of the Abayudaya Congregation in Mbale, Uganda.**

## **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.

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

# COME WITH US TO UGANDA!

*By Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn*

I am very excited since our trip to visit the Abayudaya Congregation in Uganda is approaching rapidly. I know this is going to be a memorable trip. I have been communicating with the Abayudaya, and they are waiting eagerly for us.

Trying to organize a trip to Africa is certainly one of the most challenging things I have ever attempted! Having spent several hours on the phone with Kulanu members and tour operators, I have finally arrived at definitive plans for our trip.

We will depart the evening of June 12, 1995, from JFK Airport, New York, via Sabena Airlines and arrive in Brussels, Belgium the next morning. On that evening we will fly directly to Entebbe Airport, Uganda, arriving the morning of June 14. We will spend that day and night in Kampala, the capital, resting and/or sightseeing. On the morning of June 15 we will depart, via minivan and driver, for the three-hour road trip to Mbale, the town that is home to the Abayudaya. We will remain there for five days, staying with families or, if you require running water and electricity, in a local guest house or hotel.

While in Mbale we will spend a Shabbat with the Abayudaya and also use our time to better acquaint ourselves with them and their practices. And we will be teaching them some basic concepts of Judaism. I am hoping that each Kulanu participant will take responsibility to lead a teaching session on some facet of Judaism. We would like to set up a continuous learning program that can be accomplished through correspondence, to prepare those who are interested in formal conversion to Judaism.

I am hopeful that Matt Meyer, an American living in Kenya who is familiar with the Abayudaya, will join us in Uganda. He is a very knowledgeable and resourceful young man, and I feel he will greatly facilitate our stay in Uganda.

We will be bringing the community religious articles and other gifts. In addition, we will have the honor of carrying to Uganda a Torah scroll donated by Congregation Beth Abraham of Auburn, Maine. It is one of nine scrolls the congregation has owned for over 80 years. Beth Abraham's spiritual leader, Rabbi Portal, has a history of spreading Torah wealth. At his previous congregations he sent three scrolls to Ethiopian Jews in Israel and two to Russian Jews in Israel.

There is a possibility that Lisa Kaufman, a young film maker from New York, will be joining us to produce a documentary on the unique story of the Abayudaya, and Kulanu's work with the Abayudaya. She is seeking funding, and is optimistic that the film will become a reality.

There is also the possibility for a hike up Mount Elgon, an extinct volcano right in the Abayudayas' backyard. It has the largest external surface area of any singular mountain in the world.

We will return to Kampala June 20, with another hotel overnight.

Following our visit to the Abayudaya, some participants might opt for a safari out of Nairobi (a one-hour flight from Kampala) to one or more of Kenya's famous game parks: Masai Mara, Samburu, Amboseli, Aberdares, Lake Nakuru.

reports that Uganda affords travelers a rare opportunity to see Mountain Gorillas. Only 600 remain in the world, and over half of them live in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, about eight hours' drive from Kampala. He also recommends a seven-day hike on the glacier-covered peaks of the famed "Mountains of the Moon," the Ruwenzori Mountains.

Still others may want to spend a few days in Brussels or nearby areas on the way home, arriving in New York on June 24 (a 13-day stay might be required for our special airfare to be effective).

The cost will be about \$2100 from New York, double occupancy. This amount includes basic costs only -- round-trip airfare, minivan and driver, and two nights at the Sheraton Hotel in Kampala. Miscellaneous expenses, (modest) costs for staying in Mbale, and optional add-on trips are not included.

Some members of Kulanu read a State Department travel advisory about Uganda. I am aware of problems and potential dangers in the northern provinces of Uganda. This, however, does not affect Mbale, in the southern part of the country. I want you all to know that security is a high concern of mine.

Although we already have some interested people, we still have space for a few more. For more information contact me at home (703-941-5225) or at my office (703-370-5191).

As you can imagine, there are many small details that have to be finalized. **We will be having a trip information meeting at 2 pm on March 19, 1995**, at the home of Joyce Gordon, 3816 Ft. Worth Ave., Alexandria, VA (703-370-0780). Directions: Take Rte. 395 to Seminary Road East exit. Proceed for five traffic lights, turn right on St. Stephens, and right again on Ft. Worth.

Out-of-towners who may be interested in the trip are invited to call me at home (703-941-5225) the evening before the meeting to raise any questions you might have; we'll call you back with the answers after the meeting.

I will be at the meeting, along with our travel agent and with Julia Chamovitz, who studied in Kenya and got to know the Abayudaya. We will have some snapshots of the Abayudaya community and will play a moving cassette recording of the Abayudaya children's choir singing well-known Hebrew prayers with an African beat!





# Getting to Know the Marranos of Belmonte

By Eytan Berman

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

Although the exteriors of the houses in Belmonte's old Jewish Quarter prominently displayed crosses, the interiors would tell another story.

We continued through the Jewish Quarter, knocking on the doors of Jews, but no one seemed to be home. At three in the afternoon on Shabat most of the older Jews who still live in the quarter visit their children and grandchildren. We continued up the path to one of the modern Jewish houses and knocked. A middle-aged Jewish woman answered the door and immediately invited us in. Inside we met her mother-in-law, an old woman dressed in black.

I was fascinated by the old lady, a link to the past. Her face was heavy with years and her skin leathery and browned from the sun. Helene's child was carrying a puppy, and the old woman broke into a toothless smile every time she touched the puppy. This was no ordinary Jewish woman. She held many secrets but wasn't about to unburden them on me, a stranger. I had seen her before on the street and in the synagogue. She kept to herself and her presence was ethereal. She was a history book locked shut. In her 90's, she is well-versed in the oral tradition passed to her from her mother and grandmother. I could not understand a word she spoke and she not a word I spoke. Helene tried to ask her some questions but she would not answer.

We departed with the key to one of the old Jewish houses. The house had two doors, one used for merchandise storage and the other as an entrance. The woman of the house met us. The house was cold, with uneven concrete floors, and scarcely furnished. We were led to the living room, where the woman proudly showed us the secret compartment in the wall exposing an old tin lamp made from fused, roughly cut pieces of tin. It was such a simple design, but I have never seen anything like it. It had been used regularly by herself, her mother and her grandmother to welcome in the Shabat. Once the lamps were lit, the secret storage space was closed so that unexpected visitors would not see the tell-tale light. The prayer the women would recite when lighting the oil lamp was, "Blessed be my G-d, my Lord, my Adoshem, who ordains us and commands us with his blessed and most holy commandments to kindle this holy wick." I am told that if you find an older woman in the streets of northern Portugal's small towns, chances are high that she will recognize one of these lamps. The compartment also held some balls of dough which the Marranos prepared on Pesach.

We then went to the kitchen, where there were large buckets of black olives. The only natural light in the house was through the back door, as there were no windows. I don't know if this had to do with their

being Marranos. In northern Portugal the temperatures can be very cold and this is probably the reason.

The backyard revealed a breathtaking view of rolling hills leading to the valley, the olive trees, weeping willows and land cut into tracts for farms. The backyard of the home had chickens running freely, a dog on a short leash and a structure that held drying goatskins. There was no electricity or plumbing. The man who lived in the house assisted the rabbi in the butchering of goats and chickens to provide the Jewish community with kosher meat. Unfortunately, I couldn't take pictures of the interior of the house as it was Shabat.

Helene told me that one of the old houses in the Jewish Quarter was recently recently sold. I inquired about the price, concerned that a slice of history will disappear if all the houses fall out of Jewish hands, dissolving the legacy of the Marranos' secret home worship. The homes are not expensive, around \$10,000, and converting one into a museum would not be expensive. Most of the younger Jews who have some money build modern houses outside of the Jewish Quarter. Helene showed me a plot of land in the Jewish Quarter where the Jewish community has bought a piece of land and will construct a synagogue and mikvah. Funds have been secured for half of the \$100,000 cost of the project.

Helene and I continued on our walk up past the fortress. On the street she would point out Jewish people. The children are somewhat shy to outsiders. They like Belmonte, its small-town life being the only life they know. Lisbon is regarded as fast-paced and impersonal. Unfortunately, the children are not educated because they are pulled out of school young to help in their parents' businesses.

No one could explain why they traditionally light a huge bonfire on Christmas Eve in northern Portugal. I was at the fire and there were Jews in attendance.

In neighboring Covilha there are more crosses on the houses than in the graveyard, suggesting that there were many Marranos in Covilha at one time. Presently Covilha, a town of 20,000, is almost all of Jewish blood. Unfortunately, the town has no more Marranos as the secret worship has ceased, and they are for all practical purposes Catholic.

The Jews in Belmonte are all involved in the clothing business, from linen to socks to suits. There are five clothing shops and boutiques in town. Other Jews travel to surrounding towns' markets to sell their wares. There is one factory in town owned by Obelio, a Marrano convert to Orthodox Judaism, who is one of the 1000 wealthiest people in Portugal.

Belmonte's Marranos used to have their own marriage and funeral rites. Each couple was married twice, first at home and then, to make it legal, in church. Non-Jewish friends were only welcome at the second ceremony. Parents would

*(cont. on p. 9)*

## Hantman Still Talking!

Kulanu's archivist and chief lecturer, Joe Hantman, continues to give courses in Maryland of interest to Kulanu supporters. He will present a series of six classes on "Little Known Jewish Communities Around the World - Part 3" at Congregation Beth El of Montgomery County. The course will take place 11:10 a.m. Tuesdays beginning March 21, 1995. It will discuss the Jews of Iraq from biblical times to the present, the Jews of Persia from Cyrus the Great to present-day Iran, the hidden Jews of Mashad (Muslim Marranos) and their reemergence as Jews, the Jews of Belmonte, Portugal, and the Samaritans (Jews?) of Israel and their future under possible Palestinian autonomy. Call 301-656-2606 for information.

In addition, Hantman will start a new course, "The Jewish Week That Was," which will review the week from the Jewish perspective. The eight-session course will be conducted Wednesdays at 11 a.m. beginning March 15, at the Jewish Community Center of Greater Washington in Rockville. Possible subjects include Jewish personalities influencing Republican Party initiatives; evolving relationship between Israel and American Jewish organizations; Jews in Sarajevo and Chechnya; continued immigration to Israel; and the surprising growth of Jewish population in Germany. Call 301-881-0100 for information.

## Israeli Institute for Marrano Studies

*By Gloria Mound*

We here in Israel at the Casa Shalom Institute for Marrano Studies believe it beneficial to show the outside world how Jews have maintained their identity/practice in so many parts of the world for hundreds of years, often in great danger, and how often they were protected by non-Jews. Today many, proud of their ancestry, are searching for their roots and coming back to Judaism.

We accomplish our mission through lecture tours featuring interesting and appealing presentations to varied audiences. We will tour the New York area and Florida in March, and New York/New Jersey/Washington DC/Texas in May and June 1995.

In addition, on July 25, 1995, we will join Israeli Ambassador Mose Liba, who is convening a conference in Sao Tome (an island off the coast of West Africa) to commemorate the sufferings of 2000 Jewish children who were sent there as slaves from Portugal in 1493. Their descendants still observe Jewish rites today!

Interested persons can contact Casa Shalom, Institute for Marrano Studies at P.O.B. 66, Gan Yavneh, Israel 70800; tel/fax 972-0-8-573-150.

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## Marranos of Belmonte (Cont.)

*(cont. from p. 8)*

make matches. "Marriage is the best deal you can make," parents would tell their children. There were no dissolved marriages; members are expelled from the community if they intermarry. Recently Moises Nunes and his female cousin, both single and of marriageable age, went to Israel in search of spouses on the advice of doctors. Belmonte needs a new gene pool to fight physical and psychological diseases due to intermarriage. They returned from Israel with the news that they were engaged to each other!

Funerals used to take place in church and were followed by the Jewish seven days of mourning at home. On the eighth day and again on the thirtieth day, and every three months thereafter until a year of mourning had passed, the relatives fasted. There was no Jewish cemetery. Marranos left their world as Christians buried under crosses in Belmonte's Christian cemetery. Now there is a Jewish cemetery and most of the Jews are married and buried according to Orthodox Jewish law. For example, a Marrano recently died and his family wanted to bury him in the Jewish cemetery. The previous rabbi, following certain customs, wouldn't allow it unless the dead man underwent a circumcision.

Belmonte is a sociological and religious gold mine, a pure gene pool of Spanish Jews completely insulated from the rest of world Jewry for over 20 generations. These Jews, originating from six or seven families, are physically no different from American Jews, who are primarily Ashkenazic. This was a remarkable discovery for me because I believed Ashkenazim and Sephardim looked different.

How have these people survived for so long? They have been insulated from Jewish movements, celebrations, and disasters for over 500 years. They are transplants out of the 15th century in the Petri dish of modernity. Their secret Judaism kept them together as a people and apart from all others.

Over the years the religion was passed down from mother to daughter orally, written works being too great a risk. Crypto-Judaism evolved out of the 20-plus generations of passed knowledge. Crypto-Judaism is a blend of Catholic and Jewish practices with adherents rarely knowing which practices come from which religion. Their stunted religion had been called a "potential-Judaism" to be fulfilled only when Marranos fled Portugal and reentered Judaism elsewhere. But for the remnant of Marranos who never left Portugal it was the only Judaism they knew.

## Coming Out of the Marrano Closet (Cont.)

*cont. from p. 1)*

groups of Jews that traveled to the British Isles via Portugal and the Netherlands. **The fact remains that we remembered our heritage.**

The story of my mother's Viennese family, Dubrasky, is similar to that of my father's family, but somewhat more modern. Its was the old story of middle-European pogroms, assimilation and eventual emigration. One of my uncles even changed his name to hide his Jewishness! In spite of assimilation some customs remained -- giving biblical names to the girls, a smattering of Yiddish spoken at home, and a fear of Russian soldiers. They settled in Jewish neighborhoods in the new world at the turn of the century...close to the Community but still apart.

My own Jewishness might have simply remained something of a curiosity but during the mid-1980's a friendship with an Orthodox Jew and his family led me to begin my own studies and worship at home. I began to live my life as a closet Marrano...something of a family tradition, I suppose. **In September 1993, in fear and trembling, I went to speak with a local rabbi.** So I began my public worship and formal studies. The welcoming support that I received from Rabbi Gold was crucial. Who knows whether my Jewish "roots" were simply a part of the Almighty's overall plan for me...and perhaps it is so for others as well.

I must point out that for however much an ancient tie with Judaism can be a positive force, there is also, in the psyche of the Marrano, a negative that is hard to overcome. Somewhere in the past the direct link with the "community" was broken.

Whatever the circumstances, there was estrangement and assimilation. For many of us it meant physical survival while others perished. **To return now carries a certain amount of guilt and perhaps shame that**

**acknowledge.** I don't know if this aspect is often discussed, but I do feel that it may very well be something that should be acknowledged and overcome in a supportive way. Often survivors of wars or natural disasters struggle with feelings of guilt or shame...simply because they are survivors. **That a portion of our Family should remain in hiding, albeit in psychological hiding, is certainly the last thing we should allow to happen.**

I'd like to pass along a short story that I hope you'll appreciate. Two brothers inherited an old orchard that had been planted many generations before them. The younger brother was very practical and

energetic. He wanted to immediately cut down the old, unproductive trees, plow up the field and sow grain for a quick harvest. The older brother examined the orchard which had suffered from years of neglect. A compromise was struck. The brothers would wait a season before cutting down the trees. In the meantime they dedicated some spare time to the old orchard. The following spring they pruned back the trees, nurtured the surrounding soil and re-opened the old irrigation ditches for fresh water to reach the old trees. Their harvest was abundant beyond expectation. Neighbors were called to share in the harvest. Everyone marveled at the "new" fruit.

## San Nicandro, Italy (Cont.)

*(cont. from p. 1)*

1949, and their children and grandchildren, now also live in Ashkelon and Acco. The group is fully observant of Jewish law and tradition and, except for some songs and customs (minhag) traceable to their national origin, are indistinguishable from other Israelis. As with all other non-Ashkenazim, they are categorized as Sephardim. A few years ago, when Israel radio and TV broadcast Pope John Paul's historic visit to Rome's Central Synagogue, where the original group were converted in 1948, they watched with special interest.

Their story began in 1931 in the town of San Nicandro, province of Bari, in southeastern Italy. They were agricultural workers eking out a living on the rocky soil, artisans, and laborers. In the ensuing years, Italy's Fascist government drew closer to Germany, but such matters were outside the world of these isolated people.

The main feature of their lives was their fascination with Donato Manduzzio, a healer, wise man, religious teacher, teller of tales, and singer of songs. Manduzzio was a seeker of meaning and a dreamer. He found in the Bible a truth and an identity which he succeeded in teaching his disciples and instilled in them a sense of shared history and identification with the Israelites. Their isolation was such that only when a traveler passing through the region informed them that in Rome, Florence, and Turin there were communities of descendants of the ancient people did they seek to become part of the existing Jewish community.

The following year the chief rabbi of Rome, intrigued by reports of Manduzzio and his "congregation" of new Jews, sent emissaries to inquire into the matter. This led to a constructive relationship between the Jewish establishment in Rome and the flock of Donato Manduzzio. The Jews of San Nicandro constituted an autonomous religious community until 1946, when it became fully integrated into Italian Jewry following circumcision and mikvah ceremonies in Rome.

In 1949, in a joyous departure, the group of about 60 left for Israel carrying little with them except sacks of seed from their small plots which they hoped to plant in new furrows in Israel. So imbued were they with their biblical identity that they truly felt they were going home. Manduzzio (1885-1948), like Moses, never reached the Promised Land, but he is remembered as the patriarch of the Jews of San Nicandro.

The possibility that Donato Manduzzio and his followers were of Spanish Jewish origin cannot be completely ruled out. It is known that in the 15th and 16th centuries Spanish and Portuguese Jews and secret Jews found refuge in Italy.



## LETTERS TO KULANU

### Visit the Abayudaya If You Can!

Something most remarkable happened to me back in the fall of 1992, and I want to share with Kulanu readers some thoughts on my good fortune. While doing undergraduate work in Kenya, I met a group of people called the Abayudaya. This was not just any group of people; the Abayudaya are a group of Jews living in Mbale, Uganda.

This Trip promises to be one of the most meaningful trips of your life. It's hard to put into words the thoughts, love and excitement you will feel towards the Abayudaya.

Imagine walking to a synagogue made of mud and straw, saying the Shema in Hebrew, English and Baganda, and sharing a siddur with African women and children.

This is an experience I hope many of you will be able to have on an upcoming Kulanu trip to Uganda. This trip promises to be one of the most meaningful trips of your life. It's hard to put into words the thoughts, love and excitement you will feel towards the Abayudaya. It is an experience that will move you and make you appreciate what Judaism means to people all over the world.

One of the promises I made to the Abayudaya before I left was that I would help them emerge from isolation from the rest of the Jewish world. The Abayudaya are craving information and contact. We have a responsibility!

Julia Chamovitz

### Celebrating Jewish Diversity

A recent issue of Kulanu had five letters from our tiny community in northeastern Brazil, all male (no pun intended) correspondents, including my husband, Julio D'Gabriel. So to balance things a little I thought it only fair to speak out for the women in the community.

I feel a great deal of sympathy for the Marranos, perhaps because my own background is so varied. My mother fled from the pogroms in Russia as a child and came from a very orthodox Jewish family. My father was born in India, a member of the Sikh religion and a leader of the Sikh community in England for many years. I was born in Scotland and brought up as a Jew, knowing no other religion.

I married a Cuban Jew after emigrating to Canada, where our oldest son was born; our two other sons were born in the United States, where we lived for years, and I now live in Brazil. Perhaps my mother's nickname, "Tsigayner" (gypsy), has something to do with it. I was born at the beginning of World War II and thank G-d that I was born on the right side of the English Channel. Had I been born 26 miles away, I would have been another statistic of the Holocaust.

I grew up with youngsters who had survived the concentration camps. I learned to run very fast from post-war supporters of Mosley to whom Jews were anathema. I was bullied and heckled by children who called me "half-caste" and learned to defend myself at an early age. Yet these things were comprehensible, even understandable to one who has lived through a war.

*What I do not understand, and do not think I ever shall, is how a Jew can possibly be racist! Is it because he must find a victim -- any victim -- to transfer his humiliation to? How can there be enmity between two Jews because one is Sefardi and the other is Ashkenazi? How can a person who has been born a*

*(Cont., p. 12)*

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

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

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

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

## LETTERS (CONT.)

### Praise for Kulanu

You are doing something of immense importance. I don't have stronger words at my command to tell you just how important it is. I do certainly have interest in your group and am sending you my "story" which you may use all or part of as you see fit.

Kulanu and Amishav are very important. Had I known of them years ago I have no doubt that they would have made a big difference in the process of my own "return." It has taken me many years on my own. One feels alone, isolated. Neither fish nor fowl, and certainly not realizing that one is part of a large and significant piece of Judaism.

The more publicity and practical help that is made available, the better for the whole of the Community. The old Jewish connection is a key that can unlock a door enabling our brothers and sisters to come back into the light, having lived the shadows for so many years.

Keep up the good work.

Brian P. Haran

(Editor's note: Haran's story appears on p. 1.)

### Jewish Diversity (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 11)

Jew and brought up in the Jewish faith not sympathize and accept the Marrano who wants to return to the faith of his ancestors and must work very hard to become a Jew?

I enjoy my mixed ancestry and consider myself a better person because of it. But my father was a wise man and he insisted that I be brought up only in the Jewish faith because he admired that faith and claimed that it was safer to be a Jew than to be called a "half-caste." To some people that may be considered a derogatory term; to me it means that I am more than the sum of one person!

Myra D'Gabriel

Natal, Brazil

### Converts in Israel

Thank you for reprinting my Jerusalem Post article in your last newsletter. Through this and other articles, letters to the press and an interview on Kol Yisrael Radio, I have sought (1) to show the extent that the Benei Menashe identify with the Jewish people; (2) to explain their immigration to Israel in order to complete their formal conversion to Judaism; And (3) to allay the fears of Israelis who have been misled to believe that the 150 Benei Menashe now in Israel are the vanguard of a massive horde of Indians entering Israel in "a desperate attempt...to upgrade their standard of living."

Apart from the difficulties caused to the Benei Menashe by such inaccurate and unfriendly publicity, it has become apparent that they and others who have come to Israel to undergo conversion to Judaism face many problems that are not shared by immigrants already recognized as Jews.

In October 1994 sympathizers sensitive to the needs of these future Jews set up a registered, nonprofit organization called "Friends of the Righteous Converts in Israel". The "Friends" has been established specifically to help the potential convert who is *in Israel*, not those undergoing conversion to Judaism in other countries; nor does it see its role as sponsoring potential converts to come to Israel.

In the short time it has been in existence, "Friends" has proved its value by facilitating assistance to the Benei Menashe -- and to candidates for conversion from China, Slovenia and other countries -- who have needed clothing and household effects, counseling services, Shabbat hospitality, part-time work, prayer books, and those little "extras" that help to make Jewish festivals truly joyous occasions.

Anyone who can help this worthy cause, financially or in some other way, is invited to contact "Friends" at PO Box 7589, Jerusalem, 92428. Tel. (Jerusalem) 243 664.

With many thanks,  
Dr. Myer Samra  
Australia

Deadline for next newsletter: April 30, 1995

Karen Primack, Editor

**Kulanu**

Helping Lost Jewish Communities

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