

Kulanu

"all of us"



Helping Lost Jewish Communities

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Vol. 2, No. 2

Summer 1995

Jewish Community in Ethiopia Is Abused

By Diane and Jack Zeller

We could not believe what we had heard from our Ethiopian friends in Neve Carmel, a large absorption center just south of Haifa. An Italian Catholic non-Amharic-speaking social worker employed by the Joint Distribution Committee to care for the problems of the 4,000 Ethiopian Jews waiting in Addis Ababa? This had to be a joke. No, we were assured, these Jews, some of whom have been waiting for up to six years to make *iyah*, would turn to this woman in emergencies.

For example, there was the Ethiopian mother who felt her husband was not giving her enough money to feed her children, and her husband who felt their lives were so insecure in Addis, they had to put some money away. The social worker's action: to give the Joint's meagre allotment to the mother. The result: the husband stabbed his wife because among Ethiopians, as among many cultures, the man had to be in control of finances. The children are now orphans, and do not
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Successful Absorption: The Shinlung in Israel

By Jack and Diane Zeller

(Editor's note: The Shinlung, or Bnei Menashe, who live in northeastern India, are believed to be descendants from the tribe of Menashe, exiled from Israel in 722 B.C.E.)

We were standing in a cabbage field closed by a large plastic roof and walls and asked to admire a crop that was almost ready for harvest.

"Our crop is a good one," said Sharon Benjamin. The "our" tells the real story about how the Shinlung are being absorbed in Israel. They feel at home with their Israeli colleagues who have given them training, work, friendship, a Jewish environment, education, and attention to their family needs. The Shinlung spoke in Hebrew to their Israeli counterparts and in English to us. Their Hebrew is smooth and comfortable, much the way they feel in their *aliyah*.

How can it be? we asked Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail, founder of Amishav, an Israeli organization that assists potential immigrants with Jewish roots, and the inspiration for Kulanu.
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Visiting the Ugandan Miracle

By Karen Primack

We are at a hilltop village in eastern Uganda, with breathtaking panoramic views, miles from the comforts of electricity and plumbing. A young African woman named Esther, upon receiving a gift of a scarf from a Western visitor, quietly recites the traditional Hebrew blessing for new apparel, thanking God for clothing the naked (...*malbish arumim*).

Even with meticulous preparation -- reviewing correspondence from the community, interviews with other visitors, a traveler's home video, a tape recording of their Hebrew and African renditions of traditional liturgy -- I was not prepared for the Abayudaya.

I knew that this community of 500 had been leading Jewish lives since 1919, when their leader embraced Judaism. I knew that they didn't work on Shabbat, that they celebrated all the major and minor holidays, that they davened a complete Shabbat service, Torah reading and "drash" included. And I knew they were seeking formal conversion to Judaism. What I did *not* appreciate was their deep understanding of and commitment to Judaism.

I was part of Kulanu's five-day study/teaching mission to Uganda, a delegation of 15 Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist Jews led in June by Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn.

We arrived late one afternoon after a long but scenic drive from Entebbe Airport, passing green hills lush with mango trees, cassava, sugar cane, banana trees, corn, and millet. We stopped in Jinja to see the source of the Nile River in Lake Victoria, and again near Tororo to admire a family of baboons watching the sparse traffic at the
(cont., p. 4)



Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn and Gershom Sizomu search for the Torah portion of the week in Uganda

THE CHINA CONNECTION

Meet Xu Xin, Judaic Scholar in China

Prof. Xu Xin is unusual in many respects. A non-Jew from the Peoples Republic of China, he has devoted his professional life to Jewish studies.

Xu completed a semester studying Talmud at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati last spring, is spending six weeks at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York (for intensive study in Yiddish language, culture and history), and will return to Hebrew Union College for another semester this fall. He will also conduct research at Harvard's Center for Jewish Studies, and has lectured at several synagogues and Jewish community centers in the Midwest.

Xu finds it ironic that groups find him "useful" to inspire high school students to be involved in Jewish life and studies. "I have repeatedly been requested to talk to Jewish teenagers and told that my personal experiences would be useful and inspiring for young Jewish adults...The message the organizer wanted to get across to those young adults was that they should do their best to learn about their own culture. If I, a non-Jew, am so interested in Jewish culture and search restlessly about means of Jewish tradition and heritage, they can also learn," he has written.

Xu started a program of Judaic studies in China in 1988. His most recent Chinese publication, *Anti-Semitism: How and Why*, is being distributed to university libraries throughout China, courtesy of grants from the Simon Wiesenthal Center and the Canton (Ohio) Jewish Community. The purpose of the book is to provide the Chinese reader with a comprehensive answer to the question: "Why have the Jewish people been persecuted throughout history?" Xu has said, "I naturally wish the book to be available to as many Chinese readers as possible, especially to college students who want very much to understand the subject. Unfortunately, I know that my wish might remain as a wish and that the reality will be that many college libraries would be unable to purchase the book because of the lack of funds." Contributions are welcome. Checks should be made out to Xu Xin and sent to Dr. Beverly Friend, whose address is at the end of this article.

Xu has also written a 300-page *Encyclopedia Judaica* in Chinese, and has received a grant from the Rothschild Foundation in Israel for his translation into Chinese of *The Atlas of Jewish History* by Martin Gilbert.

Xu's fall speaking engagements include Gratz College in Melrose Park, Pa., Sept. 16-19; the English Speaking Union in Pinehurst, NC, on Oct. 7; Emanuel Congregation in Chicago on Nov. 10; Keturah Hadassah in Skokie on Nov. 14; the Bureau of Jewish Education in Cincinnati on Nov. 30; and the Washington Hebrew Congregation in Washington, DC, on Nov. 18-20. **Xu has accepted our invitation to also speak to Kulanu members** during his weekend in Washington. If you wish to attend, please call Jack and Diane Zeller for final details (after November 1) at 301-681-5679.

In addition, Xu will lead a tour to visit Jewish historical sites in China, including Kaifeng and Shanghai, April 28-May 14, 1996. For further information contact Dr. Kenneth Lubowich at 1-800-343-6030.

the China Judaic Studies Association (\$20), which includes a subscription to its newsletter, *China/Judaic Connection*, should write to Beverly Friend, Ph.D., Oakton Community College, 1600 Golf Rd., Des Plaines, IL 60016.

Video Series Announced

Prof. Nathan Katz, a Kulanu supporter and pioneer in promoting dialogue between Jews, Hindus and Buddhists, will be featured in a new five-part video series, *Reconnecting East and West: Judaism and Eastern Religions*.

Katz, who teaches at the University of South Florida, Tampa, has lived, studied and taught in South East Asia for eight years and is the recipient of four Fulbright grants and the author/editor of 12 books.

A free brochure is available on the video series, produced by Summit Productions (1-800-446-3177).

Shanghai Remembered

Various approaches are being taken to examine the history and life of the 20,000 Jewish refugees in Shanghai during World War II.

The Council on the Jewish Experience in Shanghai, formed in 1994, safeguards and develops historical evidence of the event. Contact Ralph B. Hirsch, 3500 Race St., Philadelphia, PA 19104-2440 (FAX and voice mail 215-386-1270).

And a 20-episode television series on the subject, entitled *Shanghai's Ark*, will be filmed in China, produced by Yu Qiuyu, a noted cultural historian. A Shanghai TV station and Li Li Film Company will jointly invest in the series.

Shanghai refugees launched a campaign to erect a commemorative plaque in the city, reading:

"In this area about 20,000 refugees from Nazi Germany survived World War II. This plaque is dedicated to these survivors and to the friendship and tolerance of the Chinese people who made this possible."

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KULANU BRIEFS

Kulanu on "All Things Considered"

Yasher koach to Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, whose interview with Robert Siegel of National Public Radio about the Uganda trip was broadcast on August 3. The 8.5-minute segment, which also included some excerpts of Abayudaya music, was heard on the nightly NPR program "All Things Considered" by millions of people across the United States.

Penpals Needed

Four Abayudaya teenagers in Uganda have asked us to find Jewish American penpals for them. We would like to accommodate them to help bring this Uganda community out of its isolation. If you know any Jewish teenagers who would like to write to Abayudaya teenagers, please contact Irwin Berg at 212-962-2800.

Volunteers Needed to Plan Brazil Conference

The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies plans to hold its November 1996 conference in northeastern Brazil, and Kulanu's Brazilian rabbinic advisor, Jacques Cukierkorn, will help coordinate it. The two- to three-week conference will probably attract about 50 participants, and Rabbi Cukierkorn hopes they will visit Jewish communities in the rainforest.

Persons interested in serving on Rabbi Cukierkorn's planning committee should contact him at 703-370-5191.

Conference Reminder

The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies fifth annual conference will be held in Tucson November 5-7, 1995. It is being coordinated with a conference of the Latin American Jewish Studies to be held in Mexico City November 11-14, 1995.

For information on the conference in Tucson, contact Rabbi Joshua Stampfer (tel 503-

Georgetown Blvd., Ann Arbor, MI 48105.

Rabbi Cukierkorn will participate in the Tucson conference, speaking on the Marranos of Brazil.

Avichail Book Available

A limited number of Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail's book, *The Tribes of Israel: The Lost and the Dispersed*, has just become available and can be purchased for \$36.

Send your check, payable to "Kulanu," to Jack Zeller, 11603 Gilsan St., Silver Spring, MD 20902.

Spend Your High Holidays in Peru!

Rabbi Myron Zuber is seeking a rabbi or other experienced leader to lead Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services for a community of 200 Inca Indians in Trujillo, Peru. The community is in the process of converting to Judaism.

A Spanish-speaking leader is preferred.

Take a tax-deductible adventure vacation and perform a mitzvah at the same time!

Call Rabbi Zuber at 914-425-6213 or Bob Lande at 301-585-5229.

Tax-Exempt Status Granted!!!

On June 6, 1995, the US Internal Revenue Service granted Kulanu, Inc., tax-exempt status as a 501(c)(3) organization. Our Tax Exempt EIN is 52-1919094. Even though our status has been "pending" for some time, and we were certain that it would eventually be granted, it certainly was nice to finally receive the official notice!

This means that all contributions to Kulanu, including those made before its status was finally approved, are tax exempt as charitable contributions under the provisions of the US Internal Revenue Code.

Next Meeting

pm at the home of Rabbi Jacques and Denisse Cukierkorn, 5605 Hershey La., Alexandria, Virginia. For directions call 703-370-5191.

Please mark your calendar now, as this will be the only notice.

New Book Features Photographs of Women

Jolen Press (tel. 212-517-0257) has just published a book of photographer Joan Roth's portraits of Jewish women of the world. The publisher's promotion of the book, *Jewish Women -- A World of Tradition and Change*, promises, "Roth richly depicts both the personal and historical dimensions of these women as they persevere and adapt centuries old traditions amid varied cultural surroundings."

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.

Become a Kulanu Exhibitor!

Joan Barch, of Columbia, Maryland, is an experienced exhibitor at Jewish and other ethnic festivals. At a recent Kulanu table she got to know the ins and outs of representing Kulanu at public forums.

Barch has assembled her ideas and advice in a convenient three-page "manual" for future Kulanu exhibitors. In it she discusses everything from table size and weather precautions to preparing maps and collecting donations.

Now YOU can be Kulanu's rep in your area. Joan guarantees you'll meet some interesting people at your Kulanu exhibit!

Internet Help Wanted

Kulanu has a listserv that can be accessed via the Internet. It contains a great deal of information about our activity, and can be accessed by sending an E mail to "fileserv@ube.ubalt.edu" with the body of the transmission, "subscribe kulanu-l firstname lastname", substituting your name as appropriate.

Unfortunately, few people know of the existence of our listserve. We need someone to publicize the existence of Kulanu's listserve on Jewish bulletin boards and in other places where Jews who cruise the Internet are likely to look. This would be an extremely valuable service to Kulanu since it would enable us to reach a large number of potentially interested people quickly, easily and in an interactive manner.

This would probably only require one to two hours of someone's time per month. We would be most grateful if any interested volunteer(s) would call Bob Lande at 301-585-5229 or contact David Turetsky at "dturetsky@ubmail.ubalt.edu".

Visiting the Ugandan Miracle (Cont.)

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roadside. We were in a van driven by a Muslim named Kikomeko Muhammed.

At our destination, the village of Gangama, we were joyously greeted by 50 Africans singing *Hevenu Shalom Aleichem* and *Hava Nagila* accompanied by a guitar and the ululations of women. We tried to ululate back, but we could only laugh and sing and just share the emotional moment.

We all piled into the new, almost-completed synagogue, financed in part by Brown University Hillel. The building's dirt floor is not yet paved, and the open-air windows are not yet paned or shuttered. Balloons decorated the ark, where a simple white curtain hung. A brief welcome ceremony featured more songs and introductions. In his greeting, Cukierkorn commented on the congregation's singing of *Hiney Ma Tov*, which translates "how good to sit as brethren together." He said, "All of us from Kulanu are your brothers in spirit because we are one in faith, one in hope, and one in destiny." Simultaneous translation into the local language, Luganda, was provided, and we soon learned that the Luganda word for "Jews" is "Abayudaya".

Our hosts treated us to a feast of home-made bean samosas (Indian filled pastry triangles), hard-boiled eggs, and orange sodas as the sun set over nearby Mt. Elgon.

Our delegation included three graduate students in film at Columbia University who had received a partial equipment grant from Robert Halmey of Hallmark Entertainment to cover "the interaction between American Jews and the Abayudaya community." They will be seeking further funding to complete the project. In addition one colleague, Lucy Steinitz of Baltimore, took thorough notes throughout the visit in preparation for a cover article on August 11 for the *Baltimore Jewish Times*.

A Song Called "We Shan't Give Up"

On our second day, we visited the local "public" school (fees are charged) and witnessed 260 students in uniform, aged 6 to 16, standing in lines singing a medley of songs that included *David Melech Yisrael*. We were told that 180 of the pupils are Abayudaya.

Next, at an assembly at the main synagogue (there are four in all), a small choir of young adults and a talented soloist, the diminutive 13-year-old Rachel, sang a song called "You are welcome." This was followed by the Abayudaya "motto song," which features the refrain "We shan't give up," arranged with words from the 23rd psalm, in an infectious African rhythm.

come for the ceremony, the congregation staged a Shabbat service (it was Thursday) at our request so that filming could be done.

The service was reminiscent of those in many American shuls, except that cocks were crowing in the background. The leaders were fluent in Hebrew and knowledgeable about *davening*. Women and older men joined in more often when a psalm was sung in the vernacular, Luganda. In his *drash* about chapter XII of Numbers, the chairman of the congregation, Joab Jonadab ("JJ") Keki pointed out that Moses was chosen as God's leader over Aaron and Miriam, even though he was younger than they. He then commented, partly in jest, that both he, at 34, and Rabbi Cukierkorn, at 28, are relatively young but perform as leaders.

Abayudaya men wear attractive kippot with six-pointed stars knitted in. They look remarkably like head gear worn by Muslims -- not surprising since they are knitted by one of the Abayudaya's Muslim neighbors. The Abayudaya are on very good terms with all their neighbors, Christian and Muslim. Muhammed, our driver, had known the Abayudaya previously and attended many of the sessions with the Kulanu delegates.

Moving Discussion at the Flat Rock

After a lunch of sweet bananas, pineapple, and bean samosas, the leaders of the congregation and of the Kulanu delegation settled down on a flat rock for a frank discussion about Abayudaya beliefs and motives.

The Abayudaya have a certification of registration from the Uganda government as a nongovernmental organization formed for the "propagation of Judaism" and other charitable purposes.

In response to Cukierkorn's question, "Why do you want to be a Jew?" Aron Kintu Moses, secretary of the community, voiced the opinion that Jewish traditions are very preferable to the African traditions practiced around them, such as female circumcision, demeaning dances done in the nude by older males as a circumcision ritual, and the indiscriminate ritual slaughter of animals. He said that embracing Judaism is in part a way to reject the "harsh" environment.

Cukierkorn continued the exchange, referring to periodic outbreaks of Ugandan antisemitism: "I assume Uganda is not the best place in the world to be Jewish. Why would you want to take upon yourself such troubles? Judaism doesn't say that to go to Heaven, to be saved, you have to be a Jew. If you are a good person, that's enough." Keki reminded the listeners that he was born into

Jewish Community in Ethiopia Is Abused (Cont.)

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have the "right" to make *aliyah* because their mother cannot be in Israel.

And we were told of many other cases of this genre. We were told of the plight of the Ethiopian Jews waiting in Addis Ababa who were not receiving any regular allowance from the Joint Distribution Committee. The men in these cases would work for 2 burr a day, compared with 5 paid to non-Jewish workers. The result: Ethiopian Jews beaten and murdered for competing "unfairly" in the labor market.

We were told that living conditions for the Ethiopian Jews in Addis Ababa were abominable. Up to 10 or more in a room that was once -- or still is -- a latrine, a chicken coop, or a store room. We were told that the Joint vaccinated the late-arriving (1991) Ethiopian Jews only when the TV cameras were conveniently present to record the event.

How, we wondered, could this happen to members of our Jewish community?

Despite these conditions, these Jews (Beta Yisrael) follow an observant Jewish life -- praying three times a day, keeping kosher, observing Shabbat and all the Jewish holidays, wearing *kippot* and *tallitot*, thanks to the interest of the Chief Rabbinate and the presence of a large North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ) compound. These Jews were once pejoratively named "Falashmura" because, externally, they had to profess to and pretend Christianity for reasons of economics, education, and survival. Rabbi Menachem Waldman, Representative of the Chief Rabbinate for Ethiopian Jews and a scholar of Ethiopian Jews, has written:

These people, who are of the seed of Israel by virtue of their mothers and their environment, have totally left their past; in no way is it possible to label them as members of another faith or as people who follow any tradition other than that of the Jewish religion. They believe in the God of Israel and its laws... The return to Judaism is in essence the way of the Torah as the Chief Rabbinical Council of Israel has decided on the basis of the ancient principle of our tradition: "Though Israel may sin, he nonetheless remains Israel."

Why, then, are only a trickle being allowed to make *aliyah*? Why do so many Ethiopian Jewish families remain divided between Ethiopia and Israel? The reasons are deep-rooted and not pleasant to discuss. The elitist secular Jewish community in Israel has long championed the idea that Ethiopian Jews are not really Jewish or are lesser or very questionable Jews, to be put down much the way the many Sephardic communities were once humiliated. After Operations Moses and Solomon, this position became less tenable, and a new method was adopted to retard their *aliyah*.

One way was to call them something pejorative. Thus the term "Falashmura" was coined, *de novo*, by the secularists. The words are Amharic, implying that this term was selected by the continuously observant Ethiopian community. But that is not the case at all. The

who ignored the pleas of the Chief Rabbinate to bring all Ethiopian Jews, including the so-called "Falashmura," to Israel in Operation Solomon.

The term "Falashmura" is a code word for something more nasty. As simply stated by many, including Peter Gilboa, director of Neve Carmel absorption center, **"I am starting to suspect that there is a problem of black and white, of who you bring to Israel."**

Many people, including Rabbi Waldman, advised us: "Only the influence of the American Jewish Community can bring this abuse to a quick cessation. Please act urgently."

We suggest appealing to the following people:

- 1) Ambassador Itamar Rabinovich, Embassy of the State of Israel, 3514 International Dr., NW, Washington, DC 20008 (tel 202-364-5500).
- 2) Michael Schneider, Executive Vice President, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 711 Third Ave., New York, NY 10017-4014 (tel 212-687-6200).
- 3) Your local Federation. In the greater Washington area, write or phone, Ted Farber, Executive Director, United Jewish Appeal Federation of Greater Washington, 6101 Montrose Rd., Rockville, MD 20852 (tel 301-230-7200).
- 4) Marty Kraar, Council of Jewish Federations, Washington Action Office, 1640 Rhode Island Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20036 (tel 202-785-5900).
- 5) Norman Rosenberg, Executive Director, New Israel Fund, 1625 K St., NW, Washington, DC 20006 (tel 202-223-3333).
- 6) Your Rabbi and the Social Action Committee (or equivalent) of your synagogue. Ask them to bring this abused Jewish community to the attention of their national leadership.
- 7) Barbara Ribakove, Executive Director, North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry, 165 East 65th St. New York, NY 10022 (tel 212-752-6340).

The motto of the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of the United Jewish Appeal is "We are one." Help make it so.

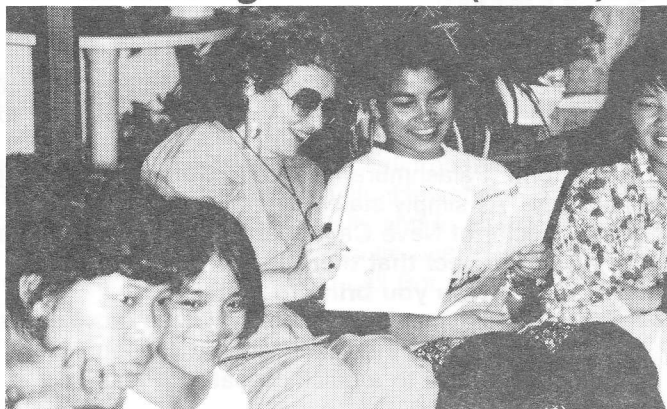
Mexico Report

By Richard A. Kulick

As Kulanu's Vice President for Mexican Affairs for the past two years, I have encountered Mexico's two Jewish communities -- the 50,000-strong, well-to-do community of "establishment" Jews, descended from Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, Turkey and Syria, and the 500-strong, poorer community of *conversos*, either convert communities or descendants of Marranos.

The "establishment" Jews are Orthodox and do not accept converts to Judaism easily. An Israeli-born Conservative rabbi, Samuel Lehrer, *is* willing to perform conversions and has served as the spiritual leader to all five of the *converso* havurot. Rabbi Lehrer, who leads a Conservative congregation in Mexico City, receives no compensation for his work with the *conversos*, and faces frequent opposition both from other synagogues and

Shinlung in Israel (Cont.)



Diane Zeller enjoys reading a Kulanu newsletter with Shinlung women in Israel

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He said it is simple: "The first day of arrival in Israel is to celebrate and the next day begins work." Rabbi Avichail in former years was a kibbutznik and he very much admires the "will do can do" method of absorption. And while performing physical work from sunrise to sunset, they follow an observant Jewish life which includes observing mitzvot, intense study and daily prayer.

It was Thursday evening just before 9 pm and Rabbi Avichail's small dining room and adjoining living room were already overflowing with people who had come for his lecture. The rabbi spoke in Hebrew and occasionally in English to help us along.

There were pleasant introductions; it was very important to the Shinlung students that Kulanu recognized their contribution to the Jewish people and Israel. They were especially excited that night to read an article about themselves in a Kulanu newsletter. The stack of newsletters we had carried disappeared in seconds.

Among the Shinlung, we felt comfortable and awkward at the same time. Comfortable because we were in such admiration of the intelligence, skill, good cheer and sterling character of those we met, and awkward because deep in our hearts we felt they were more Jewish in their deeds and decisions than we had ever been. We urged them to keep good diaries so that Jewish historians will have an easy time when writing about their contribution to Jewish civilization.

Readers might recall that some prominent Jewish officials in the Israeli government think that you can't really be Jewish and appear Asiatic. Although the Shinlung come to Israel as visitors and do not request absorption rights under the Law of Return or that they be recognized as Jews without prior conversion, the Foreign Ministry, Ministry of Absorption and Ministry of Interior are not friendly. This does not disturb them. They are in Israel and are warmly received by those they meet. Employers who hire them ask if there are more where they came from. There are; and we, in our very small way, have the honor of adding to the chorus of those who say *Baruch Haba*.

Kulanu Slide Show Available

Kulanu has recently assembled a slide show that covers some of the people of most interest to our organization. The slides are of people from India, Mexico, Brazil, Uganda, and Ghana, and we are expecting a group of slides of Peruvian Jewish converts to be available shortly. This project was made possible by a generous donation from Dr. Jules Harris.

We have 36 slides of the Shinlung/Menashe, taken in both India and Israel, provided by Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail. We have four slides of a Mexican havurah, provided by Rick Kulick. There are five slides of a Brazilian havurah, provided by Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn. And we have 18 slides of the Abayudaya of Uganda, provided by Aron and Karen Primack. We also have three slides of a group from Ghana that wants to become Jewish, provided by Yaakov Gladstone. We expect to have eight slides of Peruvian Jewish converts, furnished by Rabbi Myron Zuber, available soon.

If your organization would like to have the slide show presented, please phone our speakers' bureau coordinator, Jonina Duker, at 301-530-2361 (afternoons and evenings only).

If any Kulanu supporter would like a set of slides for use in giving presentations, please phone Bob Lande at 301-585-5229. If anyone has any additional photographs or slides that could be added to Kulanu's collection, please phone Bob or send them to him at the Kulanu address. We promise to return them quickly.

HELP WANTED!

Kulanu is seeking a rabbi, rabbinic student, or experienced Judaics teacher to spend three or more months living in a Ugandan village among the Abayudaya. The village has no electricity or plumbing and transportation is difficult, but the people are kind, intelligent, and eager to learn more about leading Jewish lives in preparation for formal conversion.

The language used will be English.

Former participants in Peace Corps and similar programs will be particularly prepared; others may face a few surprises. Applicants with a public health, health education, or medical background will be particularly useful.

Cultural sensitivity is imperative.

Kulanu will pay transportation and a modest stipend. The real rewards will be living the adventure of a lifetime, and performing a mitzvah of gigantic and historic proportions! How often does anyone have the chance to make such a tremendous difference in the lives of 500 people?

Interested persons are invited to send a cover letter and resumé to the Kulanu office. For further information, call Karen Primack at 301-565-3094 or Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn at 703-370-5191.

Judaic Research Continues in Balearic Islands and Sao Tome

By Gloria Mound

As an individual researcher in the 1970s, then very part-time, I started to examine the Jewish history of the smaller Balearic Islands of Ibiza and Formentera, near southern Spain. I was fortunate enough in this exceptionally insular society to be introduced to a number of persons who were willing to admit that these two small islands not only had a Jewish history, but that a community had continued there until modern times. When the Jews of the controlling island of Majorca had only two choices in the 15th century -- flee or convert -- a community of Jews continued there, protected by the islanders.

In the course of the next 20 years, I discovered two secret synagogues in use until the Spanish Civil War in 1936, a Megilla Esther from the 14th century (at present being restored by the Spanish Government), and numerous families who (when I finally gained their confidence) told me many things about the traditions and customs of the families of this community.

I lived with my family in London, but by 1985 our children were already married and living in Israel, and we knew we would eventually make aliyah. However, we decided to spend some time living on these islands to learn more about their Jewish history. Our stay lengthened from one year to three, during which we held open house on Shabbat, opened a cheder for children that expanded to accommodate their parents and grandparents, and held an annual seder, packing in as many as our tiny flat would hold.

Later our research extended to Majorca and Minorca, where I discovered two synagogues and a cemetery, as well as other Jewish artifacts and documents.

Upon arrival in Israel, on a minimal budget, my husband and I decided to collate all the Marrano/Anusim material we held, as well as our unique book collection, so as to be a data base for those interested in the subject. I started to have invitations to lecture in the U.K. and America and to publish my findings. In 1988 I was given the honor, on account of my discoveries, to be made an Honorary Research Fellow of the prestigious University of Glasgow, Scotland, an honor that has been renewed each year since. I have also lectured at Oxford and Cambridge, as well as several American universities.

From these visits I have had the opportunity to investigate other secret Jewish communities and their history in places like Mexico, New Mexico, the Caribbean, and Sao Tome Y Principe, consulted by other researchers as well as individuals searching out their Jewish roots.

The Jewish history of Sao Tome Y Principe, two small islands off the west coast of Africa, close to Guinea, includes a tragic era. In 1493, one year after the Jews were expelled from Spain, a large percentage of them had taken refuge in Portugal, where the edicts of banishment did not begin until 1496. King Manuel of Portugal, seeking funds to finance his program of considerable colonial expansion, exacted huge head

The king wanted to colonize the islands of Sao Tome Y Principe (to "whiten the race," as he put it), but the Portuguese did not relish settling in the fever- and crocodile-infested islands. When it was seen that there was very little likelihood that the majority of the Jews would pay the demanded tax, the king deported their young children, aged 2 to 10, to Sao Tome Y Principe. In the port of Lisbon, no fewer than 2000 children were torn from their parents and herded onto boats as slaves (Samuel Usque reports this in his book, *Tribulations of Israel*). Within a year, only 600 of the children remained alive. Usque recorded that when the parents of the children had seen that the deportation was inevitable, they impressed on the children to keep to the Laws of Moses; some even married them off amongst each other.

The entreaties of the parents apparently had not gone in vain, as reports reached the Office of The Inquisition in Lisbon that in Sao Tome there were incidents of obvious Jewish observance. The local church was greatly incensed. The bishop appointed in 1616, Pedro da Cunha Lobo, became obsessed with the problem. According to an historical source, on Simhat Torah 1621, he was awakened by a procession, rushed out to confront them, and was so heartily abused by the demonstrators that in disgust he gave up and took the next ship back to Portugal.

There was a small influx of Jewish cocoa and sugar traders to the islands in the 19th and 20th centuries, two of whom are buried in the Sao Tome cemetery.

Today, these islands of approximately 100,000 inhabitants are independent of Portugal. Two years ago Israel's first ambassador, Dr. Mose Liba, was warmly received. He found that *the descendants of the child slaves were still a very distinctive section of the population (by their whiter skins) proud of their historic past and desirous of contact with Jews outside*. Some Jewish customs seem to have continued, although by now mixed with the heavy Creole society values and culture.

In order to commemorate the children who were torn from their parents in the 15th century, an International Conference was held to coincide with the islands' twentieth Independence Day, on July 12, 1995. Participants attended from Israel, the US, France, Holland, Portugal and Spain. It is hoped that sponsorship will come forward for further research and studies in the area. Inquisition archives that have been closed for hundreds of years, including 571 pages dealing just with Jews in Sao Tome, have now been opened to researchers and are eagerly being awaited at the Institute for Marrano (Anusim) Studies in Gan Yavneh, Israel. It is hoped interested persons will come forward to enable this valuable opportunity to be used. There will be lectures, accompanied by slides, on the subject in the Washington/New York areas in March and April of 1996.

(Editor's note: The author, executive director of the Institute for Marrano (Anusim) Studies, is seeking speaking engagements for her tour next spring.

Visiting the Ugandan Miracle (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 4)

of Semei Kakungulu, the Baganda warrior leader who had embraced Judaism 75 years before. "I was raised Jewish; it was already in my environment. Now I realize that someone might question my Judaism. I read in the Bible that it is possible to convert to Judaism and that God treats those who convert as Jews." He also cited Isaiah 56 concerning the acceptance by God of the *mitzvot* of strangers and the ingathering of the dispersed of Israel.

Cukierkorn: "What do you hope to gain?"

Keki: "When you die there is eternal life."

Gershom Sizomu, 24, who leads most of the services, observed, "In Jewish observances there is civilization. If you practice Judaism you become civilized. Shabbat is a benefit, too. If you rest, there is refreshment for your body.

"The Bible shows that God loves Israel very much, more than any nation and language in the world.

"Another benefit is that precious instrument, the Torah. To be Jewish is to submit to the Torah. There is no physical benefit that you get from observing Shabbat directly. But we hope that in the world to come we shall have a share in the good that God will bestow on His people, and we shall share it together. We shall also be called God's people. That's why we have chosen not to miss that."

Cukierkorn: "Would you want to move to Israel?"

Sizomu: "I can only speak for myself. The land of Israel is significant in the eyes of every Jew because it is the land of freedom. It is the land in which the Jew gains his freedom to observe the *mitzvot*. Given the fact that the land of Israel was so, so important that the whole *Bnei Yisrael* who came out from Egypt didn't even have entrance there -- because of their misconduct they had to die in the wilderness -- if I got the chance to go to the land of Israel, that would give me a lot of joy."

Keki: "When we became Abayudaya in 1919, there was no State of Israel, but our founder knew there would be an Israel, and he talked about going."

Sizomu: "I love Judaism because it is a religion of people who are hated all over the world without reason, people who are just blackened, smeared. Any person who is sensible sympathizes with a person who is hated and mistreated without cause. As we sympathize we are called Jews, and we want to be Jews."

During the reign of Idi Amin, who was president of Uganda in the 1970s, Jews were forbidden to attend services and most of the Abayudaya synagogues were destroyed. Sizomu muses, "I think if Amin's power had continued 10 years more, the community would not have survived. But God saved it." The community has experienced more recent problems with local politicians, who harass its members as "god killers," and in 1988 four of its leaders were imprisoned. Although the harassment is "because of being Jews," Keki judges the ulterior motive to be seizure of their lands.

In response to Cukierkorn's questions about the feasibility of being converted to Judaism, Sizomu says, "We have survived because we were not willing to give up. If Jews came here and told us to stop being Jews, we can

"Persecution can come again, but now we shan't perish in isolation. Once we are given recognition, if a force was directed against us, Kulanu could get concerned. If we perish, Kulanu can at least write something -- it would not be like dying like a snake in the grass."

Another young leader, Israel Ben Shadrak, noted, "Our beginning wasn't precipitated by a Jew from the outside, but from discovery in the Bible that the Jew is the only person who is loved by God, even though he is persecuted everywhere and called Jesus-killer. From that discovery we have decided to be Jews and read directly from the books. If they say don't cook on the Sabbath, we don't cook.

"Though we are not recognized anywhere, if they refuse to convert us officially and recognize us around the world, we will still remain Jews and observe accordingly.

"I didn't see my first letter from an outside Jew until 1987. But I had heard stories about other Jewish communities outside and I kept my faith. But Kulanu has come and brought us encouragement so that I believe God cannot leave us. People can tell us, No, we shall not convert you. Still, the time will come that God will rescue us and we shall be converted."

Sarah Kaliesubula added another dimension:

"Because I am a Jew, I am an example. We are obligated by God with a responsibility. Torah was given to Jews. We are not strong nor rich, but we have hope that God will help us, will convert us."

Sizomu summed up their position: "A person can observe Judaism, and if not converted, he can keep on observing. But we want world Jewry to have concern over us so that we have concern over them. We want to be united, to be in one circle with all the Jews of the world."

Those frank exchanges at the flat rock will stay with all of us for a long time.

At an afternoon assembly, Aron Kintu Moses reviewed the history of the Abayudaya, beginning with Semei Kakungulu's realization of Judaism from reading the Bible in 1919. As Kintu Moses sees it, "Kakungulu presented it and the people seized it with both hands. The Bible provided clear teachings about peace, unity, freedom and so many other things. His followers wanted to live as Jews; they circumcised themselves and their sons and observed the Shabbat. We follow these traditions that make us enjoy Judaism -- the leisure we enjoy on Shabbat, the unity we experience during services, the Hebrew language, the original language of the Bible, and the Torah, the book of substance.

"But," he continued, "much as we enjoy our practices, we are limited by the fact that we cannot perform them properly in isolation. The persecution we face and the low level of education that we possess lead us to worry that acceptance of our community by world Jewry is necessary, and we hope that Rabbi Cukierkorn and the Kulanu delegation will take that position."

"You Are an Inspiration for All of Us"

Cukierkorn responded: "We have brought you some small gifts. You have given us something much more valuable. The love you have for Judaism, the concern you have, is unparalleled. Very seldom have I seen it. I do feel

Brazilian Genealogist Speaks

Guilherme Faiguenboim addressed an impromptu meeting of Kulanu members in Silver Spring in June. President of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Brazil, he was in the Washington area to attend the annual International Seminar on Jewish Genealogy.

Faiguenboim reported that nine-tenths of the inquiries made to his society are from non-Jews and that, while his reference books say much about Jews of Russian, German, and Sephardic descent, he did not have any information about Marrano families.

He soon discovered that a teacher named Valadares, from a humble family in the Brazilian countryside, had a vast knowledge of Marrano genealogy. Valadares, who travels 80 miles to Sao Paulo every two weeks to read from the society's library, now handles inquiries about Marrano genealogy for the society.

In his talk, Faiguenboim reviewed the history of the Portuguese and Brazilian Inquisitions of the 15th and 16th centuries. He discovered that in 1496, the year the Inquisition came to Portugal, 30-40 percent of the Portuguese population was Jewish (many had come from Spain in 1492). These Jews were automatically converted to Catholicism by law; there was no expulsion for the first 100 years. He found that 80 percent of the sugar cane farmers in Brazil were Jews. The Inquisition in Brazil was responsible for the persecution of 40,000 Jews; persecution included burning, wearing of a masked hood, incarceration, brain-washing, and torture.

According to Faiguenboim, the high illiteracy rate in Brazil today can be traced to the fact that Portuguese and Brazilian Catholicism did not emphasize reading the Bible. It was dangerous to find even the New Testament in your house, he said. The faithful were just supposed to listen to the priest at mass. Factors leading to arrest during the Inquisition in Brazil included owning a Bible, cleaning the house on Friday, and abstaining from pork.

After 1750, with the Inquisition gone, crypto-Jews in Brazil continued certain customs -- giving children biblical names and avoiding church except for birth, marriage, and death ceremonies -- even though they did not consider themselves Jewish.

Tracing ancestry is difficult for descendants of Marranos today. Surnames were often changed. For example, when a child was baptized, he received the surname of his godfather. "It's a genealogical mess!" Faiguenboim exclaims.

When people write to him that they have a strong attraction to Judaism and "perhaps" have Jewish ancestors, he advises them to convert according to *halacha*.

Mexico Report (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 5)

successor of his at Beth Israel will take a similar interest in the *conversos* when he retires.

My work for Kulanu in Mexico has focused on seeking out *converso* groups with some interest in a relationship with Kulanu or with American Jews generally. So far, I have been able to make contact with three of the five havurot (one each in Mexico City, Puebla and Veracruz).

I visited the 20-family havurah in Puebla three times since January 1994 and translated a letter from the founder of the community for the Kulanu newsletter. I have taken this community Kulanu's donations for siddurim and other Jewish books and personally brought gifts of *kippot*, *haggadot* and *tallitot*. I have also met with the Israeli ambassador to Mexico on their behalf.

My work in Mexico City has been twofold -- providing technical assistance to a group of mainstream Mexican Jews desiring to establish a progressive congregation, and developing a personal relationship with Benjamin Laureano, the unofficial historian of Mexico's *conversos*.

In general, I have found my interactions with both the *converso* communities and "mainstream" Mexican Jewry to be a tremendously enriching experience. (Editor's note: Yasher koach, Rick! Readers who might be interested in serving as Kulanu's next Vice President for Mexican Affairs should contact the office.)

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Visiting the Ugandan Miracle (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 8)

you care tremendously about your relationship to God, and we are committed to making your case known. You are an inspiration for all of us."

The Kulanu delegation closed the assembly with the presentations of gifts donated by Kulanu and individuals and groups in America -- a student Torah, books, Jewish educational materials, musical tapes, ritual objects, housewares, toys -- received by the Abayudaya with joyous songs, applause, and, of course, ululations.

The next order of business was a tour of another synagogue at Namanyouyi, a sister village a few kilometers from the main synagogue. In the modest mud structure decorated with wall drawings of Jewish designs, Israel Ben Shadrak demonstrated his drumming technique as he explained that the sounds were used as a shofar (the synagogue has none) and as notification that Shabbat has come. As we walked around, village women warmly admitted us to their simple mud huts, generally consisting of three small rooms with clothes hanging on wall nails, sparse furniture, and an outdoor cooking area. It is not unusual for them to walk a kilometer or two through corn fields to fetch water from a spring or well.

The Kulanu delegation held a nightly "debriefing" session at our hotel in Mbale. That night, upon considering the hardships of the 70-100 orphans in the Abayudaya community, we immediately established an Orphans Education Fund to help with school fees and expenses.

For Shabbat most of the Americans decided to move from the hotel, a 15-minute drive from the synagogue, to sleep on mats in snug quarters in small Abayudaya guest houses with mud walls and tin roofs. In a separate, smoky kitchen space, Abayudaya women were cooking over open coal fires, anxious to finish before the Sabbath was ushered in.

On Shabbat evening and morning it was Cukierkorn's turn to lead services and read the Torah, although the congregation recited the "prayer for the country" (Uganda) in Luganda. At the service Matt Meyer, a young American working in Kenya, delivered a stirring impromptu address. Meyer, who first met the Abayudaya over two years ago when he was a student on a Brown University semester in Nairobi, spoke about the gains the Abayudaya have made in achieving construction of a synagogue, possession of a Torah, and recognition by world Jewry.

At various points throughout the five-day mission, the visitors gave presentations on different topics. Aron Primack, a Silver Spring physician who had studied Swahili (another language used in Uganda) in the past, compared Swahili sayings with sayings from *Pirke Avot*. (The following day, he was asked by the Abayudaya leadership to give an impromptu talk on family planning.) Irwin Burg, a New York attorney, spoke on early Jewish history. Bill Katzenstein, a retiree, assisted with construction projects. A session on *halacha* relating to women was led by Rhoda Posner, a Jewish Family Services worker from Baltimore.

My own talk was on the various branches of Judaism as practiced today.

When it was the Africans' turn to bestow gifts, no one was disappointed. Kulanu was presented with an Abayudaya bimah decoration, a menorah sculpture made by one of the congregants. Cukierkorn was given a plaque, and some other individuals were presented with baskets made by Abayudaya women. And, as a personal gift, Esther Kaliesubula (see the opening paragraph) gave me a small straw tote basket, which I cherish.

Cukierkorn's final official act was a moving one -- unscrolling the new Torah around the entire congregation, encircling the Africans and Americans together.

Our farewells were tearful ones. But I am confident that the isolation is over. I know there will be future trips by Kulanu visitors and other Jews around the world who want to get to know these astonishing people. There will be media attention. And Kulanu hopes to raise funds to send a rabbi or Judaic teacher to stay with the community for several months (see our "Help Wanted" ad on p. 6).

Even though I had prepared my talk on pluralism within Judaism before I left the US, I meant these words I spoke at the conclusion of my talk even more than I had anticipated:

I hope, as you become more Jewish, you are able to accomplish something that most communities are unable to accomplish -- that you can somehow accommodate your differences and still accept each other as equals. If you do, it will be a miracle, but not your first miracle. Your very existence is, to us visitors, a miracle.

IN MEMORIAM

As we go to press, I have just learned of the death, on August 2, of my mother, Lorna Margolis, who was 86. Although Mom had Alzheimer's Disease for the past 10 years and didn't know about Kulanu's work, she was a lawyer who felt strongly about human rights, and I know she would have been an enthusiastic supporter. She also loved Uganda; she visited us when we were living there in 1971. Therefore, my husband and I are setting up a Memorial Fund for Abayudaya Education in her name, which will offer scholarships for needy Abayudaya students from primary school through university. In addition, Barbara and Julius Shair, Kulanu's VPs for New York Outreach, have generously joined in to expand the Fund as a memorial to Julius' mother, Clara Shair, who died on July 26. Contributions to the Lorna Margolis and Clara Shair Memorial Fund for Abayudaya Education are welcome. Your tax-deductible donation to Kulanu can be earmarked for this Fund. *Today!*

K.P.

(Editor's note: Articles by other members of the Kulanu delegation to Uganda will appear in future newsletters.)

Deadline for next issue: October 15, 1995

Edited by Karen Primack

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