



Everything You've Wanted To Know About The Sephardic Diaspora

By Joe Hantman

So many of the nascent and potentially nascent Jewish communities with which Kulanu has been interacting are of Sephardic origin, it is appropriate to present a brief overview of the origins and history of the Jews of Spain and Portugal.

From their earliest history Jews and Jewish communities existed along the shores of the Mediterranean. In Spain they appeared first as trading outposts and later as well settled communities, engaging in agriculture, trade, and crafts. Their religious identity was maintained by ongoing communication with Jewish institutions in Jerusalem and Babylon. Both the Greek historian Strabo (born in 63 B.C.E.) and the Roman statesman Pliny (62-113 C.E.), who at one time governed Ispania, cited the existence of the Jewish communities in Spain. It is believed that the name Safarad, as it appears in the biblical book of Obedia, refers to Spain.

In pre-Christian Spain Jews flourished and, in fact, gained converts from among the local population. In early Christian times relations between Jews and pre-trinitarian Christians were relatively peaceful. However, with the arrival of Visigothic tribes into Spain and their ultimate conversion to Roman-dominated Christianity, the status of the Jews declined rapidly. Under a series of Visigothic kings, Jewish children were forcibly taken from parents and by the year 580 C.E. Judaism was outlawed.

Although Judaism disappeared from the scene, we know that Crypto-Judaism, which was to be strongly identified with Sephardic Jews, continued to exist.

This became evident in 711 C.E. when Arab armies under Tarik, carrying the banner of Islam, crossed into Jib Al Tarik (Gibraltar) and invaded Spain. Jews, whose identity was hardly known, joined the victorious Arab armies. In the immediate wake of these armies there was large-scale movement of population from North Africa to Spain -- among them many Jews. (Jews had been in North Africa for hundreds of years, going back at least to the Second Temple period. With the fall of the Temple in 70 C.E. many more Jews fled to the existing Jewish communities in North Africa, and their number was further increased after the defeat of the Bar Kochba revolt and the harsh reprisal by Rome in 135 C.E.) These were the Jews who, entering Spain starting in 711 C.E., became the base upon which Sephardic Jewry was built.

The Arabs, a relatively small force, continued to pursue the Christian forces northward, leaving small garrisons in the cities which, together with the Jews, administered the land.

This was the beginning of a relationship controlled by Islam, but under which Jews (and in fact many Christians) continued to flourish. It led to what has been called the Golden Age of

(cont., p. 8)

Sweet Anticipation In Uganda

By Matthew S. Meyer

(Editor's note: With this article, Kulanu's travelers are just now learning about some of the preparations made for their mission to Uganda in June 1995.)

Jokes and laughter flew like an eagle in the hut next to Moses Synagogue on the night of Wednesday, June 14, 1995. Enos tried to do a little Hebrew improvisation. One of about 500 native Africans practicing Judaism in a village outside Mbale, Uganda, the young boy forgot his lines. Gershom Sizomu, the youth leader who wrote the play about the community's founder, sighed in frustration. Everyone laughed and Gershom smiled, a little nervously. Enos tried to perfect his Hebrew. He had performed the play many times before for his community. But today the visitors had come, and the practice was not a regular one. June 14, 1995, was not a regular day for the Abayudaya.

On the morning of Wednesday, June 14, 1995, I approached the Mbale Total Petrol station as I had on so many previous occasions, eager to start a visit with my friends in Uganda, the Abayudaya community of Jews. Nehemiah Jabingo, a gas attendant and treasurer of the Abayudaya, peered at me through the glass windows of the station. The contrast of his bright white eyeballs and his dark black face struck me. His eyes fixed on mine as we jogged towards one another, simultaneously our lips stretched into wide smiles and we embraced as old friends do. "SHALOM, SHALOM!" Nehemiah said. But his enthusiasm and excitement, a normal reaction the Abayudaya have when receiving visitors, hastily waned. He was nervous, and I could tell. Today, things were different.

"When are they coming?" I shrugged and shook my head. "Well, Joab went to pick them up in Kampala." (Joab Jonadab Keki is the Community's chairman) "They should come back (cont., p. 6)



Gershom at Abayudaya synagogue with his son Moshe.
PHOTO BY ELAINE BERG

WHAT IS KULANU?

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

WHAT IS KULANU'S PURPOSE?

To Provide a Warm Welcome to Anyone Who Sincerely Wants To (Re)join the Jewish People

By Robert H. Lande

In some ways it is easy to state the purpose of Kulanu. Our primary goal is to find lost and dispersed remnants of Jewish migrations and to help those who wish to rejoin the Jewish people. This is why Kulanu's motto is "Helping Lost Jewish Communities."

This simple motto, however, gives rise to many ambiguities, complexities and questions. For example, how much do we have to know before we can conclude that a person might be a lost Jew or a part of a lost Jewish community? What kinds of help should Kulanu provide? How far should "helping" or even "welcoming" be taken? How do we know whether people who say they want to become Jewish are sincere? What if someone with no proven Jewish roots sincerely wants to join the Jewish community? Are we missionaries?

Suppose We Are Unsure of Their Jewish Roots?

Kulanu has encountered many people whose Jewish roots are uncertain, and also communities and individuals without Jewish origins. So long as someone sincerely wants to become Jewish, we attempt to assist him or her in this quest.

This is in part because it is extraordinarily difficult to determine the historical accuracy of the stories we encounter. Two examples illustrate that it often is extremely difficult to determine whether someone actually has Jewish roots.

The Jewishness of the Beta Israel of Ethiopia was doubted by many for decades. They were officially declared to be Jewish by the Israeli Chief Rabbinate

How do we know whether people who say they want to become Jewish are sincere? Are we missionaries?

only in the 1970's. Even today their origin is disputed. The Chief Rabbinate believes they descend from the Tribe of Dan, and the Beta Israel also believe they descend from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. And while many academic historians believe they descend from the Jews of Yemen, a few scholars believe they were medieval converts.

If the activists in the American Association For Ethiopian Jews had waited until the Jewish community came to a consensus about the true origin of the Ethiopian Jews, all the Beta Israel would still be waiting and suffering in Ethiopia.

Similar problems arise concerning people who believe they are descended from Jews who were forced to convert outwardly to Christianity 500 years ago. Few of them can trace their maternal line conclusively back to unquestioned Jews in the 1490's.

How many of us could do this? If we cannot meet this test, perhaps we should not be so strict with people who have an oral tradition that says they are of Jewish descent.

One creative solution towards these issues was devised by a Liberal rabbi in Brazil when a descendant of Marranos presented himself and asked to be considered a Jew. The rabbi devised and required a "reunification" ceremony rather than insisting upon a normal conversion. This enabled the individual to keep his pride and respect his family traditions, and also satisfied the rabbi's desire for a halachically acceptable ceremony.

Kulanu should learn from these examples. We should

all, we should search for creative solutions. We must not simply reject individuals or groups with uncertain origins.

Still, there is a certain romance to assisting people who wish to return to their Jewish roots. If a Marrano's ancestors have for 500 years stubbornly clung to some remnants of Judaism, perhaps out of a desire that their children's children might one day be able to worship freely as Jews, it surely is wonderful, in fact a privilege, to play some small role in this miracle.

We can never erase the effects of the Inquisition, but we can at least help a few of its victims' descendants validate their ancestors' stubbornness.

Picture a secret Jew lighting Sabbath candles in a special, non-public room with her daughter in the hopes that her daughter's daughter can one day light the candles openly. Now, 20 generations later, their descendants want to worship openly as Jews. How can we not help them do so? We can never erase the effects of the Inquisition from Jewish history. But we can at least help a few of its victims' descendants validate their ancestors' stubbornness.

Are We Missionaries?

The short answer is "no." The longer answer must depend upon how this term is defined, but under any reasonable definition of the term the answer is still "no".

Judaism has generally resisted missionizing for many reasons, including the trouble we often would cause for ourselves if we engaged in missionizing. Since we oppose others who missionize among Jews, it also seems unfair or inappropriate for us to be doing this. Moreover, many of us have an image of a missionary as someone with a Christian Bible in one hand and a whip in the other. We know that historically many Jews and non-Jews were forced to adopt Christianity, Islam, and other religions, or were forced to convert if they wanted to become educated, to obtain various economic benefits, or just to fit better into the dominant culture. Naturally, we want nothing to do with conversions that are forced, induced, or in effect purchased.

Still other missionaries proselytize to everyone. Although they don't use coercion or economic inducements, they knock on doors and stop people on the street in an attempt to convince them to join their religion. Not only has Kulanu never done this; no Kulanu supporter has even proposed that we do this.

Kulanu has never done anything even remotely approaching any of this missionizing behavior. Every situation in which Kulanu has been involved has started with a group or an individual who has evidenced a strong interest in Judaism well before they had any contact with Kulanu. First they decided they wanted to become Jewish; only then did Kulanu become involved.

Thus, our highest priority is and should remain "lost Jews". The more sure we are that someone is a "lost Jew," the more we should extend ourselves to welcome them to the Jewish people. The more evidence we have that they are in fact Jewish, the more we should do to help them in their journey back. But we should not turn any sincere person away. And, they must first express an interest in Judaism.

(cont., p. 10)

TREASURER'S REPORT

Significant Growth with Little Cost

By Robert H. Lande

Last year was certainly a year of growth for this young organization. During the calendar year 1995 Kulanu received \$18,006 in income and spent \$12,035 (\$11,446 for overseas and domestic programming and \$589 for office expenses and filing fees).

Overseas program expenditures arose from Kulanu's mission to teach lost Jewish communities about Judaism. These expenditures included \$1,500 for the purchase and shipping of religious items and books to Peru; \$5,000 for the Bnei Menashe/Shinlung (\$1,000 for transportation from India to Israel, \$2,000 for absorption in Israel, \$1,000 for medical expenses in Israel [see adjacent photo], and \$1,000 to a fund established to send two Menashe teachers in Israel back to India); \$2,012 for educational assistance in Uganda; and \$396 for *taleisim* and seder expenses in Mexico.

Domestic program expenses arose from Kulanu's mission to educate Kulanu participants and others about the need to locate lost Jewish communities and help them (re)gain a knowledge of their Jewish heritage. These domestic program expenditures included about \$1,500 to print and mail the Newsletter, \$535 for copying slides and photographs for speakers, \$100 for fees and expenses for exhibits at festivals, and \$387 for an educational advertisement suggesting a new Passover ritual to recognize Menashe traditions.

Filing fees to comply with the Internal Revenue Service and Washington, DC, were \$490.

Office and meeting expenses were only \$99 -- less than one percent of total expenses!

(Editor's note: A complete Treasurer's Report is available from the author; write to the Kulanu office or call 301-585-5229.)



Up until conversion, the Shinlung in Israel are not eligible to join Kuppot Holim and must pay tourist rates for health care. Our young friend broke his leg while at play. The financial strain resulted in the establishment of a communal health fund to which Kulanu has contributed.

REPORT FROM AMISHAV Building in India

By Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail

We are in the process of refurbishing the house of Mr. Vaiphei in Imphal, the capital of Manipur, India, to improve the synagogue in it and to create a community center. With God's help we received \$5000 from our friends here and in the USA and the work is meant to end later in the year. The work is being done by Mr. Vaiphei, and he will receive \$300 in monthly rent.

The next project of importance is the creation of a kibbutz/seminar near Imphal. This includes the purchase of land and the building of 10 dormitory buildings, and five other buildings of higher standard. Youngsters will be trained for three years in the teaching of Hebrew and Judaism in Manipur and Mizoram. Mr. Hanshing is donating \$9000 to this project.

We are interested in starting immediately in the building of the central structure which will include a synagogue, lecture hall, dining room, kitchen, school rooms, and offices. We see this as a three-story building of roughly 10x20 meters, at an expected cost of \$100,000.

Is there a possibility of one of our friends dedicating this sum in memory of a loved one? It is important that Kulanu undertake this project as a *mitzvah* which will create the base for the return of the Bnei Menashe to Judaism.

I am planning a trip to France and Canada, and possibly the US, to lecture and raise funds to send teachers to the Bnei Menashe, and also to finance the sending of a *bet din* there for conversions in about six months. The trip will take place in late June, and is dependent on friends who will help organize the lectures in both countries. If you are able to arrange a public lecture, or even a parlor meeting, in your area, please let the Kulanu office know as soon as possible.

There are currently 43 families of Bnei Menashe in Israel, about 144 people. We expect some marriages in the near future. The group that arrived in late 1995 will be ready

HELP WANTED, BUT...

Several rabbis have expressed an interest in visiting and teaching the Abayudaya in Uganda for a short time. We encourage such visits, but, unfortunately, Kulanu cannot offer any financial assistance. If the visit is for educational purposes, travel expenses may be tax-deductible; potential visitors should check with their tax advisers.

On the other hand, the following position DOES come with travel expenses and a modest stipend:

Kulanu is seeking a rabbi, rabbinic student, or experienced Judaics teacher to spend four 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

KULANU BRIEFS

YOUNGEST SUPPORTER

This season's award for youngest Kulanu supporter goes to Elianna Paia, born January 5, 1996. Mazel tov to parents Ariella Zeller and Chaim Kram.

OF BLESSED MEMORY

With great sadness Kulanu notes the passing of Miryam Mugombe, 68, in Mbale, Uganda. She was the wife of Samsoni Mugombe, 96, revered Abayudaya religious leader since 1944. She is remembered as a wise counselor and will be sorely missed. May her memory be for a blessing.

A FOND FAREWELL AND A NEW BEGINNING

Kulanu's active rabbinic adviser, Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, is moving from his pulpit in Alexandria, VA. As of July 1, 1996, he can be reached at Temple Beth Israel, 840 Highland Road, Sharon, PA 16146 (tel. 412-346-4754). Cukierkorn has traveled to visit developing Jewish communities in rural Brazil and in Uganda and has lectured widely about both countries. Following extensive field research in 1992, he wrote his rabbinic thesis on Marranos in his native Brazil. In 1995, he led a Kulanu study/teaching mission to the Abayudaya Jews in Uganda; next October he will lead a study mission next October to Brazil co-sponsored by the Crypto-Judaic Society and Kulanu. He and his wife Denise will be sorely missed by his Kulanu colleagues in the Washington, DC, area, but we are looking forward to the formation of a lively Western Pennsylvania chapter after July 1!

A NEW OFFICER

Kulanu officers are pleased to welcome to their midst a new Vice President for African Affairs: Arye Oded. Dr. Oded, a lecturer in the Department of African Studies at The Hebrew University in Jerusalem, is a retired diplomat. He served at Israel embassies in Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Malawi and as the Israel Ambassador to Swaziland, Lesotho, Kenya, Zambia, Mauritius and Seychelles. He is the author of three books, including *Religion and Politics in Uganda -- A Study of Islam and Judaism*. He maintained contact with the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda in the 1960s, when he served in East Africa.

WANTED: BEGINNING HEBREW BOOKS

Most of the communities Kulanu deals with have a tremendous need for elementary level books on the Hebrew language. While the communities in Uganda, Ghana, India and some other locales have some members who can read Hebrew, most cannot. Kulanu can purchase beginning-level instruction books. This is, however, very expensive, and it might not be necessary.

Often a synagogue or religious school will have extra books or old books they no longer use. We would be grateful if every Kulanu supporter would check with local synagogues and schools about donating such

We are also looking for volunteers to coordinate the book project. These volunteers would call synagogues and religious schools seeking materials and coordinate their pickup. Please contact the Kulanu office if you can help.

Also, please be on the lookout when you visit used book stores or Jewish fairs. You might be able to purchase an elementary-level Hebrew instruction book for pennies that would make a real difference in the spiritual life of an impoverished Jew overseas.

PROTECTING JEWISH CEMETERIES

The Action Committee to Protect Cochin Jewish Cemeteries reminds us that as Jewish communities around the world are abandoned (often as residents make aliya), cemeteries are left behind. These cemeteries sometimes are vandalized or desecrated or purchased for secular building sites. The Action Committee, headquartered in Haifa, has petitioned the government of India to declare Jewish cemeteries in Kerala State (until recently site of a large Jewish community) as historical monuments enjoying police protection. One of the cemeteries is at least 600 years old. Eliahu Elias, organizer of the Action Committee, is collecting money toward the effort. Contact him for details at PO Box 781, Haifa 31007, Israel.

THREE SEPHARDIC NOTICES:

Sefarad, The Sephardic Newsletter, has been in existence for five years. It invites 10-20-page submissions and book reviews about Sephardic culture via e-mail ("sefarad@shamash.nysernet.org") or by diskette (PO Box 10642, Jerusalem 91102 Israel). Submission is open to any academic discipline connected with Sephardic studies; articles will be stored permanently on a future Web site. Editor Yitzchak Kerem, of Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, Greece, can be reached at "mskerem@pluto.mscc.huji.ac.il" or "kerem@israel.nysernet.org".

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Did you ever want to see Israel the Sephardic way? The Sephardic Education Center is offering summer 1996 trips to Israel for teenagers, college students, and young adults. The Sephardic Education Center is a world center dedicated to the preservation of Sephardic heritage and to the enrichment of all Jews regardless of cultural or religious background. For an application and more information, call Elie Amar at 718-591-2399 or 718-279-5737. Scholarships are available for those who act now!

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Erensia Sefardi ("Sephardic Heritage") is a society that advances Sephardic history and culture. To join and receive its multi-lingual quarterly newsletter, send at least \$25 to Erensia Sefardi, 46 Benson Place,

KULANU BRIEFS

Telugu Needs

Kulanu supporter Kathy Sreedhar recently visited the Telugu Jews of Andhra Pradesh in southeastern India. She reports that although the 41 families are struggling economically, they do have a synagogue, and they want to learn more Hebrew. Their religious needs include basic Hebrew books, a Hebrew calendar, *siddurim*, and a harmonium (musical instrument). Potential donors should contact the Kulanu office. We can ship the items for you, or tell you where you can send the items yourself.

Global Relief

GJARN (Global Jewish Assistance and Relief Network) "saves and improves the quality of life of needy, disadvantaged and neglected populations in distant, unpopular and forgotten cities around the world," particularly mothers, children and isolated or homebound elderly. Its work assists people in the former Soviet Union, Cuba, India, Morocco and New York. For further information contact GJARN at 666 Fifth Avenue, Suite 246, New York, NY 10103.

Fellowship Announced

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee announces its Ninth Annual Ralph I. Goldman Fellowship in International Jewish Communal Service for 1997. The fellowship provides for one year of work-study in a field office of the JDC. Preference is given to candidates in the early stages of their careers, with a demonstrated talent in the practice and/or study of communal service, who show a strong interest in international Jewish communal affairs and international social welfare. Candidates should preferably hold a Masters Degree or equivalent and demonstrate personal attributes of intelligence, integrity, and leadership.

Interested applicants should send a letter of advocacy to Ralph I. Goldman Fellowship, c/o Yafitte Bendory, AJJDC, 711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017 by November 1, 1996. Information should include educational and work history, reason for interest in the fellowship, future plans, and references. Selection will be announced in January 1997 for placement to begin September 1997.

What a Wonderful Idea!

Kulanu officers became excited upon reading Kulanu supporter Judy Neri's note (and check) requesting newsletter subscriptions for her rabbis and temple library. "What a wonderful idea!" the officers exclaimed. "A great idea for fundraising and education!" they gasped. Readers are invited to purchase Kulanu newsletter subscriptions (minimum \$18 each, please) for religious and secular leaders, educators, and libraries.

Sponsor a Ugandan Jewish Student

As our successful drive to raise funds for the

needy Abayudaya children to school next fall. For about \$20, a primary school student can be set for the year (tuition, required uniform, supplies), while \$70 will sponsor a secondary school student. For \$200, one can make a difference in the lives of TEN youngsters. Rarely does one have the opportunity to accomplish so much with such a modest donation. For a larger contribution, you may opt to send a talented young Abayudaya man to university -- at \$2000 per year. Your donation, when made payable to Kulanu, is tax-exempt! Just earmark your Kulanu contribution for Abayudaya education.

Two Special Schools in Miami Beach

Kudos to Miriam Zoldan at the Lehrman Day School of Temple Emanuel and Anita Grossman of Temple Beth Shalom for their special outreach programming. Both schools are conducting Shavuot projects in which the students are writing to Abayudaya children in Uganda. Thanks, also, to Yaakov Gladstone for his encouragement and role as a resource person in this wonderful endeavor.

A Kulanu Slide Show

Kulanu has recently assembled a slide show that covers some of the people of most interest to our organization. The slides are of developing Jewish communities in India, Mexico, Brazil, Uganda, Portugal and Peru. This project was made possible by a generous donation from Dr. Jules Harris.

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).

Certificates Available

Certificates are available from Kulanu to honor special occasions (birthdays, anniversaries, bar/bat mitzvahs) or in memory of a friend or relative.

These certificates measure 8"x11", are in color, feature a stylized representation of Jerusalem's cityscape, and are *extremely* attractive. They were designed by Jeri Lande.

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.

NEXT MEETING

Please mark your calendar today, for there will be no other notice. The next Kulanu meeting will be held on July 28 at 2 p.m. at a recreational cabin in Montgomery County, Maryland. Optional: Come early, with your own picnic, for *fressing* and *shmoozing*. The site is yet to be confirmed -- after June 1, please e-mail or write the Kulanu office or call 301-681-5679 or 301-585-5229 or 301-565-3094.

Sweet Anticipation in Uganda (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 1)

today," he added, "maybe at 2:00 in the afternoon. Maybe even this morning by 11." There was a stilted pause. Nehemiah bought me a Coke and asked, "Do you think they are really coming?"

"I was about to ask you the same thing," I said. I sat and talked with Nehemiah for a few minutes. "When they come," I added, "tell them I am at the shop on Kumi Road." It was nearly 9:00. In two hours they would arrive, I thought.

The day was to be an historic one for the Abayudaya. Fifteen American Jews from Kulanu were about to visit. The community, visited previously by about 20 Jews from outside Uganda in all of its 70-year history, was about to have 15 American Jews visiting for days, maybe even weeks. A rabbi would *daven* in Moses Synagogue on Nabugoye Hill. Individuals within the Abayudaya could test their thoughts and theories on the Torah and Jewish practice on 15 others as they had on me. And the community, for better or worse, would be transformed forever. And that's okay, I thought, staring at the beautifully majestic Wanale Mountain, its vast face looking down upon the town as a father would a child. I knew what the Abayudaya did not. The Americans were about to see Judaism practiced on the hills of Wanale as they had never seen it practiced before.

I stopped and turned back to see Nehemiah smiling towards me as I walked away. It is amazing how they make far-away visitors feel so at home. No, maybe it would not be okay, I thought. Two and a half years ago I accidentally landed on a spiritual gold mine, an amazing community with no electricity and no water that had a wealth so many of us, driving the finest cars and making good money back home, do not have. I wanted others to see, to learn. I longed for the day when a rabbi could come and see the Abayudaya, who lived kosher lives, had bar and bat mitzvahs, and kept the Sabbath very, very holy. I longed for the day when other Jews could hear the electricity in Moses Synagogue when the guitar started to play and the harmonies of the Abayudaya "Lecha Dodi" welcoming the Sabbath Queen. I also knew they longed for this day, the day when they could learn our "Lecha Dodi" and learn how we practiced our Judaism. But would theirs disappear? Might the wealth be lost?

I had met Gershom two and a half years earlier in a Nairobi Synagogue. He had told me about the community. He had shown me some pictures and invited me to visit. To his surprise, six weeks later, Julia Chamovitz and I accepted his offer and went to Mbale, Uganda for Shabbat. They celebrated us from the moment we arrived at the Mbale Total Petrol Station until we left. We sang and danced, we taught a little and learned a lot. And after Havdallah, amidst Julia's and my excitement, came a plea, to aid the community that Abayudaya leaders saw deteriorating before their eyes. A community practicing Judaism in the isolation of the villages of Uganda once numbered 2000. Now there were about 500. The Jewish resources were far too few to feed the Abayudaya's hunger to learn and practice Jewish ways. They had enough food to eat, but hoped their spirit would one day soar as Jews would recognize them as equal partners around the world. Bringing a rabbi and many visitors was part of that process.

After Havdallah they read to Julia and me a list of specific questions about marriage and funeral rituals, as well as about the laws of *kashrut*. Sitting in a mud hut in eastern Uganda, listening to Gershom read his list that pushed my knowledge of Judaism to its limits and beyond, I thought, "This is when my Mom would tell me I should have paid more attention in Hebrew School." "Let's make a list," Julia suggested, and we did. A synagogue, a Torah, *siddurim* for all in synagogue, and even a rabbi. Towards the end of our meeting, Julia and I looked at one another and laughed. We guaranteed nothing.

I arrived home in December 1992. The mere size and material beauty of my synagogue at home, in Wilmington, Delaware, overwhelmed me. I knew the synagogue to be humble by American standards, but to me it stood as an object of material beauty, with its beautiful Torah scrolls and padded seats, the huge sanctuary and fabulous stain-glassed windows. And yet, more and more, I found congregants absorbed with the beauty. "Do we go to synagogue to practice Judaism or to listen to nice organ music and gaze at the luxurious windows?" A question I could not answer. A question I cannot answer. I began to realize how much I learned from my Mbale Shabbat. The Abayudaya wanted more Jews to come and teach. I wanted more Jews to go and learn. I wrote some letters. I sent out tapes and pictures and even did a slide show. Most laughed at me, several laughed with me, and a few said, "I must go." One was this rabbinical student in Cincinnati. His name was Cukierkorn, and he spoke with a cool Brazilian accent as we spoke on the phone about his dissertation on lost Jewish groups. He had a plan for the Abayudaya that could one day lead to their official conversion. And he wanted to go. Brown University Hillel raised money to build a synagogue in Mbale and scores of people, including many congregants from home, sent *siddurim*. My mother worked tirelessly to find a Torah. She found several. In the fall of 1994, shortly after graduating university, I moved to Nairobi, Kenya. In November, I brought the Abayudaya their first Torah ever, donated by Beth Shalom of Wilmington, Delaware.

Two years earlier, following my first visit, we traded audio tapes with the Abayudaya. They gave me their fantastic music. In exchange, several friends of mine recorded Hebrew songs and sent tapes to the Abayudaya. It was a wonderful exchange, I thought, and I made sure they received more music than I did. When I returned for Shabbat in November 1994, their synagogue service consisted primarily of American versions of Hebrew songs. The beautiful harmonies and melodies that planted my heart's seeds firmly within the soil of Nabugoye Hill were gone from the weekly service at Moses Synagogue. I struggled to explain to them the value of their songs over ours. They saw the beauty of the American Lecha Dodi as I saw theirs. My attempts to aid a community dented it. Would these American visitors be any different in accelerating the regressive process I had begun?

On the Shabbat in November 1994, as we walked the many-mile journey to *shul* carrying the bag holding the community's Torah, Joab told me he received a letter from Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn. He wanted to bring a group of Americans from a new organization named Kulanu. A little less than eight months later, Nehemiah and I stood outside, nervously looking into one another's eyes, both in disbelief of what was about to transpire. And then we waited. I finished my Coke and walked to the Abayudaya Community Store on Kumi Road. Gershom's younger brother, Seth, stood alone in the store. He saw me and embraced me, "Shalom, Matty Meyer, SHALOM!!" he said. We smiled. Gershom then arrived, as did his elder brother, Aaron Kintu Moses.

After a brief greeting, Gershom exclaimed, "I think he will convert us!" I laughed and shook my head. The Abayudaya's dedication and commitment to Judaism inspired me. Gershom wanted to be a Jew, no questions asked. And so did Aaron. Like many in the congregation, Aaron had suffered for practicing his Jewish beliefs. In 1989, a local official demanded he and others in the community leave the *succah* where they were sleeping. The local police paraded many from the community across town, shirtless and at gun point, and forced them to pay a fine. Such hostility and hatred has been a part of Abayudaya life through the years. "It is part of being a Jew, isn't it?" Uri asked me once.

At noon, we all began to feel impatient. Aaron wore a wide smile and said, "I think this is a joke. No rabbi is coming.

Nathan's Prayer

By Nathan Bliss

(Nathan became Bar Mitzvah at Beth El Hebrew Congregation, Alexandria, Virginia in February 1996.)

Dear God,

I know you're very busy, but I'd like to take a little of your time this morning to reflect on this special day that you have allowed me to reach. My Bar Mitzvah means a lot to me. It is a high point in my Jewish life and a time to prove that I am a responsible person.

The Torah and Haftarah portions I read today described your instructions for holy buildings. Whether it be the traveling Tabernacle or the first Temple in Israel, they both house you.

Today, you present us with other opportunities to build holy places to worship you. Many who seek to worship as Jews around the world do not have the resources to create houses of worship in their communities. Many Jews are isolated, unknown to most in the outside world, and lack even the basic necessities of life such as food and clothing. As my *tikkun olam* project for my Bar Mitzvah, I have become involved in an organization that helps Jews in remote communities.

This organization is called Kulanu. I was introduced to it by our own Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, who is one of the organization's founders. "Kulanu" means "all of us". It was created to find lost and dispersed Jewish people and help them to become a part of the larger Jewish community. They offer financial assistance, contacts with Jews in other countries, instruction in Judaism and Hebrew language, and help in setting up places of worship. In some cases, they also help people to relocate to Israel. Kulanu has helped the Telugu Jews of India, the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda, as well as Jews from Peru, Ethiopia, and China.

The work of the Kulanu organization is very interesting to me. I contacted Rabbi Mendel Zuber, a rabbi in New York. There were close to 500 Jews in these impoverished communities in the Andes Mountains when they first came to the attention of the Lubavitch movement. Rabbi Zuber was sent to teach Hebrew and Jewish religious beliefs and practices, and helped 300 of them relocate to Israel. However, there are now still 250 remaining Incan Jews in Peru. These people are still very poor and are still trying to follow your commandments. Rabbi Zuber put me in touch with the Salagar family in the town of Trujillo, Peru. Through this family, which includes eight children, I have donated prayer books in Spanish and Hebrew so that these Jews can conduct a worship service and all follow from the same text. Our family has also sent Star of David necklaces, which the young Incan Jews especially want to wear in order to proudly show their identity. I am looking forward to continuing my personal contact with this community, and I hope some day that I will be able to visit them, either in Peru or in Israel.

As I look to the future, God, I hope for a world in which people from all different places and cultures can understand each other and live together peacefully. Help the fortunate to realize what they can do for the less fortunate, as you commanded us to do in the Torah and Haftarah portions I read today. Help them see what a small contribution can do to improve the lives of others. Help them see that our world is in need of a lot of healing, and we are the only ones who can heal it. May you guide us as we help make this world a better place for all people in all communities to live and grow in peace. *Amen*

Welcome to the Electronic Meeting Ground!

By David Turetsky

With subscribers in Israel, Australia, Russia, England, Canada, California, Colorado, Illinois, Arizona and Florida, and with genealogists in Russia reciting stories of poring through archives in Leningrad and using surplus computers from the Soviet Army, the Kulanu listserv is certainly a lively electronic meeting ground and one that's attracting widespread interest.

Kulanu-L, the Internet listserv sponsored by the Kulanu chapter at the University of Baltimore, provides an electronic version of the Kulanu Newsletter to Internet subscribers and increasingly is also looked to by the Internet community as a resource for exchanging information about everything from family genealogy to isolated Jewish communities throughout the world.

Relating some of the poignant stories from the Newsletter of distant Jewish communities has evoked strong responses from subscribers, elicited donations of *siddurim* from congregations in Canada, generated interest in forthcoming trips to Africa, and created lively and warm exchanges about family ties and cultural differences throughout the world.

Kulanu also has a World Wide Web presence complementing the listserv, similarly based on the computer facilities at the University of Baltimore. It is a convenient repository of archival material which appeared in past issues of the Kulanu Newsletter, indexed by issue and subject, and also has links to other resources of likely interest to the Kulanu community, ranging from Jewish cooking to genealogy to recent PBS showings of "Shtetl," to links to other Web sites about the Abayudaya.

Regular subscribers of the Kulanu Newsletter are invited to join the list which also includes many non-Kulanu activists. We hope some of them will want to support Kulanu's activities by subscribing to the Newsletter and otherwise lending support to Kulanu activities. Rereading Kulanu articles on the Internet and reading subscriber responses provides an interesting additional dimension. Subscribers also respond to inquiries about possible conversion, referrals to Jewish communities, genealogy, and other lively topics raised by the list.

When you subscribe, you receive a copy of any mail any other subscriber has posted to the list, and of course you have the privilege of similarly posting mail to the list which will be seen by other members as well as being retained in the list archive.

To join Kulanu-L, send e-mail to 'listserv@ube.ubalt.edu' at the University of Baltimore. In the body of the message, say 'subscribe Kulanu-L YourFirstName YourLastName', substituting your own name where indicated. You will receive a confirming notice via e-mail providing additional details about how to access the list and its archives.

To access Kulanu's Web site, which is also a University of Baltimore facility, select the URL (address) "<http://www.ubalt.edu/www/kulanu/>" from one of the World Wide Web browsers such as LYNX, MOSAIC, or NETSCAPE. That will put you into the index of articles and provide links to other sources of interest. If you have further questions, or wish to recommend other Web links, or have other suggestions, by e-mail contact "kulanu@ubmail.ubalt.edu".

The Sephardic Diaspora (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 1)

Spanish Jewry, producing such great figures as Chasdai Ibn Shaprut, diplomat, linguist and statesman for the caliph, Yehudah Halevy, great poet, Ibn Gabriol, scientist and mathematician, Ibn Nagrila, military leader of Islamic armies, Ibn Ezra, renowned talmudic scholar, and many others. They all performed in the Arab courts but remained learned and faithful to their Jewish religion and to the Jewish people.

The greatest product of Sephardic Judaism was of course Maimonides (Moshe Ben Maimon, 1135-1204 C.E.). While born in Cordova, he had to flee with his family in 1148 to North Africa and Egypt under pressure from more fanatic Islamic groups.

After their loss to Islam, Christian Spaniards began a slow but relentless battle to reconquer Spain (the Reconquista) province by province, culminating in 1492 with the conquest of Granada and unification of Christian Spain under Ferdinand and Isabella.

In the early years of the Reconquista Christians sought, and frequently gained, the support of Jews, whom they needed as administrators and financial advisors. Jews were rewarded with large estates and soon found themselves in high positions in most of Christian Spain. In the 1300s this led to much resentment by the Church, the nobility, and a rising class of Christian merchants. Laws were passed restricting Jewish activity. Riots and mob violence against the Jews broke out, culminating in 1391 in mass forced conversions. Other Jews under pressure voluntarily went to the baptismal font. Many of those who accepted Catholicism were freed of anti-Jewish restrictions and soon resumed their old positions of prominence -- this time as New Christians rather than Jews. The Jews of Spain soon fell into three categories: (1) Conversos who accepted Christianity and just wanted to continue their lives; they were not trusted and frequently pursued by the Church and later by the Inquisition. (2) Marranos -- converts whose loyalties to Judaism remained but had to be practiced in secret; they were hounded by the Inquisition and if caught subject to severe penalty, including death. (3) Jews who did not convert; they were severely limited in freedom, economic opportunity, and social status. There were of course some exceptions, some professing Jews such as Abravanel and Senhor, who remained Jewish and joined the expulsion despite pleas by the monarch to convert and remain in Spain.

In 1492 King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella issued the decree of expulsion, citing as one of the reasons the continuing influence of Jews upon former Jews who had converted. Thus ended 800 years, including some of the most glorious years in Jewish history.

It is estimated that close to 300,000 Jews left Spain -- many to Portugal, where five years later they were forced to convert or leave. Many others fled to Holland, Italy, and, most of all, to the lands of the Ottoman Empire -- Turkey, Egypt, Palestine, North Africa, the Balkans, and others. Many lost their lives en route to pirates, corrupt ship captains, etc. These exiles landed among existing Jewish communities which provided refuge. Within a generation or two the Sephardic culture, education level, language (Ladino -- Judeo-Spanish) dominated most of the local populations. These, then, were the Sephardic communities which existed for hundreds of years, and after the creation of Israel made Aliyah in great numbers; today they constitute more than half the population of the Jewish state.

Back in Spain and Portugal after 1492/1497, only conversos and crypto-Jews (Marranos) remained. Hounded by the Inquisition many using their Christian identity joined the colonial explorations to the New World, hoping to find freedom there. Some were with Cortez's conquistadores in Mexico, where the Inquisition pursued them. After public burnings (auto da fe) in

Over the generations even their Crypto-Judaism disappeared and all that is left are family traditions and practices which some are now identifying as vestiges of their Jewish roots. These are the well-publicized "Marranos" of the Southwest USA, a few of whom have returned to Judaism. Some small communities in Mexico which claim descent from Cortez's Marranos are now also re-entering the Jewish fold.

In Brazil, Portuguese Jews found freedom under the Dutch in Recife, but when that city fell to the Portuguese in 1654, the Jews were forced to leave. Many went to Holland or New Amsterdam, and many were lost into the local Brazilian population. These people, who developed the sugar refining industry, and some Jews who came later, are those seeking Jewish identity today. In Brazil

It was the Sephardic Jews escaping South who established the Jewish communities in Barbados, St. Thomas, Curacao, Surinam, and other Caribbean islands. Many of the typically Sephardic synagogues remain on the islands, but the congregations today are for the most part Ashkenazi.

In Majorca, today host to many cruise ships, an entire segment of the population known as Chuetas have been practicing Catholics since forced conversions in 1391. However, their identity as "Jews" has kept them apart from the main populations, and family names, neighborhoods, occupations and practices still reflect their origins. Some among them have shown interest in Judaism and a few have visited Israel.

On the nearby smaller islands of Ibiza and Formentera, Jewish practices and observances were never completely obliterated and continue to this day. On the islands of Sao Tomas and Principe, off the coast of Africa, descendants of Portuguese Jews are also seeking out their roots. These last groups have been researched by Gloria Mound, executive director of Casa Shalom, the Institute for Marrano (Anusim) Studies in Israel. In other far-flung outposts of former Portuguese colonies, vestiges of early conversos and/or Marrano families are being sought out by descendants of those families.

There is no doubt that more will be heard on this subject.

Beautiful Kippot for Sale

The Abayudaya of Uganda are a unique community of approximately 500 people who have practiced Judaism in rural Ugandan villages for generations. Due to the difficulties of obtaining *kippot*, the Abayudaya began to make their own. These unique, hand knit *kippot* are modeled after the Islamic skullcaps worn by many of their neighbors, but the *kippot* are decorated with Stars of David.

The *kippot* have fascinated many visitors to the community, and the Abayudaya recently began to market them abroad. All proceeds from *kippot* sales go directly to the Abayudaya community, which operates the *kippa* business to employ members of the community and assist families in earning money to clothe, educate, and medicate themselves and their children.

Matt Meyer is the proud recipient of 100 of these beautiful *kippot*. Matt, who is acting as the Abayudaya "sales representative for America," has *kippot* for you and your family and friends at \$10 each, plus \$1 for handling and shipping in the US. He also encourages you to look for orders from your local synagogue gift shops and Hillels.

All proceeds from the sale of the *kippot* (except the postage and handling charges) will go to the Abayudaya community.

To place an order, send checks payable to "Kulanu" to Matt Meyer, 2201 Gilpin Avenue, Wilmington, DE 19806.

Conversion Update

By Lawrence J. Epstein

Jews are typically not missionaries, but there have been several recent developments in efforts to increase the number of conversions to Judaism.

The Conservative movement is expanding its efforts to encourage conversions among the intermarried. A year ago, the Rabbinical Assembly, the world-wide association of rabbis affiliated with the Conservative movement, established an 800 telephone number (no charge to the caller) to provide information for people who wished to learn about conversion -- 800-ASK-N-LEARN (800-275-6532). Despite a lack of funds for advertising, the number attracted widespread interest in the Jewish and secular press, and in its first six months resulted in more than 400 referrals to Conservative rabbis.

Recently, the Conservative movement has expanded its efforts. First, it established a Joint Commission on Inter-marriage, integrating committees from the Rabbinical Assembly and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. The purpose of this commission is to encourage in-marriage and, in cases of intermarriage, to facilitate conversions to Judaism and the drawing in of intermarried families that wish to raise their children in the Jewish faith.

In addition, the movement has established a distance learning option for potential converts. Typically, distance learning takes place through such means as e-mail, fax, mail, and telephone. A list of rabbis interested in instructing students for conversion through distance learning has been established. People for whom distance and time have been major impediments to learning about Judaism and formally converting can get further information about this option by calling the 800 number.

Another effort aimed at encouraging conversion has been undertaken by the Suffolk Jewish Communal Planning Council, an umbrella group of Jewish organizations in Suffolk County, New York. The Council has published two pamphlets on conversion. The first, *Should I Convert to Judaism?*, is designed for people thinking about becoming Jewish. It includes specific steps to take in exploring conversion, and it has a bibliography. The second pamphlet, *How To Discuss Conversion to Judaism*, is designed for people who want to ask someone to consider becoming Jewish. Interested people can obtain free copies of either or both pamphlets by contacting the SJCPD at 74 Hauppauge Road, Room 53, Commack, NY 11725, (tel. 516-462-5826).

Sweet Anticipation in Uganda (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 6)

There was nervous laughter, as Seth, Aaron, Gershom and I knew, deep in our hearts, that Aaron was probably correct. "Well, let us just wait and see," Gershom concluded. "We must take what G-d delivers to us." So we waited.

After two tea breaks, two naps, and many hours of waiting, I turned to Gershom. "Six o'clock," he said. Seth had left to go home. The sun began to dip beneath the horizon. It was time to start the five-kilometer walk back to Abayudaya headquarters on Nabugoye Hill. We did not want to leave. The three of us had been together two and a half years earlier on a Havdallah evening when we decided to find a rabbi to visit the Abayudaya. And there we stood, years later, Aaron, Gershom, and I, our hopes dashed. What had happened?

Two and a half years earlier, Joab also sat with us as we mapped out a dream future for the Abayudaya. A central plot to the dream of the Abayudaya community was the arrival of a rabbi in Mbale. At that very moment, as we began our journey through the hills of Mbale, Joab and the community were on Nabugoye Hill at Moses Synagogue, greeting the visitors with song and joy. When we arrived at the headquarters, the guests were gone, but excitement beamed from all corners. Joab eagerly told us every detail of the group's journey from Entebbe. We listened in disbelief as he told of how the American visitors ascended Nabugoye Hill and how the Abayudaya greeted them in song.

As Gershom, Aaron and I gazed at one another, doubting that the visitors had actually stood on Nabugoye Hill, we began to prepare for the coming days' events. A rare hastiness, even slight panic, came across the faces of the community's leaders. These were the most important visitors the community had ever hosted. It was time to rearrange and reconstruct the tentative schedule the Abayudaya had written. They knew the planning needed to be extensive.

We had 12 hours until the Kulanu visitors returned to the village from the hotel where they were staying. The practice began. I was the sample visitor. Each member stood up and gave sample speeches. There were a few sample songs. All went well until little Enos rose and began to do his play in Hebrew on the founding of the Abayudaya community.

little nervously. Enos struggled through the Hebrew. Gershom wrote the play months ago for the youths. He had worked with them to get the Hebrew just right. "I always nod appreciatively," I told them. "I do not know what you are saying." But if the Hebrew is wrong, many of these visitors would know. Gershom knew it, too. This was the first time his play would be performed before a critical audience. It was important to Gershom as a teacher that when Enos stood up and pulled out a Bible, the Hebrew he reads be correct.

The visitors arrived the next morning. All formed immediate bonds with the community, whether it was Rhoda who thrived on her intense philosophical discussions with Gershom, Sarah, and others, or it was Bill, who spent his days trying to teach the construction of adobe brick technology as developed by Native Americans. The next day Enos did not miss a line, but someone forgot to bring the Bible, and the audience we feared would be so critical reacted sympathetically, much like Enos' brother and sister Abayudaya do. Gershom tried to stall while Enos ran to bring the Bible. The Old Testament was the foundation of Abayudaya community life. There was a silent delay that slowly evolved into wide grins.

I saw Nehemiah seated next to one of the Americans, his whole face smiling freely. My eyes drifted out one of the windows of Moses Synagogue, out across many hills and valleys to where the plateau on top of Wanale met the lone cloud in the sky. There are things I cannot understand, I thought. The mountains meeting the clouds and people meeting people. I feared the future and thought back to the past. But above all, as Enos scampered back into Moses Synagogue, I cherished the present.

Two months later I stood underneath an iron sheet that is the roof of a community hut on Nabugoye Hill. The rain poured down from the sky, and the sun shined through it. My brother Jeremy stood next to me, having flown to East Africa to visit me. We stared into the slopes of Wanale, as a double rainbow appeared above it, stretching nearly from one horizon to another. "Wow, this is beautiful," Jeremy said as I stepped out into the rain. "It's more than that," I told him. "It's a dream." And I pictured all of the Americans, Jacques, Karen, Aron, Elaine, Irwin, Lucy, Janet,

What Is Kulanu's Purpose? (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 2)

How Do We know Whether Their Interest Is Sincere?

Like many Kulanu activists, I often give talks about our projects. I describe how groups of Jews became lost but now some of their descendants would like to rejoin the Jewish community. I also discuss how groups around the world with no proven connection to Judaism have decided they want to become Jewish. Inevitably, some members of the audience react with suspicion and hostility.

In part they are asking why anyone would want to become Jewish, with an implication that people rarely would do so sincerely. There is sometimes even a suggestion that the would-be converts must be expressing an interest in Judaism to achieve economic benefits.

These questions make me sad because they imply that Judaism has so little to offer as a religion that anyone wishing to join must be suspect. It makes me wonder about the Jewish knowledge, awareness, and spiritual beliefs of those who view potential converts with hostility. Do they view Judaism as a joy or a burden?

It appears that Judaism is for some people similar to an exclusive country club that you can join only if you are rich, white, and have parents who also were members. If this is Judaism, then conversions are not permitted. But what if Judaism is instead a religion, albeit one mostly comprised of rich and middle class white people?

There is no denying that some might believe that converting to Judaism could benefit them financially. But the economic motivation simply is not a generally plausible one, for three reasons.

First, consider two of the groups that Kulanu has been working most closely with. The Abayudaya embraced Judaism in

Is Judaism an exclusive country club that you can join only if you are rich and white and have parents who are members?

1919. Yet, before Arye Oded's visits in 1960s and Kulanu's visit in 1995, they had only scattered contacts with world Jewry. It is hard to believe that they even knew that Jews on the average are wealthier than Christians. If they had wanted to please their British rulers they would have become Christians, not Jews. If they had wanted to please Idi Amin when he ruled Uganda they would have become Moslems. It is inconceivable that they adopted Judaism in 1919 so that their descendants might, in 1996, obtain some economic benefit.

The Shinlung/Menashe also began to embrace, or re-embrace, Judaism in the 1950s and 1960s. As of that time they had no hope of emigrating to Israel or of achieving any form of assistance from world Jewry. Again, it seems inconceivable that their decades-ago decision could have been so cynical. Charlatans out for economic gain won't change their lives, risk their neighbors' hostility, and endure the problems and burdens of being Jewish for decades just for some tiny probability of assistance from a community they have barely heard of.

Many more examples could be given. How long must someone live as a Jew before we believe that he or she honestly wants to be Jewish?

Second, the vast majority of the people Kulanu is working with wish to formally convert to Judaism. This means convincing a *bet din* of three rabbis that they are sincere in their desire to join us, as opposed to wanting to convert to obtain some advantage. Rabbis are not perfect, of course, and they can be fooled on occasion. But it is part of their training and their business to assess whether a convert is sincere, and we should have faith that

The third reason is based upon the observations of the Kulanu supporters who have visited the groups we have been working with. Kulanu supporters for the most part are worldly, mature people with a cynical streak who have "heard it all" many times before. Yet every time Kulanu supporters return from a visit to the Shinlung, the Abayudaya, or the other groups, they uniformly report how impressed they were with the honesty of the group's devotion to Judaism. Their accounts are filled with stories of the group's spirituality, devotion, and sincere interest in Judaism. They testify that the interest is long-term and persistent.

What Types Of Assistance Should Kulanu Provide?

Sometimes Kulanu's priorities are set by individual donors. Often someone will send Kulanu a contribution with very specific instructions. Donors have specified, for example, that their contribution should only be used to help a *havurah* of Mexican Marranos celebrate Passover, or only to purchase religious books for Shinlung/Menashe in India. In all of these cases, so long as the project falls within the general framework of Kulanu's mission, Kulanu simply respects the donors' wishes.

Most of our donations, however, are unrestricted. Kulanu must therefore decide in its organizational capacity upon priorities of at least two types. First, it must decide between different groups of deserving Jews and would-be Jews. Second, we must decide what specific kinds of assistance to provide to each group.

Emergencies and other timing issues and Kulanu supporters' ideas and energy often determine which of many worthy groups receive Kulanu's meager resources. A couple of months before Passover someone realizes that several groups that we are in contact with have no hagaddahs, so he suggests that Kulanu purchase and ship them immediately. Rabbi Avichail faxes us that a fund is needed to pay for emergency medical treatment for Shinlung immigrants. A visitor, Helio Corderio, head of a Brazilian Marrano network, visits Kulanu, tells of his group's outstanding work, and asks for money to publish a booklet in Portuguese that will answer many of the Marranos' questions. Often the financial decisions are easy to make.

The toughest decisions, however, probably arise because of the extreme poverty of some of the people that we are working with. A visitor to the Abayudaya or the Telugu communities, for example, inevitably feels compassion for these extremely poor people. Should Kulanu give aid that goes beyond religious material and instruction?

It is tempting to draw a firm line and say "no," we will pay only for religious material, such as books and ritual items. But what if a poor person cannot read Hebrew and wishes to learn? Surely Kulanu will pay for books, tapes or lessons? Moreover, what if they cannot read at all? How can we expect illiterate Abayudaya, who cannot read English or any other language, to be fully Jewish?

As a practical matter it is extremely difficult for people to be Jewish if they are illiterate. For this reason Kulanu has sometimes also included education as one of the types of assistance that it will provide. We have not, however, gone further. We have declined to do so for three excellent reasons.

First, Kulanu does not have enough money to provide even the barest form of religious assistance to those who request and need it. We have been forced to forgo many worthwhile assistance projects of a purely religious nature due to our meager budget.

Second, we have no special expertise in economic development assistance. Sandal-making may or may not be a good business for the Telugu community to enter, but no Kulanu supporter has any special knowledge of the field. We should leave this to the Peace Corps and other specialists. Otherwise we would usually waste our money.

Third, economic assistance would open Kulanu to the canard

What Is Kulanu's Purpose? (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 10)

The first two reasons have, for now, prevented Kulanu from offering any economic development aid. If Kulanu ever obtained enough funding to contemplate economic assistance I believe that we should resist the temptation to do so. If there appears to be widespread support within Kulanu for the contrary position, I suggest that we limit our aid to recipients who have sincerely been practicing as Jews for a very long time - perhaps at least 10 years. This will help to blunt the argument that we may be "buying Jews."

Conclusions

I vividly remember a friend's quandary. His young daughter asked, "Daddy, you and I are Jewish, right? That's because Judaism is the best religion in the world, right? Isn't Mommy the best mommy in the world? Then why isn't Mommy Jewish?"

Why shouldn't Jews have that child's attitude towards our religion? And if we do, why should we be so surprised, indifferent, and even suspicious when someone wants to join or rejoin us?

We certainly should point out to potential converts the disadvantages of becoming Jewish, including potential anti-Semitism. And we should be grateful that our rabbis will only

convert people they believe to be sincere, with a persistent, long-term interest in Judaism.

One occasionally hears that modern Jewry is adrift and rudderless. The possibility that people all over the world are interested in embracing or reaffirming their Jewishness, however, should be thought of as a historic opportunity for the Jewish people. We should view it as a challenge rather than a burden. The fact that so many people want to become Jewish should be trumpeted to those in our community who might assimilate away that Judaism is indeed something to keep and to cherish.

Kulanu's hope is that American Jews will ask why all of these people, from all over the world, want to join our religion, and will realize how wonderful our religion is. We pray that American Jews will look with amazement to these people who have stubbornly clung to their scraps of Judaism for centuries secretly, under great hardships. Perhaps they will be less likely to abandon such a wondrous religion. It is our fervent hope that when we warmly welcome those who would (re)join us as our brothers and sisters, we will be helping and renewing ourselves in many ways.

Choose-A-Mitzvah!

- \$200 will buy 12 Spanish-Hebrew prayer books for Peruvian-Inca converts
- \$300 will take care of immediate absorption needs for a Menashe immigrant in Israel
- \$360 will pay for a year of primary school for 18 Ugandan children
- \$600 will pay for the transportation of one Menashe immigrant from India to Israel
- \$600 will underwrite the cost of one edition of the Kulanu newsletter
- \$1000 will buy ritual items for Peruvian converts, Ghanaian Jews, the Shinlung in India, or *converso havurot* in Mexico
- \$1000 will underwrite the production of an exciting audio cassette/compact disk featuring Abayudaya music of Jewish liturgy set to Ugandan melodies and rhythms
- \$2000 will send a Ugandan Jewish student to university for a year
- \$4000 will send a *bet din* from Israel to Peru to supervise conversions
- \$5000 will pay for a trip to Pakistan and Afghanistan for research and contacts
- \$5000 will fund a Spanish-language newsletter linking groups of *conversos*
- \$8000 will pay for publication of a new book on lost and dispersed Jewish communities
- \$10,000 will pay for emergency medical care for Shinlung immigrants in Israel
- \$10,000 will pay for two Abayudaya students to study in Israel for two years
- \$18,000 is needed to send a rabbi to live with the Abayudaya in Uganda, Incans in Peru, or Shinlung in India for six months to teach them in preparation for formal conversion to Judaism
- \$100,000 is needed for a kibbutz/seminar in India (see page 3)

SUPPORTER APPLICATION

☐ IWe would like to become a Supporter 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 TO KULANU

INVITATION TO NEW HAMPSHIRE

Last year I sent a case of *siddurim* to Mbale, Uganda, and offered to travel there to help out as best I can. I am still interested in the Abayudaya, and my congregation would love to hear more.

Might I suggest that, together, Kulanu and Etz Hayim Synagogue work on Sukkat Shalom in the autumn (a wonderful time to visit New Hampshire) and convene a 2-3-day Kulanu Kolel up here. We are very close to Boston, to Nashua, and to Manchester, NH, and I am certain such a gathering would pique a lot of interest and support.

In the past Etz Hayim has resettled 18 Ukrainian Jews here in Derry, and is presently supporting a number of Bosnian relief projects (we sent a case of Hanukkah candles to Mostar in the middle of the shooting last year), including a community center in a refugee camp, and a medevac program for seriously injured children.

Please give my offer some careful thought. Two or three days of celebration, prayer, education, food, music and dance up here with you would be great!

Rabbi Bruce Diamond, Etz Hayim Synagogue
PO Box 536, Derry, NY 03038
603-432-0004

(Editor's note: Sounds great, doesn't it? Could we have a show of hands? Please contact Rabbi Diamond, with a copy to Kulanu, if you are interested. If enough respond, we'll try to jointly organize a retreat/teach-in, either about the Abayudaya or about several subjects. Let us know your preference.)

MIZORAM THANKS

We are very grateful to receive your mailed box containing books on Jewish subjects intended for use by children and adults. We, Shevet Menashe, will use them at once, especially in the children's Sabbath School. We adults have never seen books such as these, and are most appreciative.

We express our gratitude to all those who donated these materials. We pray to HaShem that the people of Shevet Menashe may reap benefits from these books.

Gideon Rei
Mizoram, India

MANIPUR PUBLICATIONS

As editor of *Qual HaShofar* (a news magazine of Shevet Menashe in Manipur), I've included interesting articles from Kulanu, including our correspondences, in the interest of the Menashe people. I've made the publication bilingual so that we

can understand each other better. The one-year gap between this issue and the last issue was mainly due to my illness for about one month, and I had to devote all my available time for the publication of the Daily Prayer Book, which was released during Hanukkah. I hope you will share my happiness in making available to our people a prayer book in the language they understand for the first time since Judaism returned to us two decades ago.

T. Hangshing
Manipur, India

(Editor's note: The 26-page magazine contains, among other articles, news about Kulanu and articles from the Kulanu newsletter translated into the Manipur language. It also lists the names of 23 community members who have taught themselves Hebrew, including 14 who can read the siddur and nine who can read slowly.)

A MESSAGE FROM ABAYUDAYA YOUTH

We are the Abayudaya Youth Association. We are of different ages and grades; some are in secondary school and some in primary school, but most are young, aged 5 through 9 years. Therefore, those in secondary school teach those in primary school and those who don't go to school, too. One of our activities is brick laying. The youth have so far made many bricks.

We remember everybody who came to visit us last June with much admiration. We thank Kulanu for initiating the Abayudaya Orphans' Fund, which is assisting us in terms of school tuition fees. We kindly request Kulanu to continue assisting us as most of the youth are at school. We expect a brighter future for the Congregation if the youth attain higher education.

Already the youth are the ones coming to services in the synagogue. I think visitors will observe a great change.

Much as we keep in touch with you, we shall never forget Kulanu and its efforts to upgrade Abayudaya Congregation. We are the youth who are benefiting, and some of our names are as follows: Shirah Musenero, Samson Enosi, Enosi Keki, Rachel Kamutali, Naume Sabano, Moses Sebagabo, Mulati Moses, Esther Naume, Moses Wargonise, Sarah Namatome and Moses Wetege.

Seth ben Jonadav
Chairman, Abayudaya Youth Association
Mbale, Uganda

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Kulanu

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