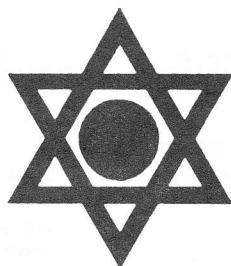


# Kulanu

"all of us"



*Helping Lost Jewish Communities*

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Vol. 3 No. 2

## Tebka Is In Israel!

Summer 1996

*By Diane and Jack Zeller*

Finally, the dream of *aliyah* for Tebka Megistu, the Ethiopian Jewish orphan featured in countless press reports, became a reality when she arrived at Lod Airport on July 22, 1996.

Tebka may be the best known orphan in recent Ethiopian Jewish history. She was orphaned twice; the first time at the death of her mother shortly after her birth in Gondar Province in Ethiopia and the second time by the Government of Israel when she was denied a visa to go to Israel with her grandparents who raised her from infancy. The second time seemed most improbable and despairing, but she refused to return to Gondar Province. Her 13-year-old sister, Engeda, also raised by their grandparents, took on the responsibility of "raising" her. Tebka's grandparents had been grieving openly and had not let the Ethiopian Jews in Israel forget. They were even interviewed by the Amhara broadcast division of Kol Yisrael.

The perseverance of the youngsters also captured the heart of the Ethiopian Jewish community in Addis Ababa. Three journalists, Yosef I Abramowitz, Ellen Grosman and Winston Pickett, wrote a three-part article about this all-but-forgotten Ethiopian Jewish community in Addis Ababa, which is forced to make *aliyah* at a snail's pace. Through these articles, which appeared in all the major American Jewish papers and was attached to the last Kulanu newsletter, Tebka also captured the hearts of the U.S. Jewish community. American Jews, under the leadership of the North American Conference of Ethiopian Jews (NACOEJ), mailed countless numbers of postcards to the Israeli Prime Minister requesting assistance for Tebka's reunification with her grandparents.

But nothing happened -- even though the government of Israel, the *Sachnut* (the Jewish Agency) and the Joint Distribution Committee were publicly held to account. Nothing, that is, until recently. Hopefully this action can be attributed to the new Israeli government.

According to Ethiopian Jewry expert Rabbi Menachem Waldman, Tebka and her brave sister, Engeda who accompanied her, received a royal welcome. Unfortunately, her older sister Assemau was not given a visa to join them. Assemau is blind and lives in Gondar. According to Barbara Ribakove Gordon, the director of NACOEJ, a large percentage of blind Ethiopian Jews are readily able to see once they have received medical treatment in Israel. Unfortunately, there is little to suggest that Assemau will arrive shortly, based on the quota that is still in place to keep the Ethiopian Jewish *aliyah* to a trickle.

## Living with the Abayudaya and Their Non-Jewish Neighbors

*By Kenny Schultz*

*(This article contains excerpts from the author's anthropology study, completed in the Senior Scholar Program at the University of Rochester. He lived with the Abayudaya for two months in the fall of 1994.)*

Although the villages of the Abayudaya are near Mbale, Uganda's third-largest city, I recalled the difficult and almost humorous time I had the year before locating the Abayudaya.

After several fruitless attempts, I eventually asked a reverend wearing a black T-shirt that read "Believe in Jesus" about the Abayudaya Community. He replied adamantly, "Jews in Mbale? If there's a Jewish group living in Mbale, Uganda, I would know about it. I know all the religions practiced and Judaism, like from the Bible, has never been worshipped here." He paused, shook his head, and then said affably, "You know, you can always stay with us." Maybe 10 minutes passed before a teacher at a Christian missionary school appeared and offered, "There's a church by my house where people claim they're Jews. I don't know because I never visited, but a man around here says he's Jewish. I'll take you to him." Surprised, I glanced over to the reverend, who seemed equally shocked. The woman led me to a thin old man who, after being told in his native language of Luganda why I was in Mbale, expressed such exuberance that he immediately put his *kippa* on and closed his shop. (cont., p. 5)

## An Unusual Society in Cape Verde

*By M. Mitchell Serels*

*(Editor's note: The author, director of Sephardic Community Programs at Yeshiva University, visited the Cape Verde Islands for 10 days this past winter, researching gravesites and lecturing about Jewish history.)*

In the wake of the Oslo Peace Process between Israel and her Arab adversaries, the descendants of Jews in the Republic of Cape Verde have openly reclaimed their identity. An archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of Senegal, Cape Verde has had two eras of Jewish settlement.

From 1460 to 1497 Portuguese Jews settled these barren islands as part of the colonization by Portugal. Their descendants -- Lima, Carvalho, Rodrigues and others -- hid their Jewish ancestry behind a facade of Catholic conversion. The only open sign of their Jewish heritage remains as a village called Singoga on the island of Santo Antao. Mixed with slaves and slave traders, their clear identity was lost.

In the 1850-1880 period Moroccan Jews, mainly males from Tangier, arrived. Ruth Marcal de Cohen's husband was a descendant of these Jews. His family settled in Ribiera Grande, Santo Antao, and opened a merchandising firm. Ruth Cohen, white in complexion, is the grandame of the island. She remains in the large, green, family mansion adjacent to the store. She entertains guests in a European style.

In the town of Paul, Ildo Benros owns a centuries-old sugar cane press for the production of Grogue, just as the pirates drank. Aware of his Judaic past, he knows few details. (cont., p. 5)

## The Jewish Handshake

By Jack Zeller

There is something remarkable about how one Jew greets another who is otherwise a stranger. Jews feel an immediate kinship for other Jews -- a feeling that non-Jewish friends often describe with amazement and envy.

The universality of the enthusiastic greeting of one Jew to another is what we tried to capture when we selected our organizational name "Kulanu", the Hebrew word meaning "all of us." The choice of this name came out of a long meeting in which we tried to find one word to define our thoughts and goal.

Jews are often to be found in unlikely places. The prophets foretold that the Diaspora would be worldwide. And our *siddur* repeatedly refers to the four corners of the earth.

One purpose of Kulanu is to preserve and enhance the enthusiasm of one Jew meeting another, even if it occurs in the most unlikely place, the Jew is of a darker skin color or different appearance, or the Jew is non-rabbinic in origin or a newly arrived Jew by choice.

Our goal is to ask all Jews (Kulanu is composed of secularists, religiously identified, and *dati* supporters) to consider the spiritually elevating experience of befriending other Jews as a treasured birthright that must be experienced -- not simply learned in books, heard in sermons, or described by our *bubbes* and *zeydes*. This practice of **doing** is deliberate, delightful, and full of surprise and meaning. This practice is self-identifying and critical to our identity.

Jews who do or do not belong to synagogues or other Jewish organizations phone Kulanu and ask how they can visit the Shinlung Jewish community in India, the Abayudaya in Uganda, the *anusim* ("Marranos") in Brazil or Santa Fe, as if this were a most Jewishly intuitive and reasonable request. And it is! Kulanu wants to make it easier.

Jews travel. We have traveled far and wide, often against our will, to find a more likely place to survive. Now, even those of us who have been fortunate enough to travel often will find that the pleasure of travel is richly enhanced by meeting Jews. We encourage you to travel for this pleasure. We suggest contacting one of the many communities we assist. The accommodations are not Hiltonesque, but then again our ancestors who have given us the opportunity to do this did not think of luxury. Their reward was the warm greeting, learning about the quality of local Jewish life, and discussing how Divine Providence intended them to behave.

Since the Jewish communities we deal with have suffered from chronic and almost complete isolation, your visit with them and continued correspondence can have a profound and electrifying effect. You may be asked the most difficult questions with the sincere belief that Western Jews must know it all. And when you ask your own questions and find the reply is a more penetrating question, you know that we are all part of *K'lal Yisrael*. You may start your journey thinking you are helping another, only to find you are the recipient.

For what can be more moving than to grapple with the nature and destiny of our identity? Kulanu, all of us, are the better for this experience, for we are much more the same than different.

Much of Jewish living has occurred in the Diaspora. We've been there far longer than in *Eretz Yisrael*. And we will probably be there for a long time to come. Never before in Jewish history has it been easier to meet remote and virtually ignored or newly developing Jewish communities. We can do it by phone, fax, e-mail, and best of all, by an in-person handshake. Many of us have done some or all of the above. You shouldn't miss out!

## 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, Shinlung in India, or *converso havurot* in Mexico
- \$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*
- \$5000** will underwrite the production of an exciting audio cassette/compact disk featuring Abayudaya music of Jewish liturgy set to Ugandan melodies and rhythms
- \$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
- \$30,000** is needed to send a rabbi-teacher to Uganda for four months followed by a *beit din* to complete conversions
- \$100,000** is needed for a synagogue, school, community hall complex in Manipur, India

## 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.

The *kippot*, which cost \$10 each, come in an exceptionally wide range of colors, styles and sizes. They can be viewed in the Washington, DC, area. Call 301-565-3094. Kulanu will try to arrange for a selection to be sent to an area where several individuals, a large group, or a shop (commercial, synagogue, Hillel) may be interested.

## JOURNEY OF RENEWAL

### A Mexican Chanukah

By Nancy Helman Shneiderman

(Editor's note: The author, a psychotherapist and musician, gives lectures, performances and workshops on Jewish life-cycle events.)

#### The Prelude

Late one night, while wending my way through a dense paperwork thicket, my home-office jungle yielded a true treasure -- a neglected frequent-flyer coupon. Alarmed by its imminent expiration, I quickly telephoned the airlines. The agent vigorously explored qualified international destinations, finding Hawaii and Mexico still available. A perfumed recollection of Hawaii's outrageous pleasures on a trip there some years earlier remained etched indelibly into my life-gallery of all-time favorites. Why, then, did I choose Mexico? Kulanu.

This decision had been sourced by a fascinating article in a recent Kulanu newsletter. Mexico, it had informed me, was the home of several indigenous crypto-Jewish communities. Those in Puebla and Veracruz, part crypto, part converso, had recently been featured. To say I felt a strong affinity with the descendants of Inquisition survivors in the New World was an understatement. Despite half a millennium of oppression, repression, coercion, and assimilation almost to the point of extinction, the current generation of crypto-Jews was retrieving its Hebraic identity successfully. Even with the Holocaust to

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***We could, together, celebrate the power of hope, the miracle of survival, theirs and mine, and the renewal of Jews who, like myself, might have turned away, but didn't.***

---

serve as their most recent historic disincense, neither could they, nor would they, be denied their Jewish heritage any longer. I sensed we had something in common.

As a woman, I too had known marginalization in Judaism. Lighting the *chanukiah* in Puebla at the winter solstice would be a joyful affirmation of the Life Source during the darkest time of the year. We could, together, celebrate the power of hope, the miracle of survival, theirs and mine, and the renewal of Jews who, like myself, might have turned away, but didn't. Instead, our quest for wholeness required full tribal recognition, in our own contexts, *Kulanu* (all of us).

I knew these communities were not entirely accepted by mainstream Mexican Jews and were looked upon with considerable suspicion by Israel. I admired their tenacity. By reconnecting the unraveled fringes of our people's cloth of continuity, we Jews have repaired ourselves time and again. Recovering and rediscovering forgotten ancestors, the crypto-Jewish story-strands were being re-attached daily, like *tzitzit*, into the total Jewish garment. I knew it took dedicated leaders with courage, vision, patience, and most of all, faith. This is holy work. I hoped our visit and songs might offer comfort, affirmation, connection, and new threads of meaning to these groups' challenging retrieval process. Aware our encounter would further define my own role and responsibilities as a contemporary Jewish woman, song writer and liturgist, I prayed for a Chanukah blessing in Mexico.

The memory buds of Hebraic heritage, tribal custom, and religious practice had, in large part, lain dormant in Mexico for many centuries. Selectively maintained by the subtle interrelationship between what could be said and done and what could not, parents, teachers, and the communal norms of each succeeding generation had carried the seeds of tradition from town to town, shaping the crypto-Jews' consciousness. Withstanding each cultural, political and industrial shift in historic Mexico, these potent seeds of tradition, though inert,

confluences. Occasionally this potentiality flowered fully within one exceptional, charismatic individual. My quick review of the Kulanu article suggested that the founder of Puebla's Beth Shmuel, Ignacio Castelan Estrada, was such a person.

#### The Contact

Speaking little Spanish myself, I invited Allan Griff, a friend fluent in the language and my Jewish singing partner, to help with travel plans and to accompany me on this journey. We placed phone calls to both Puebla and Veracruz. Soon we realized that both communities bore the same name: Beth Shmuel. This was, of course, no coincidence. Over the years, a now elderly Conservative rabbi, Samuel Lehrer, spiritual leader of Beth Israel Community Center in Mexico City -- a large congregation comprised mostly of Ashkenazim, but with considerable Sephardic and Marrano representation as well -- had made numerous visits to both Puebla and Veracruz. To honor Rabbi Lehrer's blessings, and to show appreciation for his officiating at various life-cycle rituals (marriages, bris, mikvehs and conversions) these two congregations had been given his name.

We had hoped to meet Rabbi Lehrer in person but were disappointed. He told us on the telephone that he would be out of town during our entire holiday stay, as would most of his beach-bound congregants.

Our luck improved with Ignacio Castelan of Puebla and Saul Ruiseco of Veracruz. Both were not only able but happy to celebrate our visit with special Chanukah feasts and candle lighting. Both warmly extended home hospitality. We accepted, offering to sing for our supper and bring gifts for the children. My vision had taken root. We would indeed spend Chanukah with our Mexican extended family. *Kulanu*.

#### The Visit to Veracruz

Saul Ruiseco, from Veracruz, is extraordinarily proud of his Spanish ancestry. Displayed prominently over his bedroom mirror, an 8th century crested coat of arms hangs, complete with the Ruiseco family name. Under the watchful eye of his ancestors, Saul sleeps, perhaps joining with those who went before in dream-time. The total effect of this is quite dramatic. Saul is a slender, terse, yet pleasant man, probably in his late 30s. He is light-skinned, tracing his origins back to Spain and Portugal. Saul, his mother and elderly grandmother graciously greeted us, even though our arrival was inconveniently late.

Though our party wasn't scheduled until the day following, Saul's mother shyly requested a private concert in her kitchen over tea. I couldn't have been happier to agree. She listened to my *niggunim* (wordless melodies) and her reserve dissolved. A deep, intimate, common well of feeling opened between us, lifting our veils. From her shining eyes tears of joy flowed and were reflected in mine. The words of Shneur Zalman of Ladia, a *hasidic rebbe*, echoed as we sang. "The songs of the Souls, at the time they are swaying in the high regions, drink from the well of the Almighty." Sentimental  
(cont., p. 7)



Nancy Helman Shneiderman and Allan Griff, center



## KULANU BRIEFS

### Ethiopian Embroideries

Hundreds of Jewish men and women in Ethiopia awaiting permission to leave for Israel are embroidering stunning, full-color pillow, challah and matzoh covers and tallit bags under a program of the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ).

There are about 40,000 stitches in each piece. The extraordinary folk-art designs depict biblical stories and traditional Ethiopian Jewish village scenes.

The program was set up to enable heads of Jewish households to support their families. By purchasing one embroidery (the price is \$72), you can help support a Jewish family in Addis Ababa for a month. Certainly a laudable way to buy folk art!

To view the 18 patterns available, request an illustrated order form from NACOEJ, 165 East 56 Street, New York, NY 10022; (212) 752-6340; fax (212) 980-5294; NACOEJ@AOL.COM

### WELCOME TO CANADIANS

Yaakov Gladstone recently handed over to Kulanu a new list of Canadian supporters who join our older Canadian friends. A hearty welcome to David Bitton, Evelyn and Hy Engelberg, Malka and Zvi Feldman, Millie and Sam Lubiner, Chana and Ben Marmor, Izzy Parker, Sylvia and Saul Stipelman, Hy and Estelle Strauss, and Nachum Wilchesky.

What a *mitzvah* -- to turn on friends and associates (either singly or in groups) to Kulanu's important work!

### CHILDREN-TO-CHILDREN TZEDAKA

Julie and Sarah Congress of Alexandria, VA, recently made a wonderful donation to Kulanu. They presented us with a large and heavy bag of coins (which also contained a few bills) that they had been accumulating. They had been donating tzedaka to Kulanu every day for more than a year!

Kulanu will use this money to help poor Jewish children in Peru celebrate and observe their Jewishness. We will also tell the recipients of Julie's and Sarah's generosity and compassion.

Julie and Sarah, Kulanu extends to you our utmost thanks. We hope that your donation is the first of many similar undertakings by young individuals, Hebrew school classes, and other groups.

### Sponsor Sought

Rabbi Myron Zuber, who taught Incans in Peru about the practice of Judaism in preparation for conversion, is endeavoring to bring a young Incan woman to the US for conversion and further education. He is seeking someone who makes at least \$50,000 per year to sponsor her. For further information contact the rabbi at 914-425-6213.

### DEMOCRACY IN THE SYNAGOGUE

On a recent trip to East Africa, Matt Meyer visited his old friends, the Abayudaya, in Mbale, Uganda. He happened to be there on May 13, election day. He faxed Kulanu:

"Shalom from Mbale! Things here are very peaceful and joyful, as usual. As you may know, Ugandan elections were held last Thursday. One polling station was on Nabugoye hill. When the rains came at mid-day, they moved into the Moses Synagogue! From what I saw, the elections appeared very free and fair."

### Joy and Sadness Among the Abayudaya

Mazel tov to Zeridah and Uri Katula William on the birth of their daughter. Uri was one of the English-Luganda translators assisting the Kulanu mission to Uganda last year.

Another greeting us at the airport and assisting us was Judah Mutusa, former treasurer of the Abayudaya community. We have learned with sorrow of the recent death of Judah, and of his wife. They leave four children, aged 3 to 12 years, who as orphans become eligible for assistance through Kulanu's Orphan Education Fund (the Margolis-Shair Fund). During his final days Judah extended his thanks and love to all in Kulanu.

### VP FOR FINANCE NEEDED

Kulanu needs a Vice President for Finance. Put those skills to use for a good cause and meet fascinating people. Call Bob Lande for information (301-585-5229).

### "CELEBRATIONS FOR ALL PEOPLE"

Kulanu activist and Jewish song writer and singer Nancy Helman Shneiderman recently released a critically acclaimed cassette of 13 original songs. Entitled *Like a Tree: Songs and Life-Cycle Celebrations for All People*, the tape was described by the *Washington Jewish Week* as "a joyous and inspiring album ... (combining) a delightful vocal journey of Jewish music from niggun to Charleston, gospel to chants."

Shneiderman brought this music to *converso havurot* in Mexico last Chanukah (see article in this newsletter).

The cassette, which won seven awards in the Mid-Atlantic Song Contest, can be ordered from Shneiderman, who is also available for lectures, performances and workshops. Call 202-363-0208.

### Jewish Highlights of Brazil

There is still time for last-minute travelers to join the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies conference and tour in Brazil October 15-30. The tour of Jewish highlights of Brazil will be led by Brazilian-born Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, a Kulanu rabbinic advisor and scholar on the Marrano phenomenon in that country.

The trip, which may begin in either Miami or Los Angeles, includes visits in Sao Paulo, Manaus, Belem, Recife, Natal and Rio De Janeiro. Jewish sights covered include a 2100-family modern synagogue, a Sephardic Jewish community in the Amazon, the oldest Jewish community in Brazil, the first synagogue in the Americas, and a Marrano synagogue.

A prominent travel journalist is expected to cover the tour!

For further information and to register contact Rita Tyroler at 703-524-5700.

### WELCOME, RABBIS AND SYNAGOGUES!

In the past few months Kulanu has added an unprecedented numbers of rabbis and synagogues as supporters. We thank all of them for their generosity and interest. Each one is greatly appreciated.

Among the recent new supporters are: Rabbi Barry Glickstein, Temple Beth Shalom, Miami Beach; Rabbi Paul Adler, The New Synagogue, New City, NY; Rabbi Daniel Alexander, Congregation Beth Israel, Charlottesville, VA; Rabbi Peter Tarlow, Texas A&M University Hillel; Rabbi Loring Frank, All People's Synagogue, Miami Beach; Congregation Emanuel, New York; B'nai Israel, Rockville, MD; Hebrew Tabernacle, Washington Heights, NY; Kingway Jewish Center, Brooklyn, NY; and Chovav Yonatan, Sudbury, MA.



## BRIEFS (Cont.)

### 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.

### A Bagful of Books

Temple Emanuel of Kensington, MD, has donated to Kulanu a wonderful bagful of Hebrew primers and Jewish prayer and history books for children. They will be sent to an isolated, developing Jewish community, where they will be greatly appreciated.

### NEXT KULANU MEETING

Mark your calendar now, for no other notice will be given. The next Kulanu meeting will be held Sunday, October 13, at noon, at the home of Aron and Karen Primack in Silver Spring, MD. Call 301-565-3094 for directions. Refreshments? Of course!

## CAPE VERDE (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 1)

His mother, now in her 90s, is no longer able to transmit her knowledge.

In the capital of Praia on Santiago Island, some of these Jews have banded together to form the Cape Verde-Israel Friendship Society. The country has now accepted democracy as a way of life. The first democratically elected prime minister is Carlos Wahnnon de Carvalho Viegas, of Jewish ancestry. The pro-Cuban, communist government has been replaced. Although the Chinese and Russian embassies face the parliament building, their influence is lessening, as is the oil money used to insure the former pro-Arab stand of the Cape Verde government.

The Friendship Society is headed by Dr. Januario Nascimento, of the Auday family of Tangier, founders of the first synagogue there. Often sent on diplomatic missions for his home country, Nascimento is also vice president of the country's Olympic committee which, this year, sent its first athlete to those games. Abraao Levy is the secretary of the organizations which includes Policario Anahory, brother of the national poet.

I was able to speak at a public meeting organized by the Cape Verde-Israel Friendship Society. Eighty-five people crammed into a room designed to hold 70. One young woman, during the question-answer period, spoke of her family's aversion to pork and wanted to know of other practices which could link her to Judaism.

Among the various objectives of the Friendship Society is the restoration of the three Jewish cemeteries, particularly that of Penha Franca on Santo Antao. Although Antonio Julio Rodrigues carefully keeps the debris off the graves, there is a need for funds to put up a wall around the graves and to properly protect the site.

## THE ABAYUDAYA AND THEIR Non-Jewish Neighbors (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 1)

We then proceeded a few miles to the half-built synagogue. Aaron, Gershom, and Joab, the Congregation's leaders, appeared, sweating but nonetheless smiling, once they confirmed that a *mzungu* (white man) was indeed here to see them. Although I was not the first white person to visit, my stay of two weeks last year and the prospect of extending that by two months this year were clearly a sign of respect to the Community.

On my first Friday there, Joab said, "Today we will ride to town so you can get your Shabbat food, and then we will immediately return to prepare for the holiday." Since there was no cooking on Shabbat and my body had not adapted to cold food, Joab thought that it was best I buy some American canned food and a thermos to keep it protected. Several times last year, I was asked "What can we do to heat our food on Shabbat? Our kids get sick from the cold food." I suggested that since there is no refrigeration, maybe it is all right to cook early in the morning. A few people nodded, but only out of respect. Nobody took my secular idea seriously.

As we bicycled into town, Joab proudly asked, "Mr. Kenny, do you know how we got these bicycles?" I shook my head. "Rachel. My daughter, Rachel, got them for us. About two months ago, she and some locals went to Kolonyi, which is a nearby health center started by Germans, and sang on behalf of the Farmers' Society for Vice President Kisekka. Kisekka was so impressed with her voice that he donated two bikes to the Society. We still have to pay a small sum to Kolonyi but we are extremely happy." I asked why he was allowed to keep the bikes and he responded, "Of course, I am responsible. I am the chairman of the Farmers' Society."

We continued toward town, but before we got very far we heard a rhythmic calling similar to that made from a *shofar*. It was an announcement that a death had occurred. Joab shook his head and then said softly, "A three-year-old of a nearby family died in the night. 'Yesterday, he was healthy -- today, no. We must go and pay a condolence.'"

### An Islamic Funeral

The home where the burial was taking place was on the way to town. When we arrived, Joab told me that the family was Islamic and that was good because Christian ceremonies last much longer. At first, I was surprised by the seemingly cynical remark, but I remembered Aaron telling me that something like one death occurs every three or four days and mostly to young children, whose developing immune systems are extremely vulnerable to the various diseases, particularly malaria. Naturally, the residents have learned to prefer one ceremony to another. The responsibility of the neighbors to mourn for each death makes attending funerals a weekly occurrence. This is in contrast to the Western custom that only mourns for members of the immediate family and close friends.

We walked to the table and paid a condolence of 400 shillings (50 cents). We turned and sat down with the men, who were resting comfortably under some trees and chatting quietly. Joab left and walked over to the house and peeked inside where several women were crying. He raised his hand, whispered something, and walked back across the front yard. An amiable man pushed a cow away from a wooden chair and handed it to Joab. Several people came over, including the father of the deceased, and welcomed us. I offered my condolences and he acknowledged with a sad smile.

A couple of minutes passed before Muslim men, all wearing white robes and a cloth to cover their heads, appeared from the small clay house; they were carrying a wooden coffin that was adorned with a beautiful blue and white patterned

## The Abayudaya and Their Non-Jewish Neighbors (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 5)

harmoniously began the Islamic mourning prayer as the men placed the casket under blossoming green leaves that draped a pleasant wooden shelter. There, Moslems recited the burial service, which frequently included raising their hands -- palms facing upward -- to their heads. When the religious leader finished, the coffin was lifted and the rest of us followed the male procession to the grave site, located behind the home. The women kept chanting but remained at the house. I was told it is not customary for women to join the men.

We reached the site and saw two young men standing in the grave. The tapestry was placed over their heads as they were carefully handled the coffin. The father led the prayers while dirt was poured into the grave. Finally, symbolic drops of water were sprinkled and the ceremony was over.

"Have you ever been to a Jewish funeral?" questioned Joab as we were leaving.

"Yes."

"Is the ceremony similar to this one?"

"Sure, except for the Islamic prayers."

"I'm happy to hear that. The Jewish funeral here is much the same because it does not take too long. We read the right prayers from our *siddurim* that were sent to us from people in Canada, and then we all help in burying the deceased. Usually the wooden casket is very plain. We can not afford a nice one."

"Hopefully, I will not observe another funeral."

"*Inshallah*," Joab said emphatically, which is an Arabic term meaning "If God wishes."

"You know," he continued, "**you did a righteous thing by escorting the dead. People even said that the boy was blessed because a white man was present at his burial.**"

Strange, I thought.

### In Town

We left the burial area and continued on our ride to the town of Mbale. We were stopped several times by gracious people who wished to greet Joab and me. Although their eyes were fixed on my physical appearance, I did not find the stares intrusive. We arrived at a sparsely-stocked store rented by the Abayudaya. There was no name to the store but if there were, Joab assured me, it would not be anything in Hebrew. Joab said, "If the owner of the building knew that he was renting to Jews, then of course we would have to leave. Gershom signed the lease 'Mohammed.'"

Seeing a *mzungu*, many children and adults came by to question who I was and why I was staying with Joab. After telling one middle-aged man who went to school with Uriah, a member of the Congregation, that I was here to study the Abayudaya Community, he shook his head and said, "I never knew there were Jews living in Mbale." He looked at Uriah, who had entered the shop a few minutes before, and asked, "Why didn't you ever tell me that you were Jewish?"

Uriah smiled and replied, "You never asked."

The man looked stunned and said, "**But nobody here knows about Judaism. Don't you want to spread the word of Judaism?**"

Uriah responded appropriately, "We don't believe in missionaries to attract members." The man was not content; he needed more to satisfy his curiosity.

He glanced over to me and said kindly, "I would like to bring the priest of my church here to talk with you. I am sure you could enlighten him about your religion. Is it okay if he and I come here sometime next week, like Tuesday?" I gladly accepted without realizing how strange it was that I had been there only a day, while the Community has existed since 1919, and just now this man, who was not only a friend of Uriah, but lived close to the synagogue, had for the first time heard of the

Uriah was a teacher at one of the prestigious Christian missionary schools that was regarded as the best in Mbale. He took much pride in working there, and rightfully so.

We left the shop and passed a procession of people who were singing and waving thick green leaves wildly around two young boys. The boys were covered with white powder and waving symbolic fur stripped from the back of a monkey and chanting in Lugisu, the local language. It was the dancing before a traditional circumcision.

"Will the boy be circumcised today?" I asked, amazed by what I was witnessing.

"No, maybe tomorrow but probably not. Sometimes they will dance for two weeks and some up to a month. Don't worry, you will see one. There will be many around this time," Joab assured me.

### Shabbat

On Friday afternoon Gershom and his wife Seporah, carrying their newborn baby, Moshe, came over and greeted us warmly. I was a bit surprised to see that Gershom had married, considering he had expressed such uncertainty about finding a "Jewish wife" the previous year. I remembered him saying, "This is our greatest problem. The women just leave the Community, and what are we suppose to do? They see that Muslim and Christian missionaries provide their people with beautiful buildings and other things, and we just have our little synagogue."

I asked Gershom when he actually got married and he replied, "Seporah and I were not sure, but we decided to marry early, maybe a few weeks after you left last year. **She is a good Jewish woman and now our son can be a rabbi. I teach him Hebrew everyday,**" he smiled, "**so he will someday be fluent in three languages -- English, Luganda, and the language of God, Hebrew.**" Gershom laughed and walked over to the synagogue carrying a box filled with *siddurim*, *tallitot*, and *kippot*. He was quite anxious to begin the Sabbath.

I followed him over to the synagogue, where Aaron hung a lamp from one of the wooden rafters overhead. Not many members had arrived, but Gershom began the Sabbath with the opening prayer from the *siddur*. The wind blew slightly through the empty windows and shook the kerosene lamp causing stints of darkness, but by now Gershom had memorized most of the prayers and the service continued without interruption. A few minutes passed before the religious leader, Mishael, arrived. He was draped in an old, faded white robe that covered his thin, aging body. As he entered the synagogue, he took out a torn white *kippa* and placed it on his head. He saw me and immediately came over. He bowed his head slightly, smiled and repeated in a soft, raspy voice, "Shabbat Shalom, Shabbat Shalom."

Mishael is one of the oldest members of the Community. He converted to Judaism with his father while working on one of Kakungulu's 50 acres of land acquired for his military service to the British. Although Kakungulu did not force Judaism on his subordinates and tenants like Mishael, he taught them about Judaism and conferred advantages to them. **Like Kakungulu in his old age, Mishael has dedicated his remaining years to the study and understanding of the Old Testament. Aaron once told me that Mishael no longer works on his three acres of land. He has retired to his small hut in which he eats very little and reads the Bible throughout the day. He has already signed over his land to the Congregation.**

Mishael sat down next to me on the wooden bench. He knew very little English but this did not prevent him from expressing his happiness. Several times during the prayers he

## A Mexican Chanukah (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 3)

smiles of tribal recognition as Jewish women passed between us. One human being to the other, one Jew, one woman, one Source. One. *Kulanu*.

The next evening we walked to the beachfront synagogue of this southern coastal town. The sea air blew wind in warm, sibilant gusts around the corners, brazenly ballooning the ladies' skirts. *Ruach!* The *chazan*, embracing a well-dressed Torah, wailed familiar Sephardic melodies in a sanctuary of the same ambience. When the dark wooden ark once again protected its precious contents, we all retired upstairs to the social hall. Our feast consisted of tamales, cake, pasta, and the ever present rice and beans. Our rendition of a Flory Jagoda song in Ladino, *Una Kandelika*, lent itself well to our multi-generational sing-along. Then, with the expert assistance of Saul and the smallest community children, the little windows of a large Chanukah "Advent" card were opened. Counting out the eight days of Chanukah, the Maccabee story was retold. Finally, when our bonding through story and song was done, all the lights were dimmed. We lit the *chanukiah*, and silence filled the darkness. The magic of the glowing tapers spread in a shining, expanding circle. As I sang a song from my commercial tape, "The Solstice Chanukah," (*Like a Tree: Songs and Life-cycle Celebrations for All People*) we were joined together in the mystery of our separate, linked histories. *Kulanu!*

*And the echoed voices harmonize an ancient melody,  
Our Ancestors in Unity stand with us as we light,  
Sing with us as we light  
Dance with us as we light  
Pray with us as we light the Chanukiah,  
Dark winged Shechina, Etz Chayim, Tree of Life, Amen!  
Pray now,  
Hope,  
Hold our Souls!*

### The Visit to Puebla

For personal reasons, we had to ask Ignacio Castelan Estrada and his lovely wife Mary to accept us a day early and extra, to which they graciously agreed. After a late start, the enthusiasm with which we had begun the two-hour journey from Mexico City to Puebla faded. Long shadows grew quickly, bringing the deep solstice darkness up right behind. Arriving in Puebla, a city the size of Washington, DC, we started to ascend ultra-steep hills, a cobblestoned territory with no crest in sight. Night fell. Higher and higher we climbed into what appeared to be an increasingly unsavory neighborhood. The unavoidably numerous speed bumps of unimaginable height seemed to leap out of the pavement without warning like ominous pin-ball ghosts. The odds of our rental vehicle's underbelly being marooned atop a particularly large bump seemed high. Decreasing our speed seemed to have little effect on the constant banging and scraping. Gradually, our uneasiness transformed into fear.

Suddenly, a pleasant Hispanic voice called out in melodic singsong, "Senor Allan! Senora Nancy!" Like the proverbial circus car, a tiny VW beetle, piled to overflowing with grinning people in party clothes, beeped wildly. It pulled up next to us and a stunning beauty in a cocktail dress hung out of the window up to her waist and waved her hands at us frantically. "I'm Ada, Ignacio's daughter! I knew you must be lost. I told the others we should go out to find you. And now, here you are!" she chirped. "Follow us!" she gestured gaily, turning the Volkswagen on a dime and gunning it down the steep incline into the night.

We soon arrived on a relatively flat dead-end street. One lovely home, with its appealing aesthetic touches, stood apart from all the others. Lovely tiles appointed the verandah. Flowers dripped from a decorative wrought-iron fence which

welcome smile. Her husband, Ignacio, strode out to greet us in full Maccabean command. Happy, if a bit hurried, he shooed us indoors where, to our amazement, sat the entire community. Dressed to the nines, they applauded enthusiastically. A great hand-cut gold banner with the words "WELCOME NANCY AND ALLAN" was strung across an elegant buffet. As we got our bearings, we saw the small sea of joyous, hopeful Chanukah celebrants reaching out to greet us with their eyes, hands and hearts. We saw also the great importance of our visit to this community, and their yearning for more connection to the Jewish world at large. *Kulanu*.

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***Withstanding each cultural, political and industrial shift in historic Mexico, these potent seeds of tradition, though inert, contained a robust Jewish possibility.***

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The evening was spent sharing stories in Spanish and English. We identified ourselves much as they do in the Bible, sharing ancestral names and places whenever possible. Several of the families were recent converts. Ignacio later told us about others who were interested in conversion as well. He had been clearly discouraged by Rabbi Lehrer from pursuing these inquiries. His desire to go to Israel with his family and the rest of the community was a delicate matter. Though he, his wife and their four children would probably be accepted for making *aliyah*, leaving the others behind was not a real option. Their Jewish lives and worship were genuine. To be cut off and left behind in Puebla because they were born without some Jewish lineage would be unbearable. The smallest children knew all the Hebrew words to all the songs and prayers by memory. If they were old enough to read at all, they read Hebrew. I knew few Jews in the US could make such a claim. In fact, the entire community read the text flawlessly.

Our Thursday night service-party was just an introduction, with jovial singing and dancing around the table. During the next two intense days, we worshipped with this group at home and in their small, simple cinderblock synagogue. Seldom had I experienced such spirit, such intense joy in a group. Particularly poignant was the reverence for their one tiny Torah, one of those eight-inch miniatures sold in Jerusalem. I prayed that this community might receive a Torah large enough to hold and to hug.

Though there was an aisle dividing the men and women, the feeling of comfort and spiritual intimacy was everywhere. Between services, we cooked, ate delicious meals, played with Ada's baby, enjoyed chats with Jemima, their exquisite teenage girl, and played the guitar with Hartus, the teenage son. Together with his wife Mary, Ignacio, son of peasants from Jalapa, a quality-control engineer working at a local steel mill, had built a true Jewish home. *Judaica* was everywhere, within them and without. By the time we left, it was clear a part of us would always remain. Here, in their own words, are their feelings about our visit, as translated by Allan:

**From Ignacio:** "The sound of your appreciated voices and those beautiful melodies still vibrate in my mind. You have left us thankful for unerasable memories.... Don't forget that in the city of Puebla you always have a family and a home where you can come whenever you wish.... In Mexico it is very difficult to be accepted in the Orthodox Ashkenazi and Sephardi communities because there is so much racism against the crypto-Jews, which is my background. I have the need to make *aliyah* soon, and also my children, Jemima and Hartus, in order that they may serve in the army and study in Israel. The same for the other children in our community."

**From Miriam Lior Diaz de Diaz (congregant):** "A thousand thanks for having bothered to come to Puebla and to get to know us. I feel that you are my adopted brother and



## THE ABAYUDAYA AND THEIR NON-JEWISH NEIGHBORS (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 6)

feeling, but the sincerity in his facial gestures alone created the bond we shared in practicing the same religion. Midway through the service, Gershom looked over to Mishaël and asked what the Torah portion for the week was. He quickly replied, "Chapter 6, verse 9 of Genesis." Gershom nodded and thanked him, though he clearly asked out of respect for the elder. Gershom gave a brief account of what happened in that chapter and followed it with his own moral lesson. He said:

"... The generation of the floods was very arrogant, as it is said in the Bible. Everyone had found his own way, which means the people of that generation were not united. And, what does God do? He brings the floods to destroy that generation. But still there is a lesson -- God is merciful. He tells Noah to build the Ark so maybe some people will repent and enter the Ark. But because the generation was arrogant, everyone ignored and despised the words of Noah. The first lesson is that God is merciful. And the other is that the people of that generation were divided because they all went their own way. Now we come to the generation after the flood. They also were arrogant. They resolved to build a tower in order to reach God and talk to Him. They wanted to see how God lived and this, in my mind, is arrogance. But the difference is that they were united, and instead of God destroying them, He only dispersed them. So there is a lesson -- unity towards the right thing is highly blessed by God. So it is a call from me that we unite towards the truth and we shall be rewarded by the almighty God."

The next morning Gershom walked over to a small enclosure and asked me if I knew what it was; at first I wasn't sure. Then I realized that it was a *sukkah* for the holiday of *Sukkot* that had been celebrated the month before. Gershom stated, "The purpose is to remember that our fathers lived in such structures when they came from Egypt. The word *sukkah* means 'booth' and it symbolizes the departure." I asked Gershom if he lived in the *sukkah* and he replied, "We (he with Aaron, Seth, and Joab) used to sleep in the *sukkah* when we were little. But now we don't because a certain rabbi from Nairobi advised us that if you think the security of the place is okay then sleep out. Here there are still thieves, so now we stay out there until 8 or 9 o'clock and eat our meals there. Then we go home. The women do the same."

Members of the congregation began arriving for Shabbat morning services at around 8:30, and the service began at 9 o'clock. The men sat opposite the women for the same reason that this is done in Orthodox synagogues everywhere -- simply, the fear that physical attraction will interfere with the religious purpose. At first I was surprised to see Aaron lead the service, but after hearing him recite the beginning prayers fluently in Hebrew, I realized that in the past year he had attained a similar efficiency to that of Gershom. (Apparently Gershom, Aaron, and Joab have studied very hard from basic Hebrew books sent to them from past visitors.)

The congregation participated most energetically when the prayer was either recited in Luganda or sung in Hebrew. One prayer, in particular, captured the attention of every member -- "Lecha Dodi." When I heard the soothing voices chanting together, I was entranced by their spiritual expression that seemed to accentuate the differences between the Abayudaya Community and Western Judaism.

The Torah portion of the service was very similar to the one that I am accustomed to at home. It was especially gratifying to witness not only two recently bar-mitzvahed boys who chanted the prayers perfectly in Hebrew, but also two women who read their *aliyot* in English. Last year, the women primarily sat in the corner and said nothing. I realized, then, that part of the reason the women were

and in the development of the Community, Judaism represented no more than a strange word. This year, although there are still moments of exclusion, the women seemed to be more active, and, more importantly, comfortable with their new involvement.

After the *haftara* was read by an elder of the community, there was a break in the service for people of the congregation to say a few words welcoming me back to the Community. Joab started and, in essence, thanked God for my safe return to the Community. He said, "Mr. Kenny has traveled very far. And he is very brave because there are many diseases here in Uganda. He has put his faith in God and we are most pleased. Thank you, Mr. Kenny." Two elderly women stood up at the end and expressed their happiness with a traditional cry that permeated the open room. The service concluded with an unique version of *Adon Olam*.

To each of the congregants, Shabbat is the climax of the week. Aaron told me that even when he is at school, an hour away from home, he never misses a Shabbat. He enters a private classroom and recites all the prayers. Essentially, Shabbat is an expression of their identity. Without this culmination at the end of week, a feeling of emptiness would prevail throughout the community.

### Soccer and Fundamentalists

After the service, we walked home. The rest of the day was spent sitting around and talking. The women sat outside on mats while the men relaxed. Around 5 o'clock, we were invited to play in a friendly game of football (soccer) at a nearby field; Joab and I accepted.

The game was between the elders of the surrounding community, for whom Joab and I proudly played, and the youth. When we arrived, the area was completely filled with people. Everyone wanted to watch the *mzungu* play football. At first people seemed more anxious than excited. But as soon as I chased after the ball and slipped on the wet, muddy field, the game turned into a celebration. People were screaming and dancing after every play. I think that the youth won by two or three goals, but it was the exuberance felt by everyone that overshadowed the importance of the score. I remember Joab looking at me and saying with a smile, "You have made so many people happy." The celebration carried into the streets with people singing and dancing the whole way home. (cont., p. 9)

## 1496 Commemorative

**We are living in the 500th year since the Portuguese expulsion and forced conversion of its Jewish population (many of whom had sought refuge there from Spain four years earlier).**

**Kulanu welcomes ideas and resources that would enhance our efforts for outreach to an almost forgotten but still tangibly evident peoplehood. Please write to Kulanu or e-mail [jazeller@aol.com](mailto:jazeller@aol.com) to add your contribution.**

**We also encourage Kulanu supporters to get their communities involved in commemoration events**

## The Abayudaya and Their Non-Jewish Neighbors (Cont.)

At night, after the soccer game, Joab asked me if I noticed a few of the youth "having long beards and wearing pants rolled up to their knees." I shook my head. He said, "Well, here we call those who dress that way 'Tablique,' which means fundamentalist, like the Muslim fundamentalists who terrorize Israelis." I asked when this group materialized and he said, "It came about recently, when students from Uganda left here to study in the Middle East, especially in Iraq, where Saddam Hussein is. They return and maybe there they learn different ways. Right now, we all just laugh at them," he continued, "because it is not very threatening. However, that does not mean we are not wary of them."

At the moment, according to Joab, **the Tablique do not have any conflict with the Christians or the Jews. The struggle is internal, between the youth and their Islamic elders. In the youths' minds, the elders are not praying according to the Koran**, so it is their religious duty to demand changes in prayer and leadership. Joab and many of his Christian peers fear that if this is accomplished, there could be grave danger for both religions. In the past month alone, there have been three incidents in which the Muslim youth have not only disrupted their own Islamic services but have physically fought with their elders. **One time a youth beat up an elder and poured acid into his left eye." Joab said sadly, "Now that elder must wear a covering to hide the empty space."**

I thought that since the Jewish community was so small, the Abayudaya did not have much to fear; the real conflict would be between the Moslems and the Christians. Joab's opinion differed greatly. He said, "You know Sudan is just north of us and they are governed by *shariah* (Muslim law). So the Tablique are supported by many people in that country. **And when I speak to those who have studied in Iraq, they openly say they are taught that Jews are the most dangerous enemy. So, we are weary and our joking is a way to keep them out in the open."**

### Feeling Different

A week later, as we prepared for the following Shabbat eve and were about to leave for the synagogue, the rain started. We waited for a few minutes, but the illuminating flashes of lightning only increased. I decided to remain at home. I thought that my night would be spent in solitude, but Mama Debra (mother of Joab, Aaron, and Gershon), Rachel, and Enos walked in and sat down.

Enos was a 15-year-old boy who lived with the family during breaks in the school year. Joab treated Enos as a son, although, strangely, nobody was cognizant of his real parents. He was an extremely bright and confident boy.

Rachel was a year younger and the daughter of Joab from his first marriage. She was a very quiet girl; Joab attributed this to her parents' divorce when she was 10. In this society, children are the "property" of the father and usually remain with him, while the woman returns to her family. Rachel had not seen her mother since that day and did not even know where she lived. She seemed to express her despair vividly through her exceptional singing talent.

Mama Debra asked me about my family in America, and then she told me her family history. She said she had five sisters and five brothers. All her sisters have remained Jewish, while her brothers practice either Christianity or Islam. Although there was not a conflict with her brothers, she resented the fact that they failed to follow their father's wishes and remain Jewish. She concluded, "I do not like what my brothers did and I do not see them much. But I still speak to my sisters."

I then asked Enos and Rachel questions about their Jewish identity and about whether they faced harassment from their predominantly Christian schoolmates. Enos replied, "In the beginning, it was very difficult and I had few friends. But

friends." Enos paused and laughed, and then continued, "And, as they got to know me, they liked me. Only during religious class do I feel unhappy. When we study the New Testament and read that Jews killed Jesus, the students jokingly hit me and point at me like I did it. I feel unhappy but I also feel happy because I am different -- everyone knows that I am a Jew." He smiled as he looked toward Rachel who was sitting quietly by Mama Debra. I asked her the same question.

She said softly, "I only feel unhappy. I don't like feeling different from my classmates. And I don't know why I have to just because of religion. It makes me sad." She looked over to Mama Debra apparently for comfort.

"Well, Rachel, do you feel a certain pressure to be different?" I asked.

She shook her head and replied, "No, I like practicing Judaism very much but I don't like feeling different, especially during religion class."

Mama Debra intervened and added, "Nobody likes feeling different; it makes one unhappy." Rachel nodded. Enos smiled.

I was particularly fascinated by Enos's response when he expressed his ambivalence toward being a Jew. On the one hand, he experienced an uncomfortable isolation from his peers; on the other, he reveled in this difference. I found that to be true when I was growing up, too. I also went to a predominately Christian school and when a fight broke out between me and one of my peers, someone would usually cry, "Well you're not Catholic." At first I would be upset, and then I would feel a tremendous pride in being Jewish. When I saw Enos smile at the end of his statement, he reminded me of myself.

*(The second, concluding part, featuring traditional tribal circumcisions and an Abayudaya bris, will appear in the next newsletter.)*

## Meet Selina



Suffice it to say that the Abayudaya are very, very thankful and appreciative of the work Kulanu has done on behalf of the community. The synagogue grounds has a much more sanitary toilet facility because of your initiative and efforts selling *kippot*. And many, many children who would otherwise be out of school are schooling because of the Margolis-Shair Orphans Education Fund. There is a whole back-to-school movement, where older kids who never thought they would have a chance to go back to school are going back. As you probably know, when money is low the girls are dropped from school before the boys; from what I saw, a very large number of the beneficiaries were female.

Twelve-year-old Selina Mwamula (left) is one of the orphans being assisted by Kulanu's Margolis-Shair Abayudaya Orphan's Education Fund. A student in

standard 3 at Nabweya Primary School in Mbale District Uganda, Salina enjoys net ball (girls' basketball) and names Science as her favorite school subject. Each day she carries vegetables she grows into town to sell them for some money

# LETTERS TO KULANU

## FLASH: A NEW AND VERY SPECIAL SISTERHOOD

I'm the vice chairperson of Abayudaya Women's Association (AWA), which was formed shortly after the Kulanu delegation left Mbale in June 1995. AWA caters to women's affairs socially, economically and morally.

We meet as sisters once a week to combat family problems. We also learn to pray and sing in Hebrew and talk about various issues of ethical and moral value.

Economically, we have set up a heifer project near the synagogue where we have planted enough grass for a heifer. We are struggling to raise money in order to meet the cost of a heifer, which we expect to buy in September 1996. So far we have 25 registered members to support this project. We hope that the heifer will produce milk which will be sold to meet our economic problems.

On behalf of the Abayudaya women, I would like to thank Kulanu for your effort to come and visit us last June. Your coming to Mbale has made many of our dreams come true.

Personally, I would like to say that my life has been changed greatly and my love for Judaism has increased tremendously. The Shabbat candles you brought with you to Mbale have always been my best reminder to have an increased joy on Shabbat. It has become a part of my life to see that I light candles every Friday evening.

Naume Aron  
Mbale Uganda

*(Editor's note: Two members of the Kulanu delegation that visited Uganda last year have agreed to coordinate a "Friends of the Abayudaya Women's Association" (FAWA) through Kulanu to support the Ugandan women in their social, economic, and religious activities. Janet Kurland and Rhoda Posner, both caseworkers at Jewish Family Services in Baltimore, welcome inquiries from individual women and women's groups. Call Kurland at 410-466-9200, extension 266 or Posner at extension 230)*

## SEARCHING IN ECUADOR

It appears that I have stumbled upon the proper organization to direct my questions. Materials that I have read to date on the Internet are fascinating.

I became interested in Marrano history after inheriting a small number of histories from my father, who died this past year. I am interested in researching ancient Jewish life in Ecuador.

According to Cecil Roth's *History of Marranos*, in 1642 Rabbi Menasseh Ben Israel wrote a treatise about "Lost Tribes" living in a village outside of Quito.

On a recent trip to Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands, a vacation unrelated to the Marranos, my Ecuadorian Catholic guide told me this story when I asked him about Marranos in Ecuador:

He was brought up in Pucupu, a small town in the Andes. At certain times, Caucasian traders would come to town by horseback. They did their business and returned to their village of Shyris(?) They were called the "Portuguesa." They had a reputation for only marrying among their own people in their village.

I want to return to Ecuador to look for this village. A guide informs me that it can only be reached by a two-day horseback ride.

Does anyone have suggestions for readings, anecdotes, or other information about these people? Is anyone interested in joining me on such a trip next year? My e-mail address is 73554.1673@Compuserve.com

Edward P. Samilian

## Telugu Update

Shalom. Baruk HaShem. I thank Kulanu for the box of *chumashim* which is coming to us. I am preparing an article for the Kulanu newsletter and a recording of our songs, and I will send these as early as possible.

In our Kothareddypalem village there are only 35 families practicing Judaism since 1983 and there are 10 families in Prakasham District and only seven families in Krishna District whom I know personally. But I do not know others personally.

In our Kothareddypalem, some "Untouchable" families are also interested in joining with us, and they are regularly attending Shabbat services and all the festivals, but we are not allowing them to be members until they attend synagogue for one year and learn Hebrew prayers.

We do not know how other synagogues, e.g., in the USA, conduct their worship services. **We need a rabbi or other qualified leader to guide our community and to teach us. I would appreciate it if persons interested in volunteering to be our spiritual leader would contact me at the address below.**

Sadok Yacobi  
Bene Yacob Synagogue, K. R. Palem  
PO Chebrole 522 212 Guntur District  
A. P. India

## A TORAH TO GHANA

Brother Daniel Baiden visited us in Ghana/Wiewso in May 1996. He brought us a Torah, Sabbath and festival prayer books, a Hebrew book and prayer primer, a Pentateuch with haftorahs and a Jewish calendar. Many thanks for that brotherly love he came to show us.

Bader G. Ahenkorah  
Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana

*(Editor's note: Baiden, a Jew by birth, was visiting his extended family of 75 as well as Sefwi Wiawso, a Ghanaian village that has recently embraced Judaism. His story will appear in detail in the next newsletter.)*

## GRATITUDE TO NATHAN BLISS

*(Editor's note: The last newsletter contained a prayer by bar mitzvah Nathan Bliss for Incan Jews in Peru, to whom he donated prayer books and religious jewelry.)*

I want to thank Nathan Bliss in a very special way for his kindness. His mitzvah is an unspoken example of his generosity.

The siddurim that he sent this community -- you don't know the kind of joy by which they were received. He is a jewel that guides us in how to behave and give order to our daily prayers. May the Eternal reward him many times over for all the good that he does.

Prospero Jujan Quipuzcoa, vice president  
Religious Association Bnei Abraham  
Trujillo, Peru

## Abayudaya Kippa Sales

We Abayudaya are grateful to our American friends who have bought *kippot* made by us. I would like to tell you how we spent the \$600 we received from the sale of 60 kippot: \$300 reinvested into making more *kippot*, \$200 for a latrine pit and its set-up, and \$100 spent for postage and stationery.

We have sent Kulanu another shipment of *kippot*. We hope our friends will continue to give our modest efforts such a warm response.

Joab Keki  
Mbale, Uganda

*(Editor's note: See separate article on p. 2 on how to*



## LETTERS TO KULANU (Cont.)

### Mizoram Thanks

We unexpectedly received from Kulanu a box of *chumashim* and another box which contained several booklets of prayer and song, including many catalogues of civilization and philosophy. We are very grateful to you, Kulanu, for your deep concern of this modest community. The library of our synagogue, Tzshon Shalom, has become richer recently through Kulanu and Australian Jews.

May I add that we are happy and proud that the Red Sea Song of the Bnei Menashe is recited at Passover in the US. We will soon send you more of our ancient prayer songs translated into English.

We shall also send you as soon as we can an article for the Kulanu newsletter about our Jewish community.

*Gideon Rei*

Aizawl, Mizoram, India

### PROPERTY IN MANIPUR

While reading your esteemed journal, I come to know in full the activities and responsibilities being undertaken by Kulanu in searching and identifying the lost Jewish Tribes. For this I am thankful to our Lord Almighty.

We, being the Bnei Menashe Council N.E.I. Manipur, India, are encountering a lot of inconvenience in pursuing our faith, Judaism, because of the Christian-dominated villages in Manipur. This hampers us in performing our rites and rituals in the right and original form.

In view of these inconveniences and also as desired by members, during Chanukah Festival 1995, a plot of land measuring about four acres was bought for 40,000 Rupees (about \$1200). It was divided into 28 plots, out of which three plots are reserved for construction of a synagogue, school building and community hall, and the remaining 25 plots are kept for settlement purposes.

During March 1996, 10 households were scheduled to take up permanent settlement in the acquired land. A total of over 65 households are willing to settle in the acquired land, and to cope with the need we are planning to purchase more adjacent land, so that our settlement may be a compact one.

In doing so, we hope to be able to perform and profess our faith in accordance with *halacha* and for this we need your prayer and cooperation.

*Elitsur Haokip*

Imphal, Manipur, India

**(Editor's note: Kulanu is collecting funds for this project. Please earmark your tax-deductible donation to Kulanu for the synagogue complex in Manipur.)**

## A Mexican Chanukah (Cont.)

sister; adopted by your FATHER the Jewish people. All that concerns our people moves and saddens me when we celebrate commemorative dates; sad because of the Holocaust and other such stories. Never forget them. It gives me more desire to move forward with my conversion and go to live in Israel. Though emigrating would also mean suffering, it hurts my children more than me. I have spoken with them and I know they are in accord, even if we are peasants. I know that Israel is still not a paradise, but no matter. I love it as if it were my first homeland. I hope you can help us realize our most precious dream, the conversion and then going to Israel. I will never forget your faces. You have left joy in our hearts. Our greatest fortune is to have known you, you and other Jews who have shown us their love, warmth and especially humanity. For me, you were like two jewels that, for a moment, shined only for me. You made me feel like the luckiest woman in the whole world by infusing Beth Shmuel with your strength, vigor, affection, life, joy, and the good fortune to know that we are not alone!"

### Looking Back

I often think about Ignacio Castelan Estrada of Puebla. Perhaps he is a thorn in the sides of some rabbis or government officials who prefer to define our tribe in ways that would exclude him and his kind from the full Jewish franchise. But there is no doubt that his passionate energy, focused study, and boundless faith have created and nourished his congregants and enabled them to live full Jewish lives. The

surrounding non-Jewish community has also benefited often by his volunteer school where he and his family tutored all who came, helping to erase local illiteracy.

And I often think about Saul Ruiseco's mother in Veracruz, whose eyes had met mine in recognition of a shared past.

My own mission is to sing from and about the feminine aspect of the deity in hopes that contemporary Judaism will honor generations of unnamed, largely forgotten Jewish women. I hope my small contribution joins others with this intention. I pray this work will flow into a larger stream, providing much needed land-fill for some of Torah's white spaces and increasing future participation for all Jews within a balanced, inclusive, fulfilling future.

According to the Zohar creation myth, kindred spirits recognize embers of Self in the broken fragments of other vessels encountered along life's journey. To fulfill our life's personal purpose we must recognize and then make links with these spirits from our own talents, our own grain. To fulfill our spiritual purpose we must in some way further connect our own fulfillment with our Tribe's destiny. With this wisdom, we act for ourselves, but not only for ourselves. In this way, Ignacio's shining soul in Puebla and Saul's Jewish mother in Veracruz have everything to do with all of us. One destiny for all. *Kulanu*.

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### SUPPORTER APPLICATION

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

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



## Internet Notes

~ Kulanu's listserv on the Internet is located at Kulanu-L@ube.ubalt.edu. Various inquiries and discussions about Marrano ancestry, requests for scholarly sources, and conversion (as well as reprints of some newsletter articles) make for fascinating reading.

~ You are invited to join a distribution list from the Kulanu listserv where the sole purpose will be to shmooz about anything in particular, or nothing in particular, jokes included. If you would like to join, send David Turetsky e-mail at dturetsky@ubmail.ubalt.edu.

~ Kulanu's Web site now has a link to an extensive list of over 400 Jewish and Israel related resources gathered from information disseminated over time by Matthew Album of A-Z Jewish & Israel Related Resources, based on an ORT server. For those who wish to link the listing (which is hot-linked to all of the individual resources) to their own home page, the URL is <http://www.ubalt.edu/www/kulanu/sources.html>

~ The award-winning World Wide Web site of the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry features indepth reports on the history and current status of the Ethiopian Jewish community. <http://www.cais.com/nacoej>

~ There is a new Web site that includes information about the subject of conversion to Judaism, including material about all movements in Judaism. The URL is: <http://members.tripod.com/~epst>

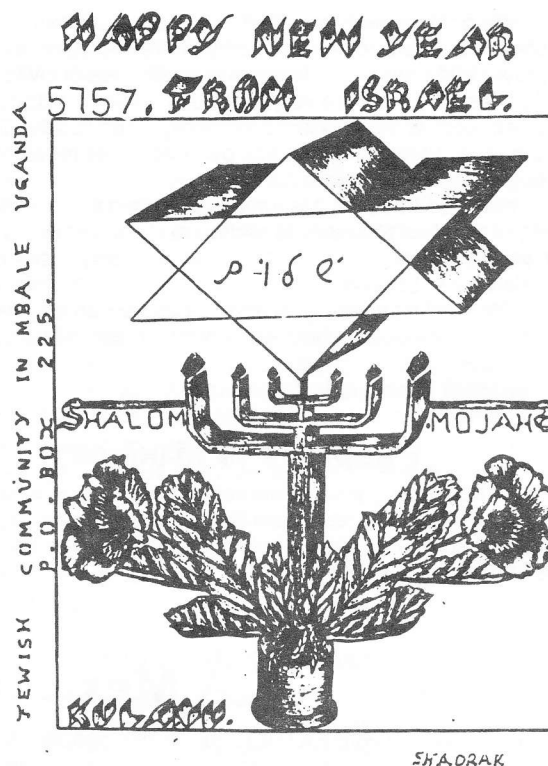
~ World Wide Web maven Matt Meyer invites Web-surfing Kulanu supporters to check out the latest Abayudaya pages at

<http://pubweb.acns.nwu.edu/~msm828/abayudaya.html>.

Yasher koach to Matt for a most impressive job!

~ Those interested in trying to recover a family's history may wish to consult the American Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies by e-mail: [info@avotaynu.com](mailto:info@avotaynu.com)

~ A Jewish cemetery database lists 13,500 Jewish cemeteries in 85 countries and 50 American states. The list is located at <http://www.jewishgen.org>



A Rosh Hashana greeting from Abayudaya artist Israel Ben Shadrak.

Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is One

שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל, יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ, יְיָ אֶחָד

聽著，以色列。主是我們的上帝。主是獨一無二。

(Chinese translation of the Sh'ma prayer by Denise Bresler. Copies of it were brought to descendants of the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng on a recent visit by American Jews. A detailed story will appear in the next newsletter.)

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Edited by Karen Primack

## Kulanu

Helping Lost Jewish Communities

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