

Kulanu



Helping Lost Jewish Communities

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A Homeless Marrano Hero

Nationally renowned New Mexican folk artist Juan Sandoval, 58, has come out of the Marrano closet. "A Jewish Soul always comes home; mine came home the day I discovered I was a Jew," he said.

After a 10-year "journey of discovery," the artist, whose famed Native American storytellers were in the Smithsonian Institution, celebrated a "Service of Return" with two others as they formally converted to Judaism in Phoenix.

Rabbi Albert Plotkin noted, "I have officiated at about 1000 conversions, but I never experienced the depth of commitment in such a service in my whole rabbinic career. They didn't just go through the formalities; they said the prayers with the full meaning of their hearts. They clutched the Torah as they passed it to the others."

Sandoval is a descendant of Sephardic Jews of Spain who were forced to convert to Catholicism during the Inquisition but continued to practice Judaism in secret. During the past decade, as he pieced together clues from his past (Jewish headstones in a New Mexico cemetery, Jewish-based family traditions), his folk art began to change; he began to sculpt Jewish storytellers out of the red New Mexican clay. *(cont., p. 9)*

The Ghanaian Village That Wants To Be Jewish

By Daniel Baiden with Robert H. Lande

For the last several years there have been scattered reports that a group of about 150 people in the village of Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana, has embraced Judaism. As anyone with even a little knowledge of Jewish history knows, group conversions to Judaism are rare. For anyone proud to be Jewish, this Ghanaian event is therefore intriguing. For me, however, news of this group had singular importance. This is because I am a Jew who was born in Ghana.

I was born in 1950, to Jewish parents. My family's oral history says that our ancestors are from Ethiopia, and that our family originally had come from Israel. As a child I had heard many times that we were part of one of the Ten "Lost" Tribes of Israel. Like many Ethiopians, we moved a lot. Hundreds of years ago, to flee conquerors of Ethiopia, my ancestors migrated west, eventually settling in Ghana. My extended family in Ghana (including cousins) is quite large -- at least 75 people. Until recently, I thought we were the only ones in Ghana with a tie to Judaism. When I heard through Kulanu about the village of Sefwi Wiawso I was sure that my family must somehow be responsible for the village's turn towards our faith.

I grew up always aware of my Jewish heritage. My father, Emmanuel, had learned much about modern Judaism from a friend, Rabbi Weiss, a Polish refugee who lived in Ghana in the late 1940s and early 1950s. My father learned some Hebrew from Rabbi Weiss and taught his children about Judaism as best as he could under the circumstances. We observed the Jewish holidays and, while we did not have weekly services, we did avoid cooking or other work on Shabbat. My family possesses various Jewish ritual objects that are quite old, including *tallitot*, Stars of *(cont., p. 10)*

Your Only Meeting Notice! Mark Your Calendar NOW!

The next Kulanu meeting will be held 1-5 pm on April 13 at the party room of The Pavilion, 5901 Montrose Rd., Rockville, Maryland, at the northwest corner of Rockville Pike and Montrose Rd. Ample parking can be found at the Sym's lot, just across Montrose Rd. The meeting will feature a vegetarian potluck -- please bring a dish or dessert to share!

RABBI DISCUSSES ABAYUDAYA

"They Sometimes Seem More Jewish Than My Own Family"

By Karen Primack

He's a British-born hasidic rabbi who is currently Hillel Foundation director in Melbourne, Australia, but his sights are set on Uganda. At an impromptu gathering of Kulanu supporters in Maryland in December, Rabbi J. Hershy Worch explained:

"It was four years ago. I was a rabbi in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, and I was asked to give a talk at Brown University about Yom Kippur. Before I left there, somebody gave me a tape and said, 'Listen to this. It's the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda.' So I put the cassette in a pocket and then put it away, and there was never time to listen to it until it was Purim. And I said, 'Now is the time!' And I put the tape on and it played for a week without stopping.

"Anyone who has heard the music of the Abayudaya will know it is quite out of the ordinary."

Worch immediately started a correspondence with these practicing Jews of a Bantu tribe, and finally visited them in their villages near Mbale, Uganda, in August 1995. (Kulanu newsletters have carried stories about the community continuously since 1995.) He now hopes to return with his family to teach for several months. The Abayudaya started to practice *(cont., p. 11)*



Rabbi J. Hershy Worch

A Convert's Story...

by Dennis Hall

In August I became a convert to Judaism. It wasn't until last year that I discovered by accident that my mother's maternal grandfather was a Jew. This had, apparently, been a family secret. I do not fully understand why honoring him with my conversion has taken on so much importance for me, but it has. Perhaps it is because my favorite person in the world is my grandmother. She is the one person who has never failed me. And for her, that person was her father, a German Jew whose heritage was not talked about because of local prejudice in their South Dakota town.

Recently we discovered that my wife Rosi's maiden name, Rodriguez, is of Sephardic origin. She is interested in perpetuating the tradition -- so our children, when we have them, will be Jewish.

We are taking it slowly, a little bit more each week. Over the last year we have made our kitchen dairy, and now I am beginning to learn the *shacharis*, *mincha* and *maariv* prayer services. It is a beautiful tradition. But I'm getting too far ahead...

In my teen years I studied the New Testament until I could quote and cross-reference from it like Jewish scholars do *pilpul* with the Talmud. But I was unable to pin down any of the quotations from *Tanach* in the Greek scriptures of the Christians unless they were taken from their context.

During a high school student exchange year in Mexico City, I discovered the writings of Bertrand Russell, read of the atrocities in Auschwitz, and pored over tales of emergency room near-death episodes compiled by Dr. Raymond Moody. It is uncanny how similar the anecdotes from the clinically resuscitated are to Jewish mystical cosmology. For example, both conceive of a pre-life existence for the soul and of the life experience as a temporary, necessary hardship to transform -- and better -- ourselves and the world around us.

In the beginning of my quest, I contacted 15 rabbis by e-mail to inquire, "Am I a Jew?" Mostly I received polite messages of "No, now go away," not in those words, of course.

Locally (I live in Portland, Oregon), there were no rabbis willing to let me study library books to prepare for conversion. I was supposed to purchase a \$60 set of books, then purchase a \$200 course, then be discouraged three times by the rabbi of the *shul* I would choose, then undergo a year of attending synagogue, pay some fees for the *mikveh* and ceremony, then, finally, join the synagogue.

As for the one hasidic rabbi in town, I contacted him by e-mail and he was very nice until he discovered I was a *goy* seeking conversion. Even today he will not answer any e-mail or phone calls about the schedule of services and Talmud study there. Hearing of the obstacles from all the local rabbis was an affront in my wife's eyes.

Of the 15 rabbis I contacted, one was supportive. I met this rabbi, who happens to be from my old neighborhood in Los Angeles, and he put me through a course on Judaism via e-mail. Later we had the conversion at Temple Emet there.

I am sure readers are aware that before Jews were targeted for heavy persecution by the Roman Empire, and Christians began avoiding the persecution by saying they did not belong to a Jewish sect, there was no discouragement against conversions to Judaism.

So why all of the rejection? We are not looking for handouts, and I don't think we're riff-raff. My wife Rosi and I have been happily married for five years, and are beginning plans for children. We come from good families. Over the years my father has become a very successful businessman, making himself a millionaire with his fruit-processing company in California. I have graduated from UCLA with a good grade-point average in my field (psycholinguistics); Rosi has a degree in media communications and has worked as a journalist.

My wife and I are on close terms with my father, her parents, and my mother, who is proud of my conversion. I'm not saying

...and A Marrano's Search

By Gilvanci ben Shmuel Portillo

(Editor's note: The author met Kulanu rabbinic advisor Jacques Cukierkorn in Natal in October and is currently studying for conversion with him via the Internet.)

Mijores saludos! Schalom!

My father's family is from Amsterdam, Holland. They came to Brazil in 1857, first to the state of Pernambuco and then to the south of the Maranhao state. Their assets were confiscated by the Catholic Church. Despite losing everything they had, they lived observing Judaism for some time. My grandfather was like a rabbi; he led the religious services and prepared foods to be kosher, and my grandmother presided over the social and celebration aspects of the family.

My mother's family is from Barcelona, Spain. They also came to Brazil in the middle of the past century, going first to the south of Ceara state and then to the south of Maranhao state, where my mother, as a child, was promised in marriage to my father. They also observed Jewish practices. My maternal grandmother washed herself and changed her clothes after visiting a cemetery. When she cooked chicken, she never wrung its neck, but always decapitated it and interred its blood. When people began to scoff at and persecute her, she bought some Christian images to show that she was now a Christian. This situation was unbearable for my grandfather, and they began to practice Judaism in secret until 15 years ago.

I have three older brothers, but only the oldest (age 30) had a *bris*, performed by my grandfather. Our grandfather was very sick at the time of the birth of my next brother, four years later, and had died by the time my third brother and I were born; there was no one else to make a *bris* for us. But our grandmother continued to observe Judaism. I will never forget gathering with the family as she kindled some candles every Friday before the sun went down. We didn't know what that meant. After she died, we lost almost all Judaic practices.

What is amazing to me is that no one imagined we were Jews, despite the family's observance of many traditions. Even today, the oldest members of our family speak with a strong accent, and others still speak Ladino.

Some of our relatives converted to Christianity and abandoned Judaism. Even though he went to church, my father continued to maintain a Jewish identity in secret. He never spoke the name of Jesus, and when he prayed he always referred to God as "Baruch Atah Adonai, God of Abraham, Itzhak and Yaacov." He endowed us with a great love for Eretz Israel and he was very happy when he came by an edition of the Torah and could finally use his kippah. Before this, he used the Christian Bible, from which he had cut out the New Testament.

Since then, he started to name us again by our Jewish names -- Klein, Iosef, Iacov and Shmuel. There were two criminal fires against my grandparents' home, and all their old books were burned. Many people tried in vain to convert my grandmother's sisters to Christianity.

One of several wishes of my grandmother was to see all her family observing Judaism. When I was 11, I thought this so strange that I started to research it. Six years later, I concluded that my family was a Jewish family. I found out that the strange words my grandmother spoke were Hebrew and that some funny expressions and terms were Ladino.

In 1990 I gathered my family together and reported on the results of my research. I pressed my parents and some relatives to tell me the truth, and they confirmed my conclusions. We were Jews, but to escape persecution and to avoid many other problems, the family had hidden this identity. Since then, we have been in the process of returning to our roots.

I am a 23-year-old accountant, and I live with my brother in Goiania, Brazil. We're studying Hebrew and we try to observe

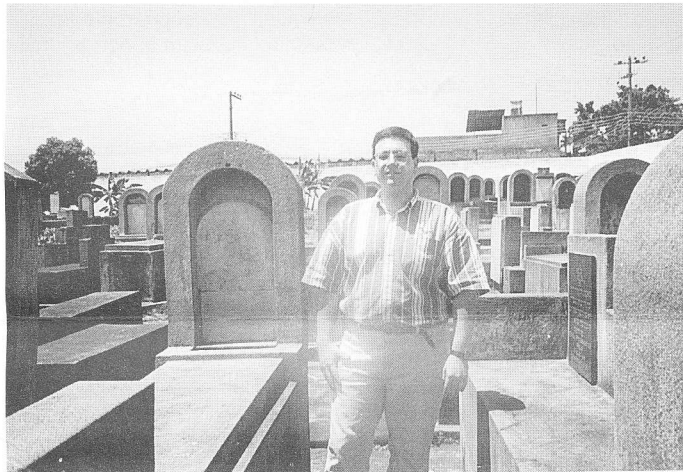
Jewish Highlights of Brazil – A Memorable Trip

By Rabbi Jacques and Denisse Cukierkorn

Last October we were privileged to lead a wonderful trip to visit the major Jewish and Crypto-Jewish sites of Brazil. This trip was the first major endeavor conducted jointly by Kulanu and our sister organization, the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies. The itinerary was carefully designed by Jacques, and was mostly based on his rabbinical thesis research about Brazilian Marranos (to be discussed in a future newsletter).

The 22 participants came from the USA, Canada and France. Our arrival point in Brazil was Jacques' native city, Sao Paulo. There we visited several Jewish communal institutions, such as UNIBES, a Jewish family service organization; CIP, the largest congregation in Latin America; Hospital Israelita Albert Einstein, the largest and best in Brazil; the Jewish country club "A Hebraica"; and the Jewish neighborhood of Bom Retiro. In Sao Paulo we also met and were briefed about the Marrano phenomenon in Brazil by journalist Helio Daniel Cordeiro, a long time Kulanu associate. Cordeiro maintains in association with Kulanu a Web page that focuses on Marrano issues, as well as a publication called "Seph@rad."

From Sao Paulo we went to Rio de Janeiro, where we visited a poorly known resting place for approximately 800 Jews who were



Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn at Jewish cemetery for prostitutes and pimps in Rio de Janeiro.

buried separately from the rest of the Jewish community -- prostitutes and their pimps. The Cemiterio Israelita do Inhauma is the only remaining sign of their self-help organization. (Recently a book -- *Baile de Mascaras* by Beatriz Kushnir -- was published in Brazil on the history of the flesh trade and the women's struggle to keep a Jewish identity in spite of their status.) We also visited the Jewish day school and the oldest synagogue in Rio. Afterwards we had a touching Kabbalat Shabbat at the Sheraton Hotel led by one of the trip's participants, Rabbi Albert Plotkin.

After a three-hour flight to Manaus, in the heart of the Amazonian Rain Forest, we were received by our guide (the only Jewish one in town) Marco, who was wearing a T-shirt with Hebrew on it. We had a city tour of Manaus, including the Jewish cemetery and the tomb of the famous Rabbi Solomon Moyal, located in the Municipal Cemetery of St. John the Baptist. Soon after his burial, Rabbi Moyal's tomb became a shrine for the Roman Catholics of the city, who believe he is a saint and refer to him as Santo Rabbino. They believe he performs miracles for those who pray to him and when they visit his grave they burn candles and place pebbles on his tombstone. Efforts to move the rabbi's remains to a Jewish cemetery resulted in objections and refusals by the Catholics. No one seemed to know why the Catholics consider Rabbi Moyal a miracle worker.

Next day we delighted in the sounds and sights of the rain forest as we went on a cruise of the Amazon River. Before

Manaus, where we were shown the oldest Torah in Latin America. The Moroccans settled along 1500 miles of the Amazon and its tributaries beginning in the 1820s. They have been steadfast under very adverse conditions to teach their children Jewish rituals and traditions and to insure that their children passed those traditions to the succeeding generations. We met one Marco Lima, whose grandfather came to Brazil from Morocco in 1887. After marrying in Belem, he and his bride moved to Manaus and had seven children, one of whom was Marco's mother. His mother, over family objections, married a young man from a Jewish-Portuguese family which had settled on the Amazon several generations before but had intermarried with the local population. Marco's grandmother came to live with and teach Judaism to all of their 12 children when they reached school age.

Belem is the site of the oldest synagogue on the continent. Temple Shaar HaShamaym was founded by Moroccan immigrants who came to Brazil in the middle of the last century. They still preserve their traditions and culture to this day. We also had the opportunity of visiting their three cemeteries.

Recife, our next stop, is the place where the first Jewish community was organized on the continent. A sign on a building on Bom Jesus Street (previously known as Jews' Street) points to (cont., p. 6)

The Menashe Need Our Help Now!

By Jack Zeller

(The Bnei Menashe, who come from northeastern India, are thought to be descendants of the Ten Lost Tribes, who were exiled from Israel by the Assyrians in 722 B.C.E. Many Menashe are rediscovering their roots and returning to Judaism. Some 300 have come to Israel to study and have been converted.)

I have been in recent contact with some of the Bnei Menashe in Israel and was asked if I could somehow find a way to make the *Sachnut* (the Jewish Agency) have a more sympathetic attitude to the Bnei Menashe, either on their way to Israel or when they arrive.

I have been able to intervene with a very satisfactory outcome with ORT in India about hospitality for the Bnei Menashe when they await their plane for Israel. I think this success raises the question as to whether we can intercede more often, and hopefully with success, with the Jewish Agency. Left to their own devices, the Jewish Agency will not be sympathetic. But, with some pressure from some Federations, they could change.

Therefore, I am requesting that any of our supporters who are active in the Federation, or have friends or relatives who are active, to approach them about the Bnei Menashe. I will be pleased to describe a group of specifics.

As you all know, the family members of Russians who are not Jewish are not denied help by the Jewish Agency even if they have no intention to convert to Judaism. Therefore, the Bnei Menashe, who are practicing Judaism and who have enrolled in programs in preparation for conversion, are warranted similar consideration. I do not mean to imply that the non-Jewish spouses and children of Russians should not get support since to do that might entice conversion for the sake of benefits. I am not against current policy. I simply want it applied intelligently and fairly. All the new *olim* from the Bnei Menashe are relatives of those already in Israel and converted to Judaism.

Anyone with help, ideas, leads, connections, or simply the energy to work on this is welcome to call me at home, evenings, at 301-681-5679 or e-mail me at jazeller@aol.com.

My Capeverdean Genealogical Account

By Donald Wahnnon

(Editor's note: Despite the absence of halachic Judaism, Jewish identity can remain both intense and intact!)

In a search for my roots, mainly those of Jewish lineage, I dug into my family records dating back five generations (including an 1891 letter I just became aware of). I also consulted specialized books dealing primarily with Jews of Cape Verde, Portugal, Morocco and Gibraltar, pamphlets, encyclopedias, and a variety of articles from various sources. I would like to point out one article by Hyman J. Gampeas in a publication from the Yeshiva University of New York dealing with name derivations commonly found among Sephardic Jews. It was from that article that I learned that the names WAHNON and its related form WAHNONO, common among Sephardic Jews, are of Berber origin.

This assertion makes sense if we note that the Berbers have lived in North Africa, particularly in northern Morocco, since the earliest recorded time. References to them date from 3000 B.C.E. and occur frequently in ancient Egyptian, Greek and Roman sources. Berbers inhabited the coast of North Africa until the seventh century C.E., when the Arabs conquered North Africa and drove many Berber tribes inland to the Atlas Mountains.

My dear cousin and well known Capeverdean writer, Luis Romano, of Jewish ancestry from his mother's side, who in the past lived in Morocco, is now living in Natal in the northeastern part of Brazil. He recounts in a publication issued by the University of Rio Grande de Norte a visit he made to Sefru, in the slopes of the Atlas Mountains, of an entirely Jewish city.

However, I have recently learned that my family lived in Spain and Portugal long before settling in North Africa. They lived in Spain until 800 C.E., when they were expelled with other Jews, and lived in Portugal until they had to flee during the Inquisition. They then apparently went to Morocco.

My direct WAHNON ancestors lived in Tetuan, a city and port in the north of Morocco, under the name of GUANANO, and its other variations, WAHNONO, WANONO, and WAHNON. (Two other variations of this name were used among Jews from Morocco, the Berber-Phoenician OHNONA and the Hebraic form of BEN HANUN.)

JACOB GUANANO was born in Tetuan in 1700. His son HAIM GUANANO, born in Tetuan in 1734, immigrated in 1751 to Gibraltar, where he married BELIDA (daughter of Solomon) and had several children, among whom JACOB GUANANO (II) (or WAHNONO or WAHNON) was born in the year 1769.

JACOB married twice, his second wife being SIMY. This marriage took place in the year 1784 in Tetuan, Morocco. They moved back to Gibraltar, where they had several children, including JONAS WAHNON, my great-great-grandfather, who was born in Gibraltar in 1812 and was the first WAHNON to emigrate to the Cape Verde Islands.

According to my sources, a whole colony of Jews had already settled in the Islands in the 16th century; they had been persecuted in their native Portugal, despite the opposition of Philip III of Spain, the King of Portugal, which was under Spanish occupation. Other Jews arrived from Morocco towards the 19th century.

The Government of the Kingdom of Portugal, in an effort to attract Jews back to Portugal, may have sent emissaries to Gibraltar. JONAS was one of the Cape Verde bound travelers. His wife did not want to accompany him, but he was joined in 1860 by his son ISAAC, my great-grandfather, who was born in Gibraltar in 1843. JONAS established himself in the Island of S. Antao, where he was engaged in agriculture.

In S. Antao, with his Capeverdean wife, JONAS had three more sons and a daughter, whose names were FERNANDO, born in 1868, VERISSIMO, born in 1875, JORGE, born in 1878, and MERIMA. Of these four, I was fortunate to have known FERNANDO, a prosperous farmer and skilled law practitioner, and JORGE, who would become a skilled seaman, sometimes

England. FERNANDO died in S. Antao at the age of 79 and JORGE at the age of 78. As to their father and my great-great-grandfather JONAS, he left Cape Verde for Portugal, where he died in 1895.

JONAS's first son, ISAAC, my great-grandfather, settled in the island of S. Vicente, where Mindelo harbour became a busy refueling port for the ships traveling between Europe, South America, and Africa. As the owner of the only hotel and restaurant on the island, he had the privilege of hosting some famous people, including Prince Albert of Belgium and John Rockefeller.

ISAAC was married to Rachel Levy Bentubo, also from Gibraltar. It was in S. Vicente that ISAAC and RACHEL started a family that grew to 14 children: 11 females and three males. I was fortunate enough to have known seven of these children, including JACOB (III), my grandfather, as well as JAIME, my granduncle and maternal grandfather of Carlos Alberto Wahnnon Veiga, current Prime-Minister of Cape Verde. It is said that ISAAC was a great benefactor and always ready to help those in need, and that it was his custom to personally distribute food and sometimes money to the needy, on a daily basis. He died in 1915 on the island of S. Vincente at the age of 72.



Family of Isaac Wahnnon, the author's great-grandfather, in 1899 in Mindelo, S. Vicente, Cape Verde Islands.

JACOB (III), my grandfather, was the youngest of ISAAC's and RACHEL's three sons. He was born on the island of S. Vicente in the year of 1884 and died in Lisbon in 1968 at the age of 84. He started working at the young age of 14, first as a ship-chandler assistant and later as a telegraphist for an English submarine cable station based in Mindelo, S. Vicente. With the passage of time he would become a sophisticated and widely-traveled businessman. He was a very popular man, with a passion for sports in general, having excelled in cricket and boxing. It is said boxing was introduced into S. Vicente by him. I was very fortunate to have known him, and I still remember his always impressive and very dominant presence.

At the age of 20, he had a relationship with a Capeverdean girl, my dear grandmother, AMELIA JESUS MONTEIRO, and fathered a son who was named JONAS (II), my father. Subsequently, still in S. Vicente, JACOB would marry twice, the last time in 1921. Five more children were added from these two marriages: EDNA, who died at an early age, ROLAND, EDGARD, DAVID, and JOEL, my uncles.

JONAS, my father, was born in 1903 in Mindelo, S. Vicente. At 14 he dropped out of school and went to take care of his father's business in then Portuguese Guinea in West Africa. At 20 he returned to Cape Verde, and soon after he fathered a daughter, EDNA (II), the oldest of my sisters. About this time he started his own business in S. Vicente in the field of import-export. In 1922, upon the death of his father, he

A Perfect Family Vacation -- Visiting the Abayudaya

By Lucy Y. Steinitz

As a Jewish communal professional, I often confront questions of Jewish survival and continuity. Given an intermarriage rate among American Jews that now exceeds 50 percent, and synagogue attendance at an all-time low, it is easy to feel discouraged about our collective future.

But I am no longer the pessimist. Jewish renewal is alive and well in many parts of the globe, in ways that are creative and inspirational. Everyone I know who has been on a Kulanu visit echoes the same conclusion: When you spend time with people in some unbelievably out-of-the-way place who want desperately to be Jewish and who willingly risk their safety and livelihood to do so, then you have to think that Judaism has a lot going for it. And that maybe -- just maybe -- it is worth a greater investment on the part of those of us for whom accessing Jewish resources and community life is relatively easy.

I have felt this way before, when I listened to my parents tell how they survived the Holocaust, or when I traveled over a period of five years to Poland, Ukraine, Russia, and the emerging Central Asian Republic of Kazakhstan, where I repeatedly witnessed the sacrifices which remnant Jews in these countries had to make in order to reclaim bits of their lost heritage, religion, and language.



Author (holding lantern) presents Torah in Uganda.

But nowhere have I felt this more keenly than in the foothills of Mount Elgon, in the isolated villages of Eastern Uganda. Here I met the Abuyadaya, a community of 500 would-be Jewish subsistence farmers -- visiting them twice in fact, because I was so moved the first time (in 1995) that I returned with my family a year later to present the community with a Torah on behalf of Kulanu. In our own Jewish observance back home, we often refer to the weeks we spent with this community, whose abiding faith, love of learning, strength of leadership, and sense of *Klal Yisrael* to Jews the world over touched us far more deeply than any Jewish experience we have had as a family in the United States or elsewhere.

The Torah we brought originally comes from the Conservative-affiliated Congregation Beth Abraham in Auburn, Maine. When members of this synaogue first heard about the Abuyadaya, they felt a connection as one small, isolated Jewish community to another. Kulanu agreed to lend the Sefer Torah to the community, pending their formal conversion.

Joab Jonadab Keki, chairman of the Abayudaya community, met us at the airport at Entebbe to accompany us back to the Abuyadaya villages. He told us that our children, Elana and David (ages ten and eight), were the first non-African youngsters to ever visit this part of Uganda. Initially, their novelty guaranteed a large audience of native children who stared constantly, and then imitated virtually everything they did. It took a soccer ball -- made from old string, bits of torn bicycle tires, and discarded plastic bags -- to finally break the ice. Suddenly, 20 children could be seen playing together, ours in the thick of things, chasing through fields and climbing up trees. With English emphasized as the local

fairly well with each other. Thus, within two days of our arrival, we discovered David in a "hide-out" surreptitiously munching raw sugar cane with two or three other boys, while Elana took to babysitting some of the younger children, for whom she invented various games using fruit pits and small sticks as bowling pins and round marbles.

The Abayudaya say that their religion is evolving. Substitutes and make-do practices are freely acknowledged. "Sometimes we have to do the best we can, even though we know it's not the best way," primary school teacher Uri Katula offered. For example, the Abayudaya make *kiddush*, the blessing over wine, using banana beer, since neither wine nor grape juice is available. Similarly, they greet Rosh Hashanah with bananas dipped in honey to ensure a sweet new year, rather than the apples-and-honey familiar in the West. For Passover, the Abayudaya use chapati -- a flat Indian style bread, that, like matzoh, can be made from start to finish in less than 18 minutes.

Between our first and second visits, the Abayudaya women formed their own Women's Association. Naomi Aaron, the president, attributes as impetus the impromptu Shabbat afternoon gathering of women a year before, with visiting Kulanu members Janet Kurland, Rhoda Posner, and me. "Last year, you taught us that Judaism values women who take a leadership role in their community," she explained shyly. "So we met together for several months to decide what we could do. Then one of our members attended an agricultural course on raising milk-cows, to help our own families and to sell the milk for income. So we decided to start a Heifer Project, for which we started crocheting handicrafts to make money in order to buy the cow." In the course of four months, the Abayudaya Women's Association raised about \$272, just over a third of what they need to purchase a good heifer.

Much like we did during our first visit over Shabbat, I met again with these women under a cluster of trees. I recalled how, during my first visit, they had explained how much they like being Abayudaya because, unlike their Christian and Moslem neighbors, on the Jewish Sabbath they really have a day of rest. "We don't even have to carry water up from the stream or gather firewood to cook food," they emphasized over and over again. Also, they explained that Abayudaya women are permitted to eat chicken, which is considered such a delicacy among their non-Abayudaya neighbors that it is generally reserved for the men. "This shows you how much Judaism values women," offered Esther, age 17. "My closest friend at school sees this, and now she wants to become Abayudaya, too."

Later in the afternoon, my husband and I spoke with a group of men and women together. They talked about the Messianic Age, about the message of healing and re-birth in the morning *Modeh Ani* prayer, and about their eagerness to become recognized as a part of world Jewry. What about Zionism?, we asked. Gershom Sizomu answered quickly that he would love to go Israel to study for the rabbinate, if that were possible. Some of the other young people also expressed interest, but not to live there permanently. "We are Ugandans," the schoolteacher Uri explained. "This is our home." Joab continued, "Many of us would like to visit Israel, but we have heard that Israel has many new immigrants for whom it is often very difficult. If ever we were to go there to live, our community would be divided and we couldn't work the land (as farmers) like we do here."

But how can the community sustain itself here, we wondered, with only 500 members? Finding suitable marriage partners is a problem, they admitted. As we spoke, Joab's youngest brother, 19-year-old Seth, listened quietly. The next morning he approached us. "I have a solution to this problem of marriage," he said, weighing every word. "I would like to wait until your daughter, Elana, is older and then I would like to marry her."

I'm sure he could read the stunned look on my face. I took a deep breath before answering. "If that time comes, I would be honored to have you as a son-in-law," I said. "But

My Capeverdean Genealogical Account (Cont.)

(from p. 4)

of Portuguese ancestry, and a year later they were married. From this marriage seven children were born, all in Mindelo, S. Vicente: myself, my brothers Eurico, Aguinaldo, and Antonio, and my sisters Dinora, Maria Alice, and Judith. I was the second of these children; Eurico and Antonio have both passed away.

In the late '30s, my father started a bakery business to which, a few years later, were added very successful biscuit and pasta industries.

My father was a very bright and honest man, a man of unquestionable integrity. It was this characteristic, together with his love for his country, that would gain him the respect of everyone in his native S. Vicente. Like his father JACOB, he was an avid sportsman, having excelled in tennis, cricket and athletics. He was the co-founder and president of the top soccer club as well as the Tennis Club of Mindelo. He was a Grand Master of the Portuguese Masonic Order, Capeverdean Lodge, which became extinct during the Salazar regime. He also served as president of the local business association. At one point during the Portuguese rule he was drafted by the then Governor of Cape Verde for a position in the Government Council. It was during his tenure on the Government Council that his unequivocal dedication for Cape Verde would become more evident, not without risks, since the struggle for independence had already started in neighboring Guinea.

For strictly family reasons my father sold his business in Cape Verde and moved to Brazil, where two of my brothers and I were already living, hoping to gather and be near all his family. However, soon after his arrival in Brazil I was informed by the American consulate in S. Paolo that my petition to immigrate to the United States had been approved, and soon after I was bound for the country of my dreams. A few years later, my father and mother and other members of my family followed.

My father was always very proud of his Jewish ancestry and always talked about Israel and her people with great admiration. He was also a fervent admirer and friend of the United States of America, having become an American citizen as soon as he completed the required time of residence. He passed away at the age of 90 in Randolph, Massachusetts, where he lived with his wife of 66 years, my dear mother ALICE.

In August 1994, soon after his death, the City of Mindelo in S. Vicente, in recognition of his demonstrated dedication, altruism, and faith in the destiny of Cape Verde, honored him by naming a street in Mindelo after him.

As for myself, I am 66 years of age, having been born in Mindelo, S. Vicente, Cape Verde Islands, in the year of 1929. I attended high school in S. Vicente, but, like my father, had to drop out to help in the family business. At the age of 21, I married MARIA FERNANDA, nee OLIVEIRA FERRO, a Capeverdean woman of Portuguese ancestry. From this marriage four children were born, three girls and one boy -- GLORIA, FERNANDA, JAIME, Capeverdean born, and SUSANA, Brazilian born.

In Brazil I went back to school, working during the day and studying at night. I completed two technical courses, one in Industrial Engineering and another in Machining Technology, which helped in my search for a job upon my arrival in the United States in 1966.

My professional career in the United States exceeded my expectations. From time study engineer as my first job, I was promoted to industrial engineer and later to senior industrial engineer, a position which I held until my retirement in 1990. I became a citizen of the United States in 1972.

And that is a synopsis of the Capeverdean branch of the WAHNON family as I was able to trace it back to its Berber-Jewish ancestry of Tetuan. It goes back eight generations. If we count my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, 11

Jewish Highlights Of Brazil (Cont.)

(from p. 3)

the fact that the synagogue once stood there. We toured Olinda, where we visited the Terreiro do Pai Edu, a worship site for Brazilian Afro religions. When the Africans were brought to Brazil as slaves, they were forbidden to practice their own religion, so they managed to practice a form of "crypto" religion, in which they would worship Catholic saints while ascribing to them the characteristics of their African gods (another kind of Marrano phenomenon!) We also visited the local synagogue and community center. Shabbat services were held that Friday night facing the ocean, at our hotel.

In Recife we also met with Isaac Assoudry, a learned and religious Jew married to a Marrano, who for five years has been teaching a class for 20 Marranos who wish to return to Judaism. Among the 20, whose complexions range from blond to chocolate, some come for considerable distances; these students include two lawyers and a judge. The class is followed by a meal, grace after meals, songs sung in Hebrew, and a *havdalah* ceremony -- a very warm and friendly afternoon and evening.

From Recife we headed for Natal, the place where the first Marrano congregation was openly organized in Brazil (as well as the place with the largest Palestinian Arab population in Brazil). There we met several of the members of the Centro Israelita do Rio Grande do Norte, who told the group about their most recent accomplishments and difficulties in seeking a Jewish identity. One of the leaders, Joao Medeiros, said that although there is neo-nazi influence in Natal and he has received threatening phone calls at home because he held Jewish services there, there are now 67 members of the Marrano synagogue in Natal and eight more waiting to "return". We visited their small synagogue and cemetery. This synagogue has benefited in the past from book donations from Kulanu supporters.

On the next day we traveled about six hours by bus to a small city in the desert area of Serido. The city of Caico is the home of Monsignor Antenor Salvino de Araujo, the "Jewish priest". This man, a Catholic priest, is very aware and proud of his Jewish ancestry. His ancestors as well as those of most of the area settlers were Jews who went there to escape the Inquisition. Monsignor Araujo received us in his summer home, the Engady Castle (to pay homage to David the Shepherd, who watered his flock at Ein Gedi). It is a medieval castle with a moat, draw bridge and armor, built on the outskirts of Caico. In the walls were pictures of Golda Meir and David Ben Gurion, Israeli political figures the priest admires. In his chapel we found a menorah and at one of the entrances to the castle, a large Star of David. That evening we were the guests of honor at a town meeting that rapidly became an open exchange of ideas -- the first interfaith dialogue ever conducted in Caico. Jacques is still in contact through the Internet with some college students who were present at the meeting.

Overall it was a great trip, one that met and surpassed our expectations. It was a great opportunity for the group to see Brazil through the eyes of a native, who also is very knowledgeable about the subject of Crypto-Jews. The participants had the opportunity to visit people and places they would have never been able to do by themselves.

The trip was so successful, we are planning another one for the near future. A possible extension to Peru, to include Lima, Machu Pichu, and mainly Trujillo (where the Jewish Peruvian Incas live) is in the works as well. Anyone interested should contact Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn at (412) 346 5555 or e-mail him at JacquesC@pgh.net.
(Irwin Berg contributed to this article.)

The Peruvians Who Yearn To Join The Jewish People

By Robert H. Lande

In August 1996 I was fortunate to be able to travel to Peru. I spent two days with a community of 32 Inca Indians who live in Lima and are interested in converting to Judaism. I also spent three days, including Shabbat, with a group of 65-70 Inca Indians in Trujillo who are studying and practicing Judaism. Both communities call themselves "B'nai Avraham".

In both cities I found remarkable communities who practice Judaism in a strictly observant manner. They are not in any respect Christian, having renounced Christian belief and practices in favor of Judaism years ago. They follow the Jewish religion to the best of their understanding, with the utmost sincerity, spirituality, and conviction.

Their Decision To Embrace Judaism

Group decisions to embrace Judaism are relatively rare and, perhaps for this reason, often are fascinating. The Peruvians' decision to become Jewish was chronicled ably by Rabbi Myron Zuber in two previous stories in this newsletter, in Vol. 1, Nos. 3 and 4 (Autumn and Winter 1994). I will therefore only present an abbreviated version here.

During the 1960s a resident of Trujillo named Villanueva began to question whether Catholicism, the religion that he was born into, made the most sense. He spent years in a spiritual quest until he finally decided that Judaism was the proper religion. He started to preach to his neighbors in Trujillo about Judaism and gradually, over the years, hundreds became interested. They taught themselves Hebrew, learned of modern Jewish practices, and began to live as Jews. Another community rose in the town of Cajamarca.

My observations confirm that the members of the community are indeed ready

Villanueva wrote to many people for assistance, including Rabbi Avichail and, in 1985, the Lubavitch Rebbe. The Lubavitch Rebbe asked Rabbi Zuber, another Lubavitch rabbi, to learn Spanish and journey to Peru to ascertain what the situation was. Rabbi Zuber made many trips to all three communities in Peru, not only observing, but also instructing the members in the proper observance of Judaism.

Either Rabbi Zuber is an extraordinarily gifted teacher, or the Peruvians are astonishing students, or both, for these people have learned an incredible amount about Jewish ritual, philosophy, spirituality, practices, history, and belief.

Through a process that I do not fully understand, the Israeli Chief Rabbinate was persuaded to send a *beth din* to Peru on two occasions. In 1988 a *beth din* converted 80 Peruvians, including Villanueva, all of whom then made *aliyah*. Another Israeli *beth din* journeyed to Peru in 1991, this time converting 160 Peruvians, who also emigrated to Israel.

Almost all the Incan *olim* -- who now, through births and a few additional conversions, number almost 300 -- live where the Israeli Government settled them, in Elon Moreh. Their absorption is going well, probably with fewer difficulties than the recent immigrations of several other groups.

Approximately 130-140 Incas interested in Judaism remained behind in Peru for a variety of reasons. Most were not ready for a formal conversion at the time of the last *beth din*. While some had become spiritually Jewish and practicing Jews in the 1970s or 1980s, others had only embraced Judaism very gradually, finally deciding that they wanted to become Jewish only in the early 1990s. Several members of the Trujillo community told me that the last Israeli *beth din* had said that they must live as Jews for another three years before they could be converted.

Others had different reasons for not having converted and made *aliyah*. Some had hesitated to leave their homeland for a strange country containing hostile Arabs, where they would have

or other personal reasons why they could not leave. Regardless, I was told repeatedly that all three communities had become "closed" after the second Israeli *beth din*, and that all of the current members have been practicing and believing as Jews for at least five years.

One interesting story is that of Prospero Lujan Qwipwzcoa, one of the leaders of the Trujillo community. Although raised Catholic, he came to believe that Christians did not really believe in one God and that many Catholic practices were tantamount to idol worship. In 1975 he met Villanueva and found his approach to God, religion and philosophy more and more appealing over time. Judaism also seemed to better explain and relate to the suffering he had experienced. In his mind he became a Jew in 1990. Since that decision many of his friends and relatives cut off all contact with him. He experienced insults and anti-Semitism at work, and his children had similar experiences at school.

Prospero's grandfather was named Abraham and, based upon a variety of details, Prospero believes that he is of crypto-Jewish descent (although he certainly cannot trace his family back 500 years to unquestioned Jews). He recognizes that he must convert so that there will be no question concerning his Jewish status.

He also understands that conversion will take time, and is prepared to wait as long as necessary for this to occur. His overriding goal is for his children to make *aliyah*. In the meantime he certainly does not regard his strict observance of Shabbat and other Jewish customs as a burden. Rather, he believes that these practices bring him closer to *HaShem*.

Prospero Lujan Qwipwzcoa, like all of the other members of the B'nai Avraham community, believes that the entire community is now ready for a formal conversion to Judaism. They are all eager for this to occur.

The Communities' Jewish Practices

My observations (like those of Rabbi Zuber that were presented in the earlier editions of this newsletter) confirm that the members of the community are indeed ready. For example, they follow the laws of *kashrut* as scrupulously as they can. The Trujillo community only eats meat a few times a year (during Jewish holidays) when they are able to purchase kosher meat in Lima. They make their own wine and challah -- and I can confirm that both are excellent.

They also observe Shabbat strictly, performing no work on this day. They do not turn electricity on or off on Shabbat, and do not tear or carry. They do not ride during the Sabbath, but stay over at the homes of one another during the entire Sabbath so they can attend services together without riding. The Lima community is equally observant.

It was my privilege to attend a variety of services with the Trujillo community -- *erev* Shabbat, Shabbat, and *Havdalah*, and also services on Sunday morning. The men worship separately from the women (due to space limitations they worship in different rooms). All the men appear to be able to read Hebrew well. From observations that I was able to make during *bentshing*, *Havdalah*, and on other occasions, it appears that the women also can read Hebrew. There was a shortage of *siddurim* -- I was told that each family owns at most one. Since the women worship separately from the men, this shortage is a serious problem.

They said they use the ocean as a *mikveh*. The boys wear *kippot*, the men wear dark hats or *kippot*, and the married women cover their hair with scarves.

They do not have a Torah, of course, and Kulanu does not have the funds to donate one to them. But at least Kulanu was able to donate a student Torah to them (a student Torah is identical in every respect to a real Torah except that it is printed instead of hand written, and is not on parchment. It also costs only a fraction as much as a real Torah.) They were overjoyed when I presented one to the community.

(cont., p. 8)

Peruvians Who Yearn To Join The Jewish People (Cont.)

(from p. 7)

Kulanu also donated a few books on Judaism in Spanish that we were able to purchase in the United States, and a large number of Star of David necklaces. Many women of this poor community had almost no jewelry and were delighted with the gifts. In addition, Rabbi Zuber found a synagogue in New York that was replacing its *tallitot*, and he persuaded them to donate their old ones to the Peruvians. I carried a suitcase full with me on my trip. Both communities were delighted. They held a drawing to determine who would receive the nicest ones, and promised to pass a share on to the community of aspiring converts in Cajamarca (which I was unable to visit.)

Many told me that everyone in all three communities has been observing Jewish practices in this manner for more than five years. The B'nai Avraham continue to have an intense and sincere interest in Jewish ritual, history, and tradition. They asked me many questions, only some of which I was able to answer. They very earnestly want to follow rabbinical instruction in all matters.

I could not have been more impressed with the Trujillo community. They are more observant than the vast majority of Jews in the United States, despite the difficulties they face. They are also more knowledgeable and more sincere in their desire to be observant, spiritual Jews.

The Incan community in Lima is equally observant. Like the Trujillo community, they attend daily services, which they take turns leading. I attended their weeknight services, and it was obvious that they too could read Hebrew easily, and they all knew the service well. The principle difference is that the Lima community has easy access to the Lima kosher market and Jewish bookstore. They are also wealthier than the Trujillo community, so they are able to purchase many more books on Judaism.

Relations with the Mainstream Jewish Community

There is an existing Jewish community in Lima of approximately 3,000. Unfortunately, they will be of little or no assistance to the prospective converts, for a variety of reasons.

While I was there I heard many stories about Rabbi Yaacov Kraus, the senior rabbi in Lima, who presides at the main synagogue there. He was in Israel while I was in Peru so I was unable to meet him. Some of the information about him was pleasant -- for example, he allows the 32 prospective converts who live in Lima to attend his synagogue for High Holiday services, and he will on occasion answer their questions about Judaism.

On the other hand, I was told that when he first saw Blanca Argandona (the leader of the Lima community) at his synagogue, he went up to her and asked her to leave. She replied that God had told her to come to the synagogue, so who was he to tell her to go away? Startled, he left her alone. Since then they have established an interesting relationship. He seems to respect her for the sincerity of her beliefs and because she is more Jewishly observant than more than many of the members of his congregation.

I also heard that many members of Rabbi Kraus's synagogue are friendly to the Incas, but that others are extremely hostile towards them (during High Holiday services some congregation members called them "garbage"; others would not acknowledge their presence). It appears that Rabbi Kraus may be caught in some kind of bind concerning the Incas. If he assists the Incas in their quest to convert, some members of his synagogue probably will become angry with him. It could be very risky for Rabbi Kraus to befriend or assist the Incas, or even to help them study Judaism.

It is difficult to determine the cause of the indifference and even hostility on the part of certain members of the mainstream Lima Jewish community. An important factor could be the general reluctance to accept converts that is so common among Latin American Jews. Another possible cause may be socio-economic. The would-be converts in Lima are middle class by Peruvian standards (their professions include those of psychiatrist, mechanic, electrician, lawyer, biologist, jeweler, and business manager). They are, however, far less wealthy than the mainstream Jews of Lima,

Avraham's interest in Judaism is not sincere, but is caused by their desire to better themselves economically, especially since *aliyah* is their goal.

Thus, it seems that Rabbi Kraus can only be of limited assistance to the community. Moreover, he has not been to Trujillo in eight years, so he probably has little interest in the community there. Most of the people who live in Trujillo are extremely poor, so it is not possible for them to travel to Lima to obtain instruction from Rabbi Kraus, even if he would be willing to teach them.

Blanca Argandona regards all of the problems that the aspiring converts face with resignation and cautious optimism. She regards the communities' religious problems as tests from *HaShem*, and says that their Jewish faith is stronger because they have been rebuffed and otherwise tested.

Their Future

It is difficult for the B'nai Avraham to live as Jews in such isolation. The public schools attempt to instruct all schoolchildren in Christianity and it is difficult to resist such pressure, especially with limited outside contact and spiritual support.

The best way for the B'nai Avraham to have access to the rabbinical knowledge and authority they need for their further Jewish development is for them to realize their dreams of *aliyah*. The entirety of both communities -- 32 people in Lima and 65-70 people in Trujillo -- would like to make *aliyah*. (I assume that this also applies to the 30-40 people in the Cajamarca community, but since I was unable to visit that city I cannot attest to this.)

The Peruvian community currently in Israel certainly would like to help their friends and relatives who are still in Peru to make *aliyah*. During my trip I met Gloria Valderamma Pretell, who had journeyed from Elon Moreh to Trujillo to visit her sister, Lucy. Gloria described in detail how the Peruvians in Israel were trying to persuade the Chief Rabbinate to send another *beth din* to Peru. I told her that if it would help persuade the Chief Rabbi to send another *beth din*, Kulanu would raise the money to pay for their travel and other expenses. She responded that the community of ex-Peruvians in Israel, even though they were relatively poor since they have not lived in Israel very long, considered it their duty to pay the *beth din* expenses. As a matter of honor they would raise the necessary money without Kulanu's assistance.

A complication has arisen, however, since a few of the Peruvians now in Israel are no longer observing Judaism in an Orthodox manner. Some are no longer observing Shabbat, others are no longer observing other Jewish practices, and some of the teenagers are "acting out" in a variety of antisocial ways. There are reports that certain Israeli rabbis believe that too many Peruvians were allowed to come, not too few.

If the stories that I heard are true, however, and over 90 percent of the Peruvians in Israel are still sincerely observant and religious, then their mass conversion and *aliyah* should be counted as a great success, not a failure. A 100 percent success rate (however "success" is defined) certainly has not been achieved by the Russian immigrants or by any other immigrant group. Perfection is not a realistic goal. It is also unfair to refuse to convert the 130-140 people in Peru because of what a few of their fellow countrymen have done in Israel.

Every Peruvian should be examined as an individual. A *beth din* should judge each person's sincerity and not penalize or reward him or her because of what other Peruvians have done.

The prospective converts are, of course, poorer than most Israelis. This means that the *beth din* should conduct its examinations with skeptical rigor to ascertain whether each individual is sincere in his or her decision to become Jewish. But it would be scandalous if we do not even allow them to go before a *beth din* just because they are poor. Who is prepared to say that Jews will allow only wealthy people to convert?

How We Can All Help

The Peruvians now in Israel are being taken care of by many sources, including Rabbi Avichail. Because they have been

A SPECIAL PASSOVER INSERT

YY
KOLANO introduces...

A New Ritual for Passover -- Honoring the Return of a Lost Tribe

(The following is suggested as a Pesach Seder reading just before the recitation of Dayenu.)

From the time of the Assyrian Exile in 722 B.C.E. until the present, segments of the Jewish people have been forcibly separated from us through persecution and expulsion.

One such segment previously lost to the Jewish community is a people now known by at least three names: Bnei Menashe (since they trace their ancestry to the tribe of Manasseh), the Shinlung (after caves in which they once found refuge), or the Chikimi (after the Chin, Kuki and Mizo ethnic groups from which they spring). The Bnei Menashe believe their ancestors were exiled in 722 B.C.E. and wandered across many lands. They live now in a mountainous region on the India-Burma border. Knowledge of various ritual observances was handed down orally for twenty-six centuries. Since 1993, over 200 Bnei Menashe have immigrated to Israel, worked to support themselves, and studied for conversion (back) to Judaism under the auspices of the Chief Rabbinate in Israel. We recite a poem that, according to tradition, accompanied the Bnei Menashe throughout their migrations:

Red Sea Song*

*We must keep the Passover festival
Because we crossed the Red Sea on the dry land
At night we crossed with a fire
And by day with a cloud
Enemies pursued us with chariots
And the sea swallowed them up
And used them as food for the fish
And when we were thirsty
We received water from the rock*

We pause during our Seder to reaffirm our unity with the Bnei Menashe and with K'lal Yisrael, all the Jewish people:

We and They**

*As we have wandered, so have they
As we have suffered for our beliefs, so have they
As we have retained our faith, so have they
As we have clung to our precious identity, so have they
As we long to lead Jewish lives, so do they
As we believe in the Promised Land, so do they
As we pray "You are One", so do they*

May those among the Bnei Menashe, and anyone else who desires to return to or turn to Judaism, celebrate Passover Seders next year in peace and tranquillity

לְשָׁנָה הַבָּאָה בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם:

* E. Avichail, *The Tribes of Israel*, 1990.

** ©1995 J. Duker.

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DESPERATION IN ADDIS ABABA

It's Time for a Passover Exodus from Ethiopia!

3,000 People Pray for a FAX

by Zvi Gilat

TRANSLATED FROM *MA'ARIV* 6 DEC 1996 (with permission)--abridged;
translated by Dr. Esther Liberman

It's already 6 years that they're living there, dejected, in an improvised rundown camp on the outskirts of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The children are fed a hard egg and one potato per day. The adults long for a redeeming FAX to arrive at the Israeli Embassy with the tidings that their request to make Aliyah is confirmed. In these last few years, 135 of them died. They're bereft of a place to which to return, and the State of Israel, which dispatched millions to aid the starving in Rwanda, refuses to take notice of their lot. Zvi Gilat stayed with the Falash Mura in Ethiopia, and he, too, came to the requisite conclusion: This won't have a happy ending.

Zvi Gilat (Addis Ababa)

At 10:00 A.M., two large cauldrons are perched on a bonfire of twigs in the Falash Mura camp in the Lambert quarter of Addis Ababa. Soon, two young men will be asked to carry the steaming containers to the kindergarten. The kindergarten is a flimsy tin shack in an area about 40 meters square, fenced off with cans. The children, numbering about 100 in the morning shift, are squeezed on to 6 long wooden benches. It's startling how little room they take, how quietly they sit opposite Bilho, a lame young man of 27 with a Kippah on his head -- every male wears a Kippah -- who serves as their teacher. On the blackboard are Hebrew letters. The children repeat, echoing him: Abba, Imma, Shabbat; Abba, Imma, Shabbat. But now, with the arrival of the great pots, they're distracted. They stare tensely outside. Quiet, says Bilho. They fold their hands. With his thin pointer, Bilho lightly touches the head of each child who in turn approaches the kettle to receive a hard egg and a small potato baked in its skin. The children take painfully small bites of this food. No wonder; this is their meal for the day. So it is daily, six years now.

About 3,000 people are in the Lambert quarter camp; men, women, oldsters, children and infants. They lead a model community life. The day begins at 7:45 A.M. with the Shaharit prayers that last about an hour. After that, they sit outside and sip tea. ("The kettle, the tea and the cups are community property," one of the community board members tells me proudly.) Afterwards, most of the adults turn to their work. This enterprise is promotional, the only kind possible in their temporary and uncertain circumstances: They embroider tablecloths that will be sold to good Jews in Europe and America. With the money thus acquired, they'll succeed in obtaining a few more pots of eggs and potatoes.

The embroidery work is done in the courtyard. Around it, in jumbled ramshackle structures about to fall, a school operates. Serving as teachers, 48 community members prepare over a thousand youngsters for the Ethiopian Department of Education examinations. In addition, pupils learn Hebrew, concepts of Judaism, the holidays of Israel, and so forth. Because of overcrowding, classes are held in two shifts, as in the case of the kindergarten. There's an office and a kitchen located in the open field. The camp is surrounded by dwellings of Christians. At best, the housing is comparable to slums, the likes of which are no longer seen in Israel. Even in such areas, members of the camp community are at the lowest level: they occupy barns, small cabins in a yard, or live five or six per room in rented apartments. When someone is ill, the landlord is liable to throw him out into the street with no pangs of conscience.

Whenever they leave the camp, the men kiss the mezuza on the gate and remove their head covering to avoid being conspicuous. "Falash Mura" is the term we apply to them; the locals call them "Bohdah" which means cannibals, or "Kaolah" meaning infidels. Thus, for reasons of personal safety, they hide the outward signs of the very identity they're so proud of in their hearts. What are they doing there these past six years? They're waiting for a FAX from Israel bearing the good news that so-and-so's application for Aliyah has been accepted. In a good month, as many as 120 people are lucky enough to learn that such a FAX has arrived. The FAX instructs them to report to the Israeli Embassy, located on top of a hill on the other side of the highway. It's a handsome building set in a colorful tropical garden. Israeli security personnel

immediately. Here, they'll be allowed to shower, provided with clothes and shoes and a suddenly improved diet. They'll be examined by a physician and will rest a bit -- an admission stopover on the way to the longed-for land. Those left behind will watch in envy. They'll try to comfort themselves with the contents of the iron cabinet in the camp office: a Deedee Fisher cassette, a Siddur, the book "Azit the Parachute Dog," or the video on "The Wonderful Journey Home."

But what happens to them is no wonderful journey. It's a dispiriting, hapless voyage concealing dreadful danger. "It's liable to degenerate into mass suicide," says Knesset Member Addisu Messala, who demands removal of the camp and immediate Aliyah for its inhabitants. "It's a time bomb that will explode here in Israel," says physicist Avshalom Elitzur, veteran Ethiopian Jewry activist, who also demands that the camp population come on Aliyah at once. "These people will end up here because they're Jews, even if there are those who want to shrug it off. When they come and begin to grasp the injustice done them, they'll ask themselves, 'Why did we lose our children and our elders there, and years of our lives? Only because the Israeli government disregarded us and discriminated against us?' The government is blameworthy for the deaths of 135 men, women and children in this camp during the last 3 years," says Elitzur, "and it's guilty of ruining the lives of the others."

The Israeli government knows full well what must be done to eliminate this shameful wrong. More or less, there's agreement on the desirable resolution, but each of the various ministries involved prefers throwing the ball into another court. Absorption rolls the problem over to Interior, which rolls it on to the Chief Rabbinate, which declares it's not the party responsible for a decision. Meanwhile, the wheels of bureaucracy grind down an entire living community convinced it is the victim of discrimination based, in the end, upon skin color.

Urgent telegram to Yitzhak Shamir

Though the story has already appeared and disappeared several times in the press, recalling once more the chain of events that led to the present situation is unavoidable. The saga begins with the Aliyah of Ethiopian Jews in the 1980s. Then, during the long civil war, convoys of individuals were brought to Israel by way of unusual routing through Sudan. This marvelous story is well known, as is the suffering of families torn apart in this venture, with some landing in Israel and others elsewhere. Paradoxically, these dislocations aided the Aliyah of some of those left behind. The Ethiopian authorities that opposed massive Aliyah didn't resist the emigration of individuals for family unification. Thus, in practice, until Operation Solomon, the Aliyah stream never stopped completely, even though it was sometimes reduced to a mere trickle.

Even then, a few of the Falash Mura, at times by exploiting the confusion, succeeded in entering Israel. Falash Mura are Jews who converted to Christianity in the last generations, mostly in the last decades. They acted sometimes from a desire to leave the small ostracized Jewish groups living in remote villages, sometimes through geographical propinquity to Christians, sometimes as a result of pressure -- even physical -- of the neighbors. All of them, then, belonged to "Beta Yisrael," the community of Ethiopian Jews. Whoever wanted, for whatever reason, to return to Judaism would find that the Kessim, the community leaders, had ruled "Israel that has sinned is nonetheless Israel." They arranged a Return to Judaism process. The returnee shaves of all bodily hair and starts a fast for a week or two, during which he subsists on grains of chick-pea (humus). This symbolic degradation ceremony, in which the participant eats "the bread of affliction," has a practical aspect: the body is purified from non-Kosher foodstuffs. The Ethiopian community has almost no written tradition. However, it is known that this was the ceremony undergone by some who had never converted but required purification following an undesired friction with the Christians. Ethiopian Jews were an isolated, pious group. Some who had spent a time interval in a big city, or eaten non-Kosher meat, would follow the convention: shaving, fasting, immersing themselves in the river.

During Spring 1990, a massive stream of Ethiopian Jews from the

Gondar region villages in the north began moving towards the capital, Addis

Ababa. The reasons for this upheaval were several: fear that these areas would

exploiting wartime unrest; and, chiefly, the initiative of Jewish organizations seeking to round-up the community so a mass Aliyah could be undertaken. Buses were dispatched to the villages, and rumors that "they're boarding the bus to Zion" circulated. Some of the Falash Mura mounted these buses.

Even then, thousands of Ethiopian Jews, gathered in the transit camp near the Israeli Embassy compound, lived in difficult conditions like those of today. Even then, Israeli officials were mainly occupied in clarifying personal identity. Because family unification was the grounds for Aliyah, only those with verified first-degree relatives in Israel were permitted to leave. Again and again, the lists, which had to pass close inspection by the Ethiopian government, were scrutinized. Even then, there were many Falash Mura among them. The members of the broader community, then as now, differed in their attitude toward the Falash Mura. A minority wished to distance themselves and now allow amalgamation with the community. Most tended to accept them, and the Kessim arranged for dozens, if not hundreds, of Return to Judaism ceremonies right in the camp.

Already back then, there was a push for the Aliyah of the Falash Mura. It was urged by family members who had arrived in Israel previously, and by Israeli supporters with ties to the Ethiopian community.

In any case, on the eve of Operation Solomon, Friday, 23 May 1990, both Etzion and Hanan Porath sent urgent telegrams to then Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir, calling for the Aliyah of those whose Judaism the Jewish Agency had placed in doubt. Joining in this request were the Chief Rabbis of that time, Rabbi Avraham Shapira and Rabbi Mordechai Eliyahu. They reminded Shamir that "Israel that has sinned is still Israel." Rabbi Ovadiah Yosef also took this approach, and the positions of the Rabbis are well documented. The parties in charge -- the Agency and the Foreign Ministry -- were firmly opposed. They claimed that, by this reasoning, there's no way to set any barriers to the numbers of newcomers and thus bring on Aliyah the entire population of Ethiopia. The Falash Mura would draw in their relatives and these, in turn, would bring the relatives of the relatives. There's no Ethiopian who won't want to join the migration. For an inhabitant of Ethiopia, under the terrors of civil war, living at the bottom standards of the third world, Israel is a paradise. This argument is still extant, and is based upon a firm reality. There's no Ethiopian who doesn't see himself, historically, as a direct descendant of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. The poverty is very difficult to bear.

Operation Solomon was an astounding event by any measure. The government of Israel persuaded both parties, embattled over dominance in Addis Ababa for 17 years, to observe a 24-hour cease fire so that it could bring the Jews to its shores. In the transit camp near the Ethiopian capital, astonishing dramas were enacted. Thousands flocked to the gates, tried to steal aboard the Air Force planes that had landed, or attempted to storm their way in. A winnowing occurred: only those whose names appeared on the Agency lists embarked. Shamir decided against the Rabbis' recommendations, not to take the Falash Mura along. He was concerned that, given the narrow time restraints, their Aliyah might frustrate the chance of bringing the unquestioned Jews to Israel. When the last plane took off, thousands remained behind, tearfully clinging to the fences. Some families were reunited; others broken anew.

As it turned out, not all those whose Judaism is beyond question were taken to Israel in Operation Solomon. Some who are undoubtedly Jewish were left behind. Since Operation Solomon, about 8,000 Ethiopians have come on Aliyah. Of these, only 2,000 are Falash Mura.

The Plane Will Come in a Little While

Most residents in the Lambert quarter camp, where I visited recently, have been there during the six years since Operation Solomon.

-- How did it happen that your relatives left and you didn't?

"They told us our plane was coming soon. They told us to wait. Since then, we're waiting."

He's a well-mannered young man, but the six years of waiting have embittered him, and a plethora of talks with family members and Israeli visitors give rise to another line of thought. "I've heard that newcomers from Russia

-- What if they tell you unequivocally that you won't be able to go to Israel?

The idea is difficult for him to digest. "The mitzvah of all Mitzvot," he counters, "is to ascend to the land of Israel. How is it possible to deny it to me?"

He and Tefesho Worko are the community's unchallenged leaders; two quiet, intelligent young men who possess a presence. They were elected to their posts. There are seven people in the community council. When a change is desired, the issue is brought to a vote. The leaders are responsible for managing affairs inside the community and for contacts with Jewish and Israeli bodies without. They notify families who have been asked to report to the Embassy for inquiries; they receive the longed-for FAX from Israel that may come to camp residents.

Asoh, the one in charge of the tea corner in the camp, comes from Dambia in the Gondar district. Actually, all the residents come from three Falash Mura centers: the villages Dambia and Tzilga in the north, and Tigano in the South. Most, at some stage or other in the family history, did indeed convert or assimilate. As Tefesho translates for me, Asoh left the village and came to the camp because she didn't want to marry a Christian as she would be forced to do. She has relatives in Israel, but the FAX doesn't come. In Ethiopia, she has no one, so she's been given this work to sustain herself. She earns 60 Bir monthly, the equivalent of about \$10 -- an impossible rate of pay even in Ethiopian terms -- paid from the community fund for which each family is taxed.

From my very first day at the Falash Mura camp, everyone I addressed brought out a color photo of relatives in Israel. Here is a picture of two soldiers, one in an armored unit, one in engineering. They're Kassao Ambarah's relatives, he tells me, who live in Tiberias. Six years ago they looked exactly like the skinny, barefooted, downcast children roaming about the camp in torn clothing. Now they look like demigods from another world.

-- Why did they make Aliyah and you not?

"They got a FAX," says Kassao. "God willing, I'll get one too."

What will happen, I ask Zaodo and Tefesho, if these people are told that it's finished. The State of Israel cannot bring you on Aliyah. Go back where you came from. They look at me disbelieving. Evidently I don't understand their situation fully. "There's nowhere to return to. There's no village, no home. Either it's been torched or taken over by the Christians. There's only one place, the land of Israel. If they won't bring us there, the people will remain here and continue to pray to God; whoever can continue to live after they tell him a thing like this."

Rabbi Waldman Brings Them Back to Judaism

The State of Israel says nothing. It ponders, it inquires, it sends forms. Files pile up high on the desks of Interior Department clerks in Jerusalem. The State doesn't want to decide.

In 1991, the Chief Rabbinate recommended sending a delegation to the Falash Mura in the Addis Ababa camp. These delegates -- rabbis, religious court judges (Dayanim) and heads of the Ethiopian Jewish Community (Kessim) -- would enable the people there to undergo the process of return to Judaism, which in turn would make Aliyah possible. In 1992, a commission headed by then-Government Secretary Dr. Elyakim Rubenstein decided to adopt the Chief

Rabbinate's recommendations. An initial delegation went to Ethiopia -- a prominent member being Rabbi Menahem Waldman, head of the Shvut Am Institute at Nir Etzion. After a five-week survey, this group returned with recommendations that the Chief Rabbinate accepted. It was resolved to offer

Jewish studies to interested Falash Mura, and to check their family connections concurrently. Whoever chose Judaism would have to accept the immersion ceremony and the obligation of religious observance.

This determination was decisive about their status, but cautious in the

Israel; Interior Department personnel make that ruling. However, there is in the aforesaid determination a hint, and maybe an assumption: if an individual undertakes this program, his chances of being recognized as a Jew are good.

But in 1992 a new government came to power. Yair Tzaban became Absorption Minister, and was appointed head of a ministerial committee charged with examining the Falash Mura issue anew. Tzaban inaugurated an almost academic review. Experts appeared before the committee to testify about Judaism and the connection to Zionism. Yet, amazingly, not a single one of the Kessim of the Ethiopian community in Israel was summoned. The Ethiopian Jews have no written tradition, but they constitute a singularly unified community. Its leaders know the genealogy of each individual within it for generations. The Ethiopians, for example, strictly enforce the commandments forbidding marriages among close relatives. Members of the same family may not intermarry for seven generations. The Kessim decide the relationship according to the lineage of each. Who is more qualified than they are to determine familial pedigree?

The Tzaban committee concluded that it is not the task of the State to enable Falash Mura to return to Judaism. Its task is to determine who is and who is not entitled to Aliyah. It ruled, after a long period of deliberations, or procrastination, that only those who qualify under family unification regulations (whoever has first-degree relatives in Israel or under the stipulations of the Law of Return, can come on Aliyah. And that's that.

If so, what does one do with the 3,000 in the Addis Ababa camp? One checks to see if they conform to the given criteria. The investigation takes time. There are lists maintained by the Jewish Agency, lists maintained by the Joint (Distribution Committee); clerks find it difficult to penetrate the thicket of strange names that have landed on them suddenly, difficult to decipher vague, inconclusive data.

So the investigation drags on and with it the suffering. Rabbi Waldman and his emissaries are involved, meanwhile, in community affairs. They help organize life there, assist with money and equipment, train instructors, teach Torah and, in practice, carry out a wide-ranging program of return to Judaism. The Foreign Ministry isn't enthusiastic about this development. They claim the Ethiopian authorities look askance at a missionary process, carried out on their soil, in the course of which -- from their viewpoint -- simple Ethiopian citizens are persuaded to convert in order to emigrate. These are the Ethiopian perceptions. But it's not exactly clear who is more vexed: is it really the local authority or might it be the Israeli Foreign Office, which diligently pursues bilateral relations and is apprehensive about creating problems?

Whether to distance himself from the public arena, or to discourage newcomers in the overcrowded Addis Ababa camp, Rabbi Waldman has been operating in the villages in the north. There it is possible to immerse in a river, as Ethiopian Jews are long accustomed to do. The Tzaban Committee's decisions, as was indicated, are a limiting factor.

Who Wants a Million Ethiopians?

From year to year, the existence of the Lambert quarter camp exerts more pressure. In the past three years, 135 people died there. One father told me that his son died of cold. Sanitary conditions are sub-standard. Ethiopia is a country afflicted with diseases. "Living close to the center of the big city, the people are exposed to sickness, crime, intrigue, looting, and fatal diseases," says Knesset Member Addisu Messala.

However, more appalling than anything else is the fact that the State is so challenged in solving the problem of these fewer than 3,000 people. The

Tzaban committee ruminated over the subject a long time before submitting recommendations, but three years later, the situation remains just about the same. The pace of Aliyah is alarmingly slow. The Kafkaesque system proceeds thus: one of the Falash Mura requests permission for Aliyah. His file is transferred from Ethiopia to an Interior Ministry desk in Jerusalem. There aren't too many clerks assigned to this project, so the file may wait sometime for attention. Such attention begins by verifying the details recorded. Is he the son or only the nephew of the Israeli resident cited? Does the latter reside in Atlit or

in Hatzrot Yosef. Some obscurities turn up. Back goes the file to Addis Ababa. The petitioner is called to the Embassy and questioned. His replies are sent to the

cite for honorable mention Avi Granot, the current Israeli ambassador to Ethiopia; a quiet, attentive man sensitive to their problems. He's the first ambassador, they point out, to visit the camp. Some among the Falash Mura believe that the procedural delays are intended to insure that death occurs before Aliyah.

Within Israel's Ethiopian community's establishment, in itself intricate and entangled, there's no monolithic approach to the Falash Mura question. However, on one matter they all agree. Even if the Falash Mura in Ethiopia total 24,000 (the accepted estimate), and there's no desire to bring them all to Israel, the 3,000 waiting in Addis Ababa these long years should come on Aliyah immediately.

In the meantime, political leadership in Israel has shifted again. Falash Mura supporters had high hopes in the wake of this change; maybe because it provided a "new broom" chance, and maybe because of promises they received from Netanyahu and his people. However, as a new administration started to organize itself, a certain vacuum was created. Falash Mura supporters claim Avi Friedman, advisor to Absorption Minister Yuli Edelstein, infiltrated this vacuum. He's done everything possible, say the activists, to stop Falash Mura Aliyah, and for the most part has succeeded.

The Fury Will Yet Burst Out

Avshalom Elitzur also joined up years ago in the Ethiopian cause. "How many made Aliyah from the Soviet Union? Half a million? And the most conservative estimate is at least 20% aren't Jewish. But this doesn't bother anyone, because a computer engineer from Leningrad is preferred over a cowherder from Koarah," he asserts.

The contempt, or perhaps the neglect -- they're the same -- cry out to the heavens. All agree that the bureaucracy thwarts the whole enterprise. It will drag out the saga to the end of time. The desired solution is to station a consul for Aliyah affairs in Addis Ababa with authority to verify the data and conclude the process. Simple, no? A suitable person has been found. His name is Eino Elimelech, an Interior Ministry clerk involved in the Ethiopian issues many years. The optimists hope the consul will take up his post beginning January 1997. Meanwhile, in Lambert they're distributing an egg and a potato daily to each kindergarten child.

In Lambert they will recite the Shaharit prayers each morning. They clip the Kippa to the head, study Hebrew, and when I enter the kindergarten, the tots, in order to welcome the honored guest from Israel, sing for me the hymn "Lecha Dodi." Thin voices, large eyes, some laughing, some already dimmed. The women congregate outside with pictures of their children or their cousins, or -- what's the difference? The whole issue is degrading and disgraceful. The Falash Mura proudly point out to me the Mikva (Ritual Bath) they've erected. In Addis Ababa they're punctilious about the prayer service, and they wonder how I, a Jew, go about bareheaded.

But it seems to me there aren't many options. I believe the Falash Mura are Jews and thus qualify for Aliyah, but that's not the issue. We're speaking of a human problem created by Israeli government inaction. The lack of readiness to decide pushed the Falash Mura into a position of no outlet. They have no place to go other than Jerusalem. Gondar is behind them; the bridge is burned down. Six years ago, they could have been sent back; not it's impossible. A state that feels the obligation to send millions of dollars in humanitarian aid to 3 (and it's good that was done) can't hide from its responsibilities for a problem created through its inertia, haughtiness, and small-minded policy.

in Hatzrot Yosef. Some obscurities turn up. Back goes the file to Addis Ababa. The petitioner is called to the Embassy and questioned. His replies are sent to the

Suffering Continues in Addis Ababa

By Jack Zeller

We hope you will read carefully the enclosed article by Zvi Gilat about the Jews who have been left behind in Addis Ababa and have been waiting to make *aliyah* for six or more years. Most people who read the article are deeply moved and immediately ask, "What can we do?" Here are some suggestions:

*Print copies and distribute them. Give one to your rabbi, one to the director of your Jewish Community Center and one to the Jewish Community Relations Council director in your area.

*Give it in person to them and make an appointment to talk about it with them in their office.

*Prepare yourself for a debate on this complex topic by re-reading the Gilat article and by speaking with Andrew Goldman, of the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jews, at 202-362-1946 or andy@cais.com. (Andy looks after the well-being of the Addis Jewish community from Washington, having been expelled from Ethiopia because of his zealous advocacy.)

*If anyone tells you that Israel must be careful or there will be millions of Ethiopians knocking down its door, point out that extensive records kept by Rabbi Menachem Waldman put the total number of Falashas remaining in Ethiopia at 24,000.

Homeless Marrano Hero (Cont.)

(from p. 1)

Sandoval has paid a heavy personal price by claiming his birthright: loss of his wife, children, grandchildren, home, studio and gallery. And yet he would do it all again. He has said, "They have burned us at the stake and in the ovens of the concentration camps; they have whipped, gassed and tortured us. But we are always Jews, seeking compassion and mercy, wherever we have gone."

At the national conference of Crypto-Jews in Albuquerque in December, Sandoval challenged his fellow Marranos to quit straddling the fence about their identity, "to give themselves the greatest gift they can -- the gift of their identity."

Nevertheless, the artist's treatment by his family, friends, and professional associates is a chilling reminder of what Schulamith Halevy's warning published in our last newsletter -- "Respect their fear of exposure."

Kulanu hopes to arrange a lecture by Sandoval and a show and sale of his art in the Washington area. If you are interested in helping out, contact Karen Primack at primack@aol.com or 301-565-3094.

(Ruth Silverman contributed to this article.)

Attention New Yorkers!

A meeting of Kulanu supporters in the New York area is scheduled for March 30 at 3 p.m. at the home of Barbara and Julie Shair, 7 Stoneham Road, New City, NY. Call the Shairs at 914-354-7223 for information and directions.

Happy Pesach!

Be sure to bring the enclosed Kulanu Passover reading to seders you host or attend. Feel free to make copies and distribute the reading, located in the Passover Insert to this newsletter.

BOOK COMMENT QUOTAS ON JEWISH SOULS?

The Falashas: A Short History of the Ethiopian Jews, by David Kessler, 3rd edition, 1996, Frank Cass & Co., Portland.
Reviewed by Jack Zeller

David Kessler is 90 years old and has just published the third edition of *The Falashas*. The book is very meaningful to me since I read the first edition about 10 years ago and it helped launch my wife, Diane, and me into the efforts to give Ethiopian Jewry their well-deserved and long-overdue recognition in the modern Jewish world.

It is a recognition that has been given begrudgingly and very incompletely by many Eurocentric Jews.

The Ethiopian Jews of Falasha origin who remain in Ethiopia who want to make *aliyah* number about 20,000. There is a quota agreed upon between the Ethiopian government and the government of Israel that only 1000 Jews a year may leave for Israel. With what other country does Israel have such a quota? Why?

The official reason is that Ethiopian Jews left behind in Ethiopia are being "checked" for their Jewishness, one by one, by the Ministry of the Interior. However, there are extensive and very accurate demographic lists obtained by an Ethiopian aliyah organization, South Wing to Zion, that are available to the government, both the current one and the previous one. The present Likud government is supposed to be more sympathetic. It may be, but not in deeds -- so far.

The Labor-Meretz crowd (previous government) knew exactly how to mutilate the Feres Moura: Call them Christians. Who wants Christians? It worked except for the Chief Rabbinate, which has recognized the so-called Feres Moura as return (t'shuva) Jews, not as Christians.

Dr. Kessler acknowledges that he hasn't the slightest idea where the term Feres Moura comes from; it was not in the early edition of his book or ever in print in any book before 1991. The reason: The term was made up in 1990 by the Jewish Agency and the Israeli embassy in Addis Ababa in a desperate (and successful) effort to limit the size of the community that would come to Israel.

This bias is not what Dr. Kessler talks about extensively in his book. Instead, he dwells upon the wrong selection of sources used by some important scholars when searching out the history of the Falashas and their predecessors from the Merroitic civilization. For example, one of the favored sources is the Kings Chronicles. This is very comforting to many scholars, since it is a "written" source. However, Kessler prefers oral sources since the Kings Chronicles are a totally political document, and much of Ethiopian history is written after the country converted from Judaism to Christianity in the 4th century. My Ethiopian friends assure me that the Chronicles are commonly rewritten by each succeeding king, who has usually poisoned or otherwise hastened the dispatch of his predecessor.

The genealogy of Ethiopia begins with Saba in the Bible, when the descendants of Noah are listed. The queen of Sheba (Saba, too), who legend says visited Solomon, and after whom the Song of Songs is written, is but one of the many early Ethiopian Jewish connections.

The book, to me, from a Kulanu perspective, is about more than the Falashas. It is about the need to know who are the Jews, where they are, what we can do to reunite, and what we can all learn from each other.

And one thing more: It teaches us not to develop any bizarre racial ideas about the distribution of Jews in our long travels through the ancient world.

The book is available in the US (Kessler is English) from Frank Cass, c/o 5803 NE Hassalo Street, Portland, OR 97213-3644

Introducing a Web Rabbi

By Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn

I receive frequent calls, e-mails and letters from people around the world, who want to learn more about Judaism. Some live in very remote areas without the benefit of a Jewish teacher or rabbi; others (such as those in my native Brazil) have their access to Jewish instruction barred by the local religious authorities who doubt their real motivation.

As a response to this situation I have developed a new program. The idea is to instruct people in Judaism "long distance" through the mail and especially through the Internet, since it is such an accessible and rapid means of communication.

I have developed a curriculum and currently use several different books as the basis for this course. In the future I hope to have texts available online in different languages, thus eliminating the need for real books. Also I have developed questions that allow me to test a student's motivation, knowledge and progress. This program has, however, several limitations. The main one is that, while it is possible to teach the theory of Judaism long distance, I still have to find ways of making sure my students will be able to experience the practice of Judaism as well. I try to do so by encouraging them to find other Jews in their areas.

To become part of the Web Rabbi program requires a personal interview. If applicable, another personal meeting may be necessary to perform the conversion ceremony. I limit the participation in this program to individuals who don't have a rabbi in their communities or within a reasonable distance.

For more information email me at Jacquesc@pgh.net or by mail at: 840 Highland Road, Sharon, PA 161416.

(Editor's note: The author is in the Reform Movement. Kulanu welcomes the participation of Orthodox, Conservative and Reconstructionist rabbis willing to answer questions and help prepare isolated individuals for conversion by e-mail.) Those seeking conventional conversions may contact Kulanu vice president Dr. Larry Epstein at LEpstein@ccum.sunysb.edu or may call 800-ASK-N-Learn (800-275-6532). A Web site prepared by Epstein is at: <http://members.tripod.com/~epst>

The Ghanaian Village That Wants To Be Jewish (Cont.)

(from p. 1)

David, and prayers said to be written in Amharic, the Ethiopian language. Sadly, many members of my family who are still in Ghana no longer practice Judaism.

I moved to the United States in 1979. I joined congregation Oseh Shalom, in Laurel, Maryland, where Rabbi Gary Fink has served as my spiritual teacher, and my friend Harry Rosenbluh has patiently taught me Hebrew. I regularly attend Shabbat services, keep a kosher home and am active in Jewish causes.

When I heard that in the remote village of Sefwi Wiawso there was a group that practiced Judaism, I had to see for myself. I borrowed the plane fare from Harry Rosenbluh and was given a number of *siddurim* and other books by Rabbi Fink. In addition, Kulanu gave me a student Torah to present to them. (It looks like a real Torah and is complete in every way, but it is printed, not handwritten, and is made with ordinary paper.) Kulanu also provided me with additional prayer books, Israeli flags, etc., that the Jewish Book Store in Wheaton, Maryland, was kind enough to sell at a reduced price. I contacted my relatives to tell them that I was coming and then left for Ghana.

On May 8, 1996, I arrived at Accra, the capital of Ghana. I had a joyous reunion with my family in the nearby town of Cape Coast, and even more joy that Shabbat when I led services for them. I led a Shabbat morning service for many members of my extended family and a few onlookers as well -- 75 people in all. They especially liked the Shabbat songs that I taught them, "Ma Tov" in particular.

I then started to plan the best way to reach Sefwi Wiawso -- no easy task since it is in a remote portion of the country, far from Accra. I prayed for guidance as to which route to take, and decided on the coastal route. I wanted to time my arrival for Shabbat, so I set out at 3 a.m. on Friday morning, together with Samuel, my brother.

The journey, by "bush taxi" (actually a small crowded bus) took until 8 p.m. The driver left us off at a village called Takoradi with instructions to start climbing a small mountain if we wanted to reach the village. After an hour of climbing we arrived at a police station and asked for the village of Sefwi Wiawso. When pressed, we said that we wanted to meet the Jews who lived there. They first professed to have never heard of the place, and then said that the village contained "thieves and bad people." When we protested that the village must exist if "thieves and bad people" lived there, they threatened to put us in jail. The impasse was broken when a small boy, who had overheard everything, offered to take us there for a fee.

By 10 p.m. the boy brought us to the house of Joseph K. Nippah, one of the group's leaders. We were delighted to see that their Shabbat candles were still burning. We were warmly greeted even before we could announce who we were. When they discovered that we were Jewish, they were even more delighted to see us. Despite the late hour they took us to a second house, the home of Joseph Armah, the group's chairman, where 25 people quickly gathered. Despite my fatigue I could not resist such a wonderful crowd, and led them in Friday night services. As my adrenaline pumped I taught them "*Lecha Dodi*" and other appropriate Shabbat songs and prayers.

My brother and I stayed overnight with the Armah family and awoke the next morning to find that we had stayed in the middle of a compound of approximately 14 Jewish households that contain, I was told, about 100 people. The Jewish community also contained perhaps an additional eight households that did not live in the compound. All told, approximately 150 people are members.

The community is affluent by Ghanaian standards. The houses are relatively large and well built, with electricity and running water. The Armah family had a television, but I could not watch because it was Shabbat. The villagers are mostly farmers (they grow cacao and palm trees, and I saw many cows, goats and other animals) and also earn money by baking bread, operating a grocery store and taxi service, photography studio, etc.

They led me to their synagogue, which is an old, cramped building with three rooms. One of the rooms was used for prayer. In addition, many members of the community stayed at the synagogue all day to make it easier for them to avoid such Sabbath prohibitions as watching television. The other two rooms were for resting during Shabbat, one for the men and one for the women.

I delighted them by putting on my *tallit* and taking out the student Torah that Kulanu had given to the community. They had never seen a Torah before, so it was an object of great interest to them. The children especially wanted to touch it. I assumed the role of rabbi, leading the enthusiastic congregation of 55 in a service. I thought of the prayers and melodies that Rabbi Fink, at Oseh Shalom, had taught me as I did my best to teach this eager group a small bit of modern Judaism. I conducted most of the service in English since they did not know Hebrew. But I also attempted to teach them a few Hebrew prayers, including the Shema, Kaddish and Yigdal. I conducted the Torah service in Hebrew, explaining that every synagogue in

(cont., p. 15)

Rabbi Discusses Abayudaya (Cont.)

(from p. 1)

Judaism in 1919, when their leader embraced the religion, and their Jewish education has had some gaps, but Worch finds that "they sometimes seem more Jewish than my own family."

At various times early in this century, the Abayudaya would meet a Jew and, according to Worch, "They would drain him to learn everything they can about Judaism from this one person before they let him go."

"Many had never seen a pair of *tefillin* or a pair of *tzitzit*. We talked about things I know they had never heard, ever, obscure things that are not in the Bible, talmudic concepts -- and there is instant understanding!"

He is especially impressed by the Abayudaya women, whom he finds "very *frum*, very Orthodox, very passionate and religious. They fast a lot; they have dreams that need sweetening and they fast; if a child is sick they fast. They don't brag about fasting. I suppose when you have no money to give to *tzedaka*, fasting is one way of making a contribution. We today in the West don't think about fasting as a response to everyday life. People who do fast stay in touch with a certain element of spirituality that we tend to lose."

Noting that "women are not empowered in Africa," Worch introduced the concept that only women can bring light into the world, and this is why Shabbat is brought in by women. Recognizing that the Abayudaya cannot afford Shabbat candles, he got someone in Australia to provide them. "What kind of Shabbos is it without candles? If you have no money for anything, for food or for wine or for challah, the candle comes first. Shabbat begins and ends with the lighting of a candle."

He reported that the women were very moved by the concept, and "I could see that it meant to them a change in focus from the male-oriented, because from reading the Bible you can get a very male-oriented picture."

Some of the women credited this lesson with resulting in their taking on a Danish heifer project, in which they undertake to raise and care for a heifer and sell its milk. "For the women to feel empowered to take on a project like that on their own, independent of the men -- I want to sort of take responsibility!" Worch says with pride.

We Could Sell Bricks from Uganda!

The Abayudaya villages near Mbale have four synagogues. The main one, the Moses Synagogue, is made of bricks, subsidized by Brown University Hillel. Worch was particularly impressed with these bricks.

"They make them the old-fashioned way our ancestors made them in Egypt. We could each buy one of the bricks and put it on the seder plate. We could sell bricks from Uganda!"

As he observed brickmaking there, "Out of clay, you dry them and make them into a big pile. And then you make a tunnel underneath and set fire to wood and start burning them. Whole families will spend a week just firing these bricks. The ones on the outside are just clay, basically, but the ones on the inside, you hope, will have reached a sufficient temperature to have fired, and the ones down at the bottom probably are overfired and cracked, so it's very touch-and-go. You see a whole family gathering around and everybody is coughing and basically dreaming of a house."

Worch has three projects in mind to help these subsistence farmers, who have no electricity or plumbing, raise their standard of living -- and their standard of Jewish observance. He would like to provide some running water and electricity to the main synagogue area and to set up a weaving project on a low-tech wooden loom. He himself owns and cherishes a handmade Tunisian *tallit*, given to him by his father, but notes that these are no longer made since labor costs are now too high in most parts of the world. He would like to see the Abayudaya fill this void, and he says it would be true *tzedaka* -- helping people to help

Kulanu Scholarships for Jewish Ugandan Children

We are pleased to report to Kulanu donors that you have made it possible for 114 Abayudaya orphans and other needy children to attend school during the last two terms (beginning August 1996 and October 1996)! Those benefiting included 97 primary pupils and 17 secondary pupils.

The cost was about one million Uganda shillings per term (about \$1000). Since there are three terms in a year, the amount needed to provide for these children is \$3000 per year.

As you can see, we get a big "bang" for our bucks. Tuition for a primary student is only \$5 per term (\$15 per year); for a secondary student tuition is about \$100 per year. It does not sound like much, but these amounts are not affordable by most Abayudaya families, who live on a subsistence level.

We are also sending a gifted young Abayudaya man, Gershom Sizomu, to college, at a cost of about \$2000 per year. Gershom serves as one of the community's *mohels* and often leads Shabbat services (including reading the Torah).

The need for academic assistance is, of course, ongoing. It would be unthinkable to drop any child from the rolls due to lack of funds. We need at least \$5000 per year -- more if another student qualifies for university. We appreciate your past help. Please make it a regular event. Todah!

A Convert's Story (Cont.)

(from p. 2)

white supremacist myths -- that some Jews help perpetuate -- that Jews control a lot of things and converts want to benefit from their association with them.

Some of us feel called by God to fulfill more than the seven Noahide laws. Others of us wish we could participate with the people of the Bible.

Before World War II, there were many the world over with Bibles in their homes who did not even know Jews still existed. An example is a village in southern Italy, a very religious Catholic town. The story goes that the oldest and most devout man there, after his retirement, hunkered down to serious study of his Bible. He came to the conclusion that the "Old" Testament, in which their belief was unshakable because it had been given first, held for them specific instructions about how to worship God, and was different from the newer religion of the Vatican. This man led his village in ritual sacrifice for some 10 years before discovering there were still Jews in the world. The village later learned of a rabbi in Rome, whom they contacted by mail, and he convinced them to stop the ritual slaughter, explaining the reasons why. Most of the village formally converted to Judaism and, several decades ago, migrated to northern Israel, near Galilee, where they and their descendants live to this day.

Personally, I am finding self-realization in Judaism, and in it a gift for my future children. My wife has very favorable feelings about Judaism because it is home centered and family centered and traditional, and her favorite friends and students are Jews here. All this was *before* she discovered her maiden name is of Sephardic origin!

More young people are seeking meaning in their roots nowadays. This is especially true for those of us who grew up in the United States in the 1960s and '70s, when "tradition" took such a beating. I want to have some kind of heritage that I can grasp hold of, and I want my children to grow up with a clear sense of who they are and how they fit into the big picture.

There is no reason why coming from a diverse lineage should prevent one from choosing the tradition of one of his ancestors. I may not be full-blooded, but it is within my rights to choose to be whole-hearted.

KULANU BRIEFS

Attention, Kulanu Supporters!

Under its articles of incorporation, Kulanu does not have a "membership" but it does have supporters! To be an official supporter (as well as to subscribe to our newsletter) you must make a modest (or more generous!) contribution **each year**. In order to save overhead costs, we do not send dues notices. We count on **you** to take the initiative, and we appreciate your loyalty!

Also, if you no longer wish to receive the newsletter, please let us know.

Portuguese Atonement

Commemorating the 500th anniversary of Portugal's 1496-97 expulsion of Jews, the country's leaders expressed atonement. President Jorge Sampaio, at a ceremony in Lisbon's synagogue, called the expulsion an "iniquitous act with deep and disastrous consequences" for the country and "a renunciation of the best we were and had." On another day, Justice Minister Jose Eduardo Vera Jardim referred to the expulsion as "a black piece of our history" and called for "moral reparation" to Jews for centuries of "brutal persecution." Today there are about 1000 practicing Jews in Portugal's population of 10 million.

How About Another Trip to Uganda?

A few supporters have expressed a desire to visit the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda this spring. How much interest is there? If you are interested in traveling this spring -- or at another time -- please contact Karen Primack at 301-565-3094 or primack@aol.com.

Sephardi Newsletters

Helio Cordeiro's important new Portuguese-English newsletter for and about Brazil's Marranos, *Sef@rad*, has just come out. The international internet edition can be found at www.stbnet.com.br/hpf/sefarad. For a mailed copy or to correspond by regular mail, write to Cordeiro at Rua Bela Cintra, 1318-34 CEP 01415-001, Sao Paulo, SP, Brasil.

Erensia Sefardi is a multi-lingual quarterly newsletter that contains historical sketches, news items, geographic and cultural information all pertaining to Sephardic heritage. For a subscription, send name, address, and check for \$30 to Erensia Sefardi, 46 Benson Place, Fairfield, CT 06430 USA.

A Purim Note

When you celebrate Purim this year on March 23, think of Bagunca, Portugal. A "Persian Parade" there every year features a *malka* (queen) who plies her husband the king with enough wine to make him grant her any desire. She asks him to free her relatives from incarceration and to execute the jailer who has wrongly accused them. And everyone eats pastries called *megillas*. The interesting thing is that this is a pre-Lenten celebration observed by Christians. According to anthropologist Flora Nissim, Bagunca was an all-Jewish village in the 11th and 12th centuries, but today its Jewish past is forgotten -- almost.

Internet Notes

Kulanu Internet *maven* David Turetsky reports that in December the number of Kulanu listserv subscribers went over 100 for the first time. If you are not a subscriber, you are missing out on some lively exchanges and some fascinating information! To subscribe contact dturetsky@ubmail.ubalt.edu.

Turetsky also reminds us that the Kulanu web page is reached at: <http://www.ubalt.edu/www/kulanu> or more directly at: <http://www.kulanu.org>

A new Web site for Sephardic history and culture: <http://www.bsz.org>

A new America Online site, @Washington Religion (AOL keyword: DC Religion) provides general Jewish information, including answers to halachic questions, lessons for children, and listings of places of worship, and affiliated school info.

Helio Cordeiro has a new web page dedicated to Brazilian Crypto-Jews at www.stbnet.com.br/hpf/sefarad.

Check the web page at www.oakton.edu/friend/chinajews.html for some fascinating articles from the China Judaic Studies Association!

Todah Rabah

Kulanu is grateful to **Robert Feron**, who will be our new co-president, along with co-president Jack Zeller. Zeller will concentrate on policy and Feron on administration.

The Media Take Note

Read Kulanu activist Irwin Berg's article "Among the Abayudaya" in the January 1997 issue of *Commentary*.

We appreciate the coverage of Kulanu's work and the Abayudaya Women's Association in the winter 1996 *Lilith Magazine*.

And see *Moment Magazine's* coverage of Daniel Baiden's visit to Ghana in its December 1996 issue.

Jews by Choice Club

The JCC of Greater Washington sponsors a Jews by Choice Club for the DC area. The club's January speaker was Jonina Duker of Kulanu. Future topics will include: Who is a Jew in Israel?, synagogue life in Washington, Holocaust study, and Jewish book discussion. For information contact Lisa Shapero at 301-881-0100x6782 or lshapero@jccgw.org. You can check their Web page, too: <http://members.tripod.com/~anak/JBCPAGE.HTM>

A Listserv for Marranos?

Kulanu is considering how to establish a listserv that would meet the needs of descendants of *anusim* (forced converts) and those in the Jewish community who would like to help *anusim*. The listserv could provide for the opportunity for people to meet and study. Some ideas are to provide history, current events, and opportunities for study in preparation for formal conversion or a return ceremony. The listserv should be in Spanish and Portuguese. We are considering having a dedicated listserv in Portuguese and Spanish or perhaps a combined Spanish-Portuguese listserv.

This could start out as a service under Kulanu's umbrella, as we try to provide organizations with common interests with the use of e-mail. At a later time, if there is enormous success and too much traffic, other listserves could form with dedicated purposes.

Please let us have your suggestions and let us know if you can help.

Are You a Rabbi on Sabbatical?

If so, perhaps you'd like to donate some time and energy teaching in one of our isolated, developing Jewish communities. Kulanu can offer a little in the way of financial support but a lot in the way of advice and connections! If you speak Spanish or Portuguese, all the better! Treat yourself to a little sunshine and a lot of grateful students in Africa, India, or Latin America! For info contact Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn at 412-346-3722 or jacquesc@pgh.net.

BRIEFS (CONT.)

Black Jews of Zimbabwe

A few supporters forwarded to us copies of Angus Shaw's fascinating Associated Press article about a group of 5000 practicing Jews in Rusape, Zimbabwe, who worship at a tabernacle presided over by Rabbi Ambros Makuwaza. The group believes its antecedents were exiled from the Golan Heights over 2000 years ago. We'll try to learn more!

A Benevolent Thought

A rabbi has written us to tell us that he has left a bequest for Kulanu in his will and wants to encourage other supporters to do the same. We think it a splendid idea, and also remind readers that a fund for Kulanu programs can also be set up in memory of a loved one.

Duker Teaches

Jonina Duker, coordinator of Kulanu's speaker's bureau, is teaching a four-session DCJCC course this winter entitled "The Ten Lost Tribes: Jews Lost and Found."

For a speaker for your congregation or organization, contact Jonina (afternoons and evenings only) at 301-530-2361.

Crypto-Judaic Society Conference

The annual international conference of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies will be held in Denver July 20-22, 1997. To register, contact Gloria Trujillo, 2000 Avenida Cesar Chavez, Monterey Park, CA 91754. To present a research paper, position paper on current issues, or literary or artistic work at the conference, submit proposal with a brief abstract to Dr. Stanley Hordes, 1375 Santa Rosa Dr., Santa Fe, NM 87501.

A Sad Note

We note with sadness the death of Peter Ambeba, a Kenyan Jew from the Luo tribe who made *aliyah* in 1973 and served in the Israeli Army. He was interested in Kulanu's work and had planned to teach the Abayudaya in Uganda.

Cape Verde Cemetery Project

The Jews of Cape Verde Project is seeking funds to investigate the presence and honor the memory of the numerous Sephardic Jewish families who traveled to Cape Verde in the late 19th century by restoring the small cemeteries they left behind. The work will culminate in a photographic exhibition at the B'nai B'rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum. Donations are urgently needed for research, physical restoration of the neglected cemeteries, and for preparation of the photographic exhibit. Tax-deductible contributions payable to the B'nai B'rith National Jewish Museum can be earmarked for the Cape Verde Project. Donors sending \$100 or more will be inscribed on a plaque to be affixed on the cemetery wall. Please mail checks c/o Carol Castiel, Project Director, 1245 4th St., SW, Suite E202, Washington, D.C. 20024. Address specific inquiries to CCastiel@aol.com

Women in Jewish Life & Culture

April 6-8, 1997, is the date of the third annual conference of the Western Jewish Studies Assoc. Sponsored by Judaic Studies of the Univ. of Arizona, the theme this year is "Women in Jewish Life and Culture." For details contact Esther Fuchs, Judaic Studies Program, The Univ. of Arizona, PO Box 210080, Tucson, AZ 85721-0080.

LETTERS

Thanks from Cordeiro

I would like to thank Kulanu for its support of my work on the Internet about the *anusim* around the world. You can be sure that this support is going to be very useful on research and dissemination about crypto-Jews. In the name of the Society for the Study of Marranism (Shema), thank you very much. My best regards and Shalom!

*Helio Daniel Cordeiro, Sao Paulo, Brazil
cordeiro@stbnet.com.br*

Ugandan Gratitude

Since our contact with Kulanu, many changes have occurred in both socio-economic and religious spheres. You have contributed a Sefer Torah, orphans' education, a school building, a synagogue floor (from kippot money) and gifts from various friends.

I am also happy to report that money from the sale of our kippot in the US and a loan from my farmers' society has obtained for us two young heifers. We hope that in future the offspring of these heifers will be passed on to waiting Abayudaya families.

*Joab Jonadab Keki, Chairman, Abayudaya Congregation
Mbale, Uganda*

A Request from Ghana

I am a member of the Jewish community in Ghana. We can be found in the western part of the country. I worship only one God, who is Adoshem.

We have a teacher who is teaching us how to read Hebrew, history, facts about Israel, and customs. Please try to send books about the following subjects to help us learn more and do more to help the little ones to serve God in the true way: (1) alef-bet, (2) history, (3) facts about Israel, and (4) holidays. I wish to send my greetings to you and your community. May peace and unity be among you all. I hope to hear from you.

*Alex R. Armah, House of Zion, PO Box 57, Sefwi Wiawso,
Ghana (West Africa)*

Happy in Brazil

We were very happy to receive the visit of Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn and the Kulanu/SCJS friends. The visit was very fruitful for our small community, as we struggle to regain the Jewish culture the Inquisition tried to annihilate. Our friends have proven that they want to help us, that they recognize and value our lineage, that they understand our goals. Now, we feel better received in the Jewish world, and very thankful to all the *chaverim* at Kulanu and SCJS.

Joao Medeiros, Natal, Brazil

Hard at Work in Uganda

Women have a vital role in the development of a society, whether small or large. It was just a year ago when an association called Abayudaya Development Association (ADA) was formed. It has all stages, types, and kinds of people; it combines youths, the aged, women, and men. Our objective is to exploit all people's talents with a division of labour and balanced thinking for decision-making to fight the common enemies of poverty, ignorance and disease.

Committees include poverty pacification, tree planting, poultry keeping, vegetable growing, education, and health and sanitation. I am pleased to say that the ADA has received the cooperation of the Abayudaya Youth Association and the Abayudaya Women's Association as well as the Abayudaya Community.

Esther Kaliesubula, chairperson, ADA, Mbale, Uganda

Peruvians Who Yearn To Join The Jewish People (Cont.)

(from p. 8)

converted under the auspices of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate they are assisted by the Israeli Ministry of Absorption as well. But Rabbi Avichail is already spread too thin, and there appears to be no one other than Kulanu who will assist the 130-140 aspiring converts who are still in Peru.

Prior to their *aliyah* it would be extremely helpful if a rabbi or Jewish educator could visit them for an extended period to answer their questions and provide them with additional religious instruction. This person would have to speak Spanish, however, because no member of the community can speak English well enough. If anyone reading this knows of such a person who might have an interest in a teaching visit to Peru, Kulanu would be very appreciative if they could contact me, at 301-585-5229 or rlande@ubmail.ubalt.edu.

In addition, it would be wonderful if a Kulanu delegation could visit the B'nai Avraham. A group visit, similar to the visit to the Abayudaya in Uganda that Kulanu organized in 1995, would be enthusiastically received. So would visits by individuals. Anyone interested in organizing or participating in such a visit should contact me. (Any visit to one or all communities could also include stops at some of Peru's wonderful tourist destinations, including Machu Piccu and the mysterious Nazca lines in the desert. Even Trujillo has a nice ocean beach and also has Chan Chan, reportedly the world's largest adobe village, abandoned in the 1400s.)

The Jewish Incas' morale would be helped tremendously if Kulanu supporters could write to them in Spanish. Do any of you have children studying Spanish -- would they like a pen pal? Does anyone know of a Spanish language class at a Jewish school that would like friendly people to write to? This communication would let them know that they have friends who welcome them into the Jewish community and that they have not been forgotten. Their addresses are: Comunidad Beney Avraham, Pasaje Godofredo Garcia #406, Urb. Chimu, Trujillo, Peru; and also Comunidad B'nai Abraham c/o Blanca Argandona, Av. Tupac Amaru #299, Km. 8, Jr. Carabaio - Comas, Lima, Peru. Consider including \$1.00 for return postage because some of the Peruvians are so poor that even the price of postage is a burden for them.

In addition, a member of the Lima community, Javier Zavaleta Osorio, is a jeweler, and makes fine silver jewelry that has an Aztec motif. He gave me some samples as gifts, and said that if anyone in the United States would be willing to sell his jewelry, he would donate all of the profits to the community. I would be delighted to show this jewelry to anyone who might be willing to undertake this project.

Finally, the B'nai Avraham are in need of many things that would make their Jewish observance easier. They can use *bentshers*, *kipot*, and Spanish language books on Judaism. They would like tapes with modern Hebrew songs, including holiday songs. They would like Israeli flags (those few members of the community who have them delight in displaying Israeli flags in their homes and automobiles) and Jewish games for their children, as well as books and audio tapes that would help adults and children to better learn Hebrew. Tax-deductible contributions to Kulanu can be earmarked for the Peruvian community.

There is much that Kulanu should be doing for these worthy people right now. But the most important thing that we could possibly do for them is to help them to formally convert. In terms of their attitude and spirituality they are ready for conversion and *aliyah* now. Israel and the Jewish people would greatly benefit if this community were allowed to join us.

Ideally, they would all be converted in Peru right now, but that is not going to happen in the foreseeable future. One alternative we can arrange now is to send one or more members of the community to Israel, where they can live with a Peruvian family while they study for conversion. **The cost of this is \$800 per individual for airfare.** I feel strongly that Kulanu should sponsor at

least one person as a symbolic gesture. Again, tax-deductible donations to Kulanu can be earmarked for this specific purpose.

It is my prayer that the conversion of the B'nai Avraham -- together with the conversions of the people from all over the world whom Kulanu has helped turn to, or return to, Judaism -- will be a sign to non-observant Jews around the world that Judaism is a precious legacy, one that is worth holding onto, no matter what the circumstances. In light of the terrible intermarriage and non-observance rate among many Jewish communities in the United States and around the world, I pray that the conversion of these Peruvians will be a much needed inspiration to all of us.

Marrano's Search (Cont.)

(from p. 2)

Judaism. We try to eat kosher food and observe most of the holidays, but our great problem is the Jewish communities in Brazil. They say we aren't Jews because we have no evidence of our identity.

Since we were born, we have had two names, one civil and one Jewish. But how can we prove our roots if every document was burned in a fire at my grandparents' house? And for this reason, they don't accept us.

Now I know we need to submit to a *beit din*. We were preparing to go to Eretz Israel to study in a yeshiva before I met Rabbi Cukierkorn; now I am happy to be studying with him on the Internet.

We know that the rejection by some Jews does not change our status as chosen people of *HaShem*. For this reason, we continue observing Judaism and we are sure God will bless us, more than before, because now we try to live according to His Torah, observing the *mitzvot*.

Family Vacation with Abayudaya (Cont.)

(from p. 5)

And she is still only 10 years old. Among Jews in our country, it is generally the custom not to marry before one's mid-20s. A lot can happen before then. Please do not wait for her. I advise you to keep your options open."

Seth remained interested, however. The next day he approached me with a different question. "Who wrote the Bible?" he asked, with obvious sincerity. I knew that he wanted the traditional answer. "The Bible comes from God..." I responded tentatively. Seth was ready for this. "Then why, when Moses receives the Ten Commandments does the Torah say, 'And God spoke to Moses' (this, Seth quotes in Hebrew), and not simply use the first person or say directly, 'Moses...'?"

A budding Ugandan Talmud scholar for a prospective son-in-law, I thought to myself. But whatever my own daughter's Jewish future, I feel quite confident about that of the Abayudaya community. When we left Uganda, it was to the same chorus of Hebrew songs that had greeted us several days earlier. "You are now Abayudaya!" some of the people shouted. "You must come back again!"

Somehow, sometime, we shall.

PUBLICITY NEEDED

Many people who hear of Kulanu are interested in our work. But no one can join us if they haven't heard of us. Does your synagogue or Jewish organization have a newsletter that would run a brief piece about our work? Please let them know about us! If you do this, interested people will be able to contact us. Thank you very much -- we really need your help.

The Ghanaian Village That Wants To Be Jewish (Cont.)

(from p. 10)

the world was reading the same Torah portion that same day. I read it in Hebrew because I wanted them to experience an authentic Torah service emotionally, even if they could not understand it.

The service I led for them was totally unlike their normal service, where they mostly read the Old Testament together. They did this because they lacked modern Jewish prayer books. My gifts of prayer books were received with the utmost gratitude.

After the service we had a late, leisurely lunch. The meal was cold because they do not cook on Shabbat. We talked for hours about a wide variety of matters.

During this conversation I solved the mystery of the origin of their Jewishness. The solution was one that I had in part suspected. In 1976 a man named Aaron Ahomtre Toakyirafi had a vision that he and the other members of the village were descended from one of the Ten Lost Tribes. He convinced some of his neighbors that they should return to the customs of their ancestors and follow only the Old Testament. Although he has since died, this community is his legacy.

There is more to the story, though. My older brother, Isaac, had attended and taught at a nearby teacher training college in the late 1950s. Clearly, Isaac (who is no longer living) was an excellent teacher. As they told me about my brother, the memories came back to me. I remembered that, as a small child only about six years old, I had once accompanied him to this very village! How amazing that the seeds that Isaac had planted in the 1950s had grown a generation later. How incredible that they had maintained their Jewishness for another generation with almost no contact with the outside Jewish world. How appropriate that I, more than a generation later, would be the one to continue my brother's holy work. I believe that it is my destiny to lead them to a higher level of Jewish belief, knowledge, and observance.

We talked about many other subjects. They told me that they have named their community the House of Israel. Several members told me they embraced Judaism because, to them, the Old Testament contained more truth than the New Testament. They reject Jesus Christ in all forms and consider themselves to be Jewish, although they would like to convert formally. They also told me that although Ghana does not have an ambassador from Israel, in February 1996 the community's leader, David G. Ahenkorah, had journeyed to a nearby country, the Ivory Coast, to meet that nation's Israeli ambassador. Unfortunately he offered no assistance to the community. They expressed to me a great interest in visiting Israel but asked almost no questions about the United States.

Late that afternoon we concluded our conversation and went back to the synagogue, where I gave the House of Israel a *havdalah* candle I had brought with me, and led the congregation in making *havdalah*. They insisted on calling me "rabbi"; this embarrassed me, of course, but it was perhaps understandable since I was the closest thing to a rabbi they had ever encountered. In fact, I was the first outside Jew to enter that village since my brother's visits many years before!

It is my prayer that my visit will be the start of world Jewry's contact with this village. They sincerely want to join the Jewish people and have a great thirst for Jewish knowledge. They practice no other religion. Although none knows Hebrew, many of the men and the children can read and write English. This makes the task of giving them Jewish knowledge very difficult, but not impossible.

One can only speculate how much longer they can maintain their desire to become Jewish, and their feeling that they are Jewish, without help from the outside world. We must immediately start taking steps to dramatically increase their level of Jewish knowledge, to help them become the Jews they want to be. We must send them Jewish educational material, including books for children, prayer books, beginning Hebrew books, and audio tapes with songs and prayers in Hebrew. We must also correspond with them -- perhaps a penpal program for the children would be appropriate. They also need a much larger synagogue; they have a half-built one that they would be delighted to dedicate to anyone generous enough to send them the funds necessary to complete it. In addition, my family, in Cape Coast, would like to build a synagogue and dedicate it to Rabbi Fink in appreciation for all that he has done to teach me and enable me to bring Judaism to Ghana.

We should also organize a visit by a fact-finding and teaching delegation. I hereby offer to be the expedition's guide, and beseech every rabbi reading this to consider becoming our expedition's spiritual leader. We must let them know that if they sincerely want to be Jewish, we will provide them with a warm and friendly welcome to the Jewish community.

(Editor's note: Kulanu has started a program to assist the House of Israel. Tax-deductible donations of appropriate Jewish books, tapes, or ritual objects and donations of money so Kulanu can purchase and ship this material, should be sent to Kulanu, earmarked for this purpose. Anyone interested in volunteering to organize a penpal program or otherwise to work with this community or participate in an educational expedition to Ghana, or rabbis interested in leading a mission to Ghana, should contact Kulanu.)

Think of memorializing a loved one with a Kulanu endowment. Consider including a bequest to Kulanu in your will.

SUPPORTER APPLICATION

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

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Interests and affiliations useful to Kulanu's work _____

RABBI WORCH DISCUSSES THE ABAYUDAYA (CONT.)

(from p. 11)

"Electricity," Worch said, "would make being Jewish possible as an option. At this point they really don't have the option. They don't have an infrastructure that would enable people to keep Shabbat without breaking it." He notes that the Abayudaya cannot afford to buy many candles, and they don't have oil lamps. During Shabbat they use smoky, expensive kerosene lamps which require constant pumping and other kinds of fiddling to maintain sufficient pressure for efficient burning. Unless they have cheap lighting that does not require maintenance during use, such as electricity, they will have to spend Friday night in the dark, he lamented. He reported that the Uganda Electric Board provides cheap electricity, and that to run poles from the main road to the main synagogue would cost \$1700. A generous donor at the meeting immediately contributed that amount. The donor bringing light to the Abayudaya is, not surprisingly, a woman.

Worch also has a religious project in mind. Before they had the Torah or a *siddur*, every Shabbat they would all sing the Song of *Haazinu* (Deuteronomy 32), which Moses sings just before his death. "It's a stroke of genius that if you don't have the whole Torah and you want people to read the Torah every week

There wasn't anybody telling them. You could say they were called. I don't understand it. But if you hear them singing *L'cha Dodi*, then you get it.

and to memorize it, of all the portions that one might have chosen, that is in fact the ideal one because it's *musar* (ethics), it's poetry, it's really the highest. And they all know it by heart and it's astonishing to hear them singing it."

Worch believes that the *siddurim* the Abayudaya have been sent from Jews all over the world are "really superseding and obliterating their traditional prayers that they had for 50 years before they had the *siddur*. One of the projects we need to do is maintain their original texts and integrate them into a *siddur* that would be a very Abayudaya *siddur*."

When asked how world Jewry supports the Ugandan Jews, Worch points out that none of the traditional Jewish organizations is interested in the Abayudaya because they're not officially Jews. "So the fact that some of them have already died martyrs' deaths as Jews for being Jewish is of absolutely no concern." He also points out that during the tenure of virulently anti-Semitic Idi Amin in the 1970s, the president of the Abayudaya community was paraded naked in the streets because he was found sleeping in a *sukkah*.

You Could Say They Were Called

"Our official policy is, Who needs it? Who needs proselytizing? Who needs more *gerim* (converts)? Who needs

another community in need? That's how we've always responded to people coming and saying that they want to be Jewish. To respond like that to these people, I feel it's wrong," Worch laments.

Worch plans to assist Kulanu in obtaining for the Abayudaya formal conversion to Judaism. "I am hoping that by the end of two years they will be informed sufficiently to make a decision about whether they want to take on the very onerous obligations of Orthodox Judaism. It's what they've asked for. And if we go any other route, it would disempower them in the future. They wouldn't be recognized by Israeli authorities. If it ever came to an emergency and there was a need to evacuate them all, if they're not converted by an Orthodox or recognized *beth din*, it would be impossible to get world aid to them."

Worch notes that the older generation of Abayudaya speaks "only" six local languages plus Swahili. The younger generation knows nine languages, because they also speak English and Hebrew. "They're very intelligent," he says. "They're a smart people, and very diligent. They really want to learn."

When asked what intrigued the Abayudaya about Judaism, when it would have been so much easier for them to have been Christians, Worch responded:

"It's like a disease, of course. You get it in your *kishkes*. There wasn't anybody telling them. You could say they were called. I don't understand it. But if you hear them singing *L'cha Dodi*, then you get it. When you hear them singing *Adon Olam*, then you know. When you hear this 9-year-old girl singing, 'I believe in one God, I believe in the Torah of Moses, I believe in the coming of the Messiah....,' it's just astonishing."

Worch concluded with a suggestion that his listeners visit the Abayudaya.

"I would like to suggest that meeting, encountering, spending any time at all with the Abayudaya forces us to examine our attitudes and relationship to our God, to our religion. And I would encourage anybody, if you have a couple thousand dollars, hie thee to Mbale! And meet there with your cousins, the Abayudaya. And maybe you'll discover something about that part of your own spirit to which you're not connected, to which they are very, very connected."

A Fundraising Note

Kulanu is undertaking to assist Rabbi Worch in his mission to teach the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda. Tax-deductible donations to Kulanu may be earmarked for this purpose. The money will be used to help Rabbi Worch with his travel and subsistence as well as with his religious and development projects in Uganda. Please consider being part of this important and historic work!

Deadline for next issue: April 15, 1997

---RECYCLED PAPER---

Edited by Karen Primack

Kulanu

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