



FROM THE PRESIDENT

The Bnei Menashe Need Our Help Now!

By Jack Zeller

The Bnei Menashe of Mizoram and Manipur are 270 souls in Israel. Many are young adults who left behind siblings and parents with the hope they would come to Israel some day soon. And it appeared that was a reasonable expectation until recently, when it became common practice in the Israel Ministry of Interior to look suspect on any non-Europeans who want to come to Israel by questioning the religious character of the applicants.

Canadian film maker Simcha Jacobovici recently visited the Menashe in India with Rabbi Avichail. He reported to Israeli Justice Minister Tsachi Hanegbi that there are 3500 Menashe practicing Orthodox Judaism. He has said, "These people are completely genuine in their Judaism. Some are suffering for that faith.... These are not people seeking a passport from the Third World to the First."

The Bnei Menashe could pass any reasonable test, but the problem is that the test is not offered. Instead, applications to the Ministry of Interior are simply ignored. For the Bnei Menashe, who have grasped the essence of disciplined Jewish life and taken joy in this possession, this is an aspersion far worse than anything previously endured. To be rejected by insecure Christian neighbors in India is endurable, but scorn from Israel is an insult too painful to bear.

Kulanu can make a difference. Firstly, we have to stop and write a letter to the Ministry of Interior, Rabbi Suissa, and tell him firmly but respectfully that he is mistaken. Perhaps he has been misinformed about the community's discipline and character. Cut out and send Yaakov Levi's article on page 6 of this newsletter that details their lives and aspirations. Encourage Rabbi Suissa to meet with the Bnei Menashe in Israel, visit them when they pray, fully accepted in minyan throughout the country, and visit them at school, the army and in the workplace, where they are respected and valued.

Kulanu's newsletter is received by over 800 families throughout the world. I ask every reader to stop for a few minutes and place a word in behalf of the Bnei Menashe. Your letters are critical to them and to our collective efforts to make a difference. If Kulanu's newsletter is merely to inform, it is not good enough; Kulanu is an outreach organization and when our extended hand is most needed, it should be there. I would not ask for help if I thought we were without influence.

Please send letters to Rabbi Eli Suissa, Minister of Interior and Religion, c/o The Embassy of Israel, 3514 International Drive N.W., Washington D.C. 20008, or fax to 202-364-5423. And send a copy of the letter to President Ezer Weizman at the same address. For those who prefer e-mail, send to ask@israeemb.org. Kulanu has a sizable support group in Israel who should write to: Ministry of Interior, 2 Kaplan St. POB 6158, Kiryat Ben Gurion, Jerusalem 91061; telephone 26701411. President Weizman's address is 3 Hanassi St., Jerusalem Israel 92188; telephone 26707211.

ABAYUDAYA CD AVAILABLE

"Shalom Everybody Everywhere" Makes a Tuneful Debut

By Karen Primack

When Matt Meyer was a Brown University student in Africa a few years ago, he attended Shabbat services with the Abayudaya Jews in eastern Uganda. He recalls: "The service itself was magical. When I heard their *L'cha Dodi*, I was quite moved. It was simply one of the most beautiful tunes I had ever heard in a synagogue. I wanted every Hebrew school teacher, fellow Jew throughout the world, to hear the Abayudaya version of *L'cha Dodi*. It was the magical mix of being Ugandan and Jewish simultaneously that so few Jews in the world have seen."

When Rabbi J. Hershy Worch, a *hasid* who has released a cassette of his own musical renditions of prayers, heard Matt's copy of Abayudaya Jewish music, he played it continuously for a week and then made plans to go to Uganda. He made his second trip this summer.

When Rabbi Ethan Seidel, a pulpit rabbi with a degree from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, heard the tape, he described "Jewish music in a refreshing flavor unlike any other in the world," and tried out one of the melodies with his students and congregants at Tifereth Israel Congregation in Washington, DC.

Cantor David Shneyer is founder of the Jewish Folk Arts Society, founder and director of Am Kolel Judaic Resource Center, a founder of the popular Fabrangen Fiddlers klezmer band, and a singer-composer with numerous recordings. When he heard the Abayudaya sound, he said, "What I love about this music is the joyfulness that comes through. Several of the tunes should be integrated into the repertoire of cantors, Jewish singers, and choral groups across the U.S." (cont., p. 4)

Shalom Everybody Everywhere!

introducing the
ABAYUDAYA Jews of Uganda

Kohavim Tikvah Choir



MEETING NOTICE ON PAGE 8!

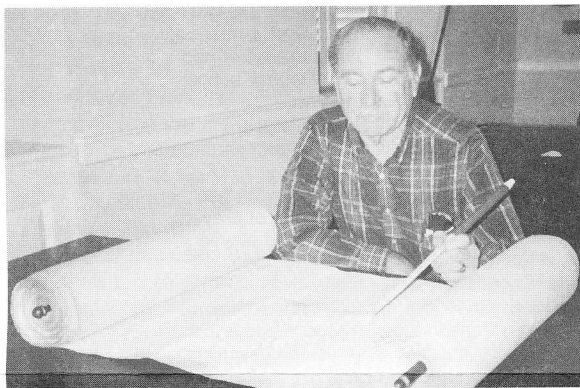
My Quest for a Chinese Torah

By Ray Kaplan

(The author led the Kulanu contingent of Prof. Xu Xin's tour to Kaifeng in 1996.)

Upon returning from a fascinating trip to China in the spring of 1996, I read a most interesting book by Michael Pollak called *Mandarins, Jews and Missionaries -- The Jewish Experience in The Chinese Empire*. The highlight of our trip had been a visit to Kaifeng in Hunan Province, where a Jewish community of several thousand people had thrived for over 800 years. We visited the site where a synagogue had stood from 1163 until it was torn down in about 1860.

Most of the ancient Torahs, books and manuscripts from the synagogue had been sold to missionaries or destroyed as the synagogue fell into disuse when the last rabbi in Kaifeng died around 1810. However, Pollak described one of the Torahs that had been acquired by a Canadian missionary, Bishop William White, in the early 20th century. He revealed that this Torah had, in recent years, been acquired by a university in Texas.



The author's persistence pays off!

In November of 1996, my wife and I were in Texas to attend a wedding. I recalled that the Kaifeng Torah was at a university in Texas, but didn't remember which one. Since the University of Texas at Austin is the largest in the state, I assumed that it had to be located there. We had planned on doing some touring after the wedding, with Austin and San Antonio as our destinations. When we arrived in Austin, our first destination, I was excited at the thought of finding the Kaifeng Torah.

Our first stop was the HRC Museum, on campus. I was sure that it would be located at the museum. A very helpful young undergraduate student working in the ancient manuscripts section of the museum had never heard of a Chinese Torah in their collection. However, he checked their catalog and also called a professor who he thought would know if such a prized "manuscript" was located anywhere on campus. He drew a total blank. While he was researching his catalog, I looked up Jewish institutions in the yellow pages of the telephone directory and came up with the addresses and phone numbers of the Hillel House, the Habad House and two synagogues. The young undergrad advised us that the Hillel House was located only two blocks from the museum, so I decided to make inquiries there.

At the Hillel House, one of the young men on the staff became interested in my quest. However, he also had never heard of a Chinese Torah being anywhere at the university. He called a professor of Judaic Studies and she also could shed no light on the subject.

Sitting in his office, I noticed a computer set-up and wondered out loud whether or not he was hooked up to the

Yahoo browser to see what information he could come up with on Kaifeng Jews. He did come up with a list of references, including Pollak's book title. However, that was as far as he could go. He could not access an index or table of contents. In further conversation with him, I was advised that the Habad House was located only two blocks further down the street from the Hillel House. I thanked him for his efforts and headed out the door thinking that a rabbi at the Habad House would surely know about the Kaifeng Torah.

The front door at the Habad House was locked, but a cleaning lady responded to my knock. She spoke very little English, but I understood that the rabbi was not in, nor was anyone else. I was about to turn to go when she asked if I would like her to phone the rabbi at his home. She handed me the phone and I found myself saying hello to the rabbi's wife. She advised me that the rabbi was resting and could not be disturbed. When I told her what I was after, she suggested that I go to the PCL Library on campus and ask for a man by the name of Nathan.

So off I went to find the PCL Library, which was located two blocks on the other side of the HRC museum. I had no trouble finding Nathan Snyder. He was sure that no such Torah was to be found anywhere on the campus of the University of Texas. When I told him about the reference in Pollak's book, we located the book in the library. We opened the book and right up front, in the list of illustrations, there it was! A Kaifeng Torah was located in the Bridwell Library at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. I could have kicked myself for not remembering that it was at SMU; nevertheless I was overjoyed at our find. Nathan invited me to his office, where he proceeded to telephone the Bridwell Library at SMU. He handed me the phone and I found myself talking to the head librarian. Yes, she knew of the Kaifeng Torah and they did have it stored in the library. She advised me that Mr. Page Thomas was in charge of the section on ancient manuscripts and transferred our call to his office. Unfortunately, he was out and I found myself talking to his answering machine. I left him a message saying that I would be at SMU the next day (our departure was scheduled out of Dallas on a three o'clock flight) and that I would be most appreciative if I could see the Kaifeng Torah. That was it. I thanked Nathan profusely for his efforts and he wished me success in my quest.

The next day we drove back to Dallas and headed for the Bridwell Library at SMU. Yes, Mr. Thomas had received my message. He had taken the Torah out of the vault and it was waiting for me up in his conference room. As my wife and I rode the elevator up to his conference room, my anticipation and excitement accelerated. I was about to realize my quest. We entered the room and there it was, partially unrolled on a mahogany table.

I sat down and examined this ancient Torah. As I did so, I thought about its history, which was related in Pollak's book, as well as in other references that I had studied in the past months.

The Kaifeng Jews had brought 13 Torahs with them when they made the long trek from the Middle-East to China in the 11th century. No one knows how old those Torahs were at that time. They were installed in the ark of the Kaifeng synagogue in 1163 and remained there until 1642, when a terrible flood of the Yellow River wiped out a good portion of Kaifeng and did much damage to the synagogue. Most of the 13 scrolls were washed away. However, the surviving Jews managed to find enough portions of the 13 Torahs to assemble one complete Torah. In the following years, they made 12 copies from this original, to get back to their original 13. The Torah I was looking at was copy number 12, as inscribed on the back of the last section of the scroll. So this

AFTER 37 YEARS

A Return to the Cuban Jewish Community

By Jack Ventura
Kulanu Syndication Service

(The author, a B'nai B'rith activist, is an economist at the US Department of Transportation)

My wife Stephanie and I were privileged to join B'nai B'rith International's mission to Cuba earlier this year. I had been waiting impatiently for this opportunity to see once again the country I grew up in and left at the age of 16 in July of 1960.

Today, the Jewish community of Cuba lives free of religious persecution and poised for spiritual reinvigoration but, like the rest of the Cuban population, under great economic strain. This is the gist of what our mission, over 30 strong and accompanied by International President Tommy Baer, found.

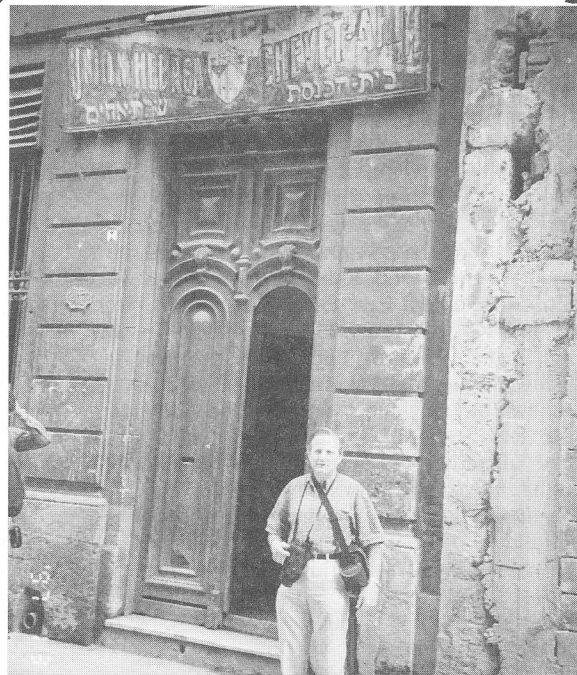
We met with the communities in Havana and (across the island, by plane) in Santiago, and brought them medicines -- prescription and non-prescription -- as well as other items in short supply, which each participant had assembled from his or her respective community.

It took a long time to realize I was in the place where I had grown up. The Cuban Jewish community I knew was thriving and prosperous, building new buildings, sending money to Israel. Now it is a community that, while spirited, is in need and receiving aid from around the globe. Cuba in general struck me as glum, with houses and offices in a perennial brown-out, and economically paralyzed. The hustle and bustle of urban life I remembered are gone. Instead, everywhere one sees children and adults begging for a pencil, pen, or bar of soap. The socialist system insures no homeless people lie in the street, as they do in our cities, but instead you see many adults hanging around, with little incentive to work for a government that pays, after the conversion rate of dollars for pesos, about \$10 a month. The Jews of Cuba share equally in these strained economic conditions.

Cuban Jews once were a prominent portion of the entrepreneurial and professional class. Many owned stores, some even factories. Their numbers had swollen in the 1930s and '40s when Cuba was a primary transit point for Jews leaving Nazi Europe and trying to reach the United States. (The reader may remember the 1938 incident in which the ship Saint Louis, which had arrived in Havana Harbor full of Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany, was turned away.)

But the arrival of Castro literally decimated the Jewish community. The economic policies of the new regime targeted the very class (store owners in particular) that characterized the Jews, and in 1959-61, some 90 percent emigrated and most established themselves in the Miami area. Some stayed behind because they liked Cuba, and anti-Semitism in the population was simply not what it was in Argentina and other places. Where the community had reached 15,000, it is now down to 1,500; 300 families are in Havana; 30 in Santiago de Cuba, and a sprinkling in towns across the country.

The Cuban government has made available places of worship, basically most of those that were operating in 1960, when I left, and has allowed community members to direct their own facilities. But unlike in the US and elsewhere, where members support their own communities and the wealthier give aid to the disadvantaged, in Cuba all members are economically destitute in some degree and are in no position to transfer wealth to the worst off. Some of those worst off came up to individual members of our group, seeking financial help. Clearly, the community depends on



Ventura at Chevet Achim, a Sephardic synagogue (now a museum) in Havana where he was bar mitzvah in 1957.

1906 by Reform Jews from the United States, some of whom had fought in the Spanish-American War. All others are still represented. The Ashkenazi Orthodox congregation Adas Israel supplies the community's *shohet* (kosher butcher) and the *chevra kadisha* (burial society). Chevet Achim, established by Sephardic Jews in the 1910s (and where I was bar-mitzvah), was recently left as a kind of museum, having reached a severe state of disrepair.

Sephardim now go to services and run their activities at the newly refurbished Sephardic Hebrew Center, the facility my mother, Mathilde Ventura, was greatly instrumental in establishing in the 1950s. Her name heads the bronze plaque that hangs on the walls of the Sephardic Center. That plaque, and other furnishings and memorabilia, were rediscovered just last year during remodeling. The Center is in the able and dedicated hands of José Levy, who told me that one of the greatest needs of his congregation is guidance on Sephardic ritual, Torah reading, and the like, preferably in the form of visits by rabbis or others knowledgeable enough to instruct them, but if not, at least in the form of cassette tapes.

The primary center and largest congregation is the same one that dominated in my time -- the Patronato, now headed by Dr. José Miller. The Patronato runs a religious school and coordinates aid to the various communities. The Joint Jewish Distribution Community of the US coordinates aid to the Cuban Jewish community. Both the Patronato and the Sephardic Hebrew Center are today affiliated with the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.

Heading the small community in Santiago de Cuba is Rebecca Button, who has made it her life's mission to bring the community there together and reclaim its physical and spiritual place. When asked what aid the community could use, Button's unexpected response was: some kind of transport vehicle to get people to the distant Jewish cemetery and to community events. We were impressed by the involvement of young Jews all over Cuba, but especially in remote Santiago de Cuba.

Abayudaya CD Makes Tuneful Debut (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 1)

When I heard the Abayudaya service in Uganda in June of 1995, along with 14 other American Jews on a Kulanu teaching and fact-finding mission, I immediately visualized a commercial-quality recording of the stirring and original music.

Now, after two years of selecting songs from various field recordings, writing text notes, viewing photographs, and conferring with sound experts and artists, I'm pleased to be able to say that the CD and audio cassette are available.

Entitled *Shalom Everybody Everywhere!* (from one of the songs) the recording features the Kohavim Tikvah Choir singing -- in English, Hebrew, Luganda and Swahili -- traditional Jewish liturgy set to African melodies and rhythms, as well as new compositions created by the Abayudaya for religious services and daily Jewish life.

The recording will not only enable the world to hear this wonderful music; it will also introduce the world to the remarkable Abayudaya people. Proceeds of the recording go to the Abayudaya.

Produced by Kulanu and the Abayudaya, the recording was edited and mastered by Charlie Pilzer at Airshow, Inc., with graphic layout by Tracy Pilzer and duplication by Oasis.

The 17 songs on the tape include Abayudaya versions of "Sh'ma Yisrael", "Hinei Ma Tov", "L'cha Dodi", the *Shehecheyanu*, and "Adon Olam", as well as the traditional version of "Hatikvah".

There are original English-language compositions of "Torah Torah" and "Thirteen Principles of Faith", both interpreted by the popular child soloist, Rachel Namudosi, whose singing once impressed the vice president of Uganda. The stirring words of "Torah Torah" include "I love the Torah... she gives me food, she gives me life. Torah, the tree of life, is full of peace...She is my mother, she is my happiness..." "The Thirteen Principles of Faith" is an African treatment of Maimonides' formulation.

Another original composition in English is "We Shan't Give Up", the Abayudaya motto song. Its emotional words move every visitor to the small but vibrant community: "However few we shall be...We have the hope to prosper...Every day, every night, we shall never give up...Come on, come on, join the struggle...."

Also included are mesmerizing songs in Swahili -- "Tunafuraha Sana" ("We Are Very Happy") and "Fanya Kazi Nangufu" ("Work Hard with All Your Might"), sung while the Abayudaya youth worked on their kibbutz to make bricks for the synagogue -- and in Luganda -- "Mukama Alinyamba" ("My Lord Will Help Me") and "Mukwano Gwange" ("My Beloved"). The words of "Mukwano Gwange" are especially beautiful: "I have one beloved, God is my beloved...You, the sick, don't worry, for the Lord is your Doctor...You who are in peril, do not worry for the Lord is everything you need. Let me boast of my Lover..."

The title song closes the recording with a tuneful "Shalom" from their isolated mountain top to Americans, Ugandans, Arabs, Christians, Jews...to "everybody everywhere".

TO ORDER

Please follow instructions carefully, since Kulanu cannot afford to ship any order that does not include sufficient postage. We can only accept checks or money orders (payable to KULANU), and only in US dollars.

Send \$15 for each CD and/or \$10 for each audio cassette, plus \$2 for postage and handling in the US (\$3 for Canada, \$5 for other countries). Add \$1 for postage and handling for each additional CD or cassette in the US and Canada (\$2 for other countries). Allow one month for delivery.

Please send your LEGIBLE order to: Kulanu Music Project, 1217 Edgevale Rd., Silver Spring, MD 20910-1612.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

Buy CDs and cassettes for yourself, family, friends, holiday gifts, hostess gifts, etc.

Make copies and post or distribute the publicity flyer/order form located on page 5 of this newsletter.

Talk to your local record stores, book stores, Judaica stores, and synagogue shops about carrying the recording. They can contact the Kulanu Music Project at 1217 Edgevale Rd., Silver Spring, MD 20910-1612, tel. 301-565-3094.

Return to Cuba (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 3)

Despite these signs of progress and rejuvenation, many wish to leave. Over the past year, 60 families have been able to make *aliyah* to Israel.

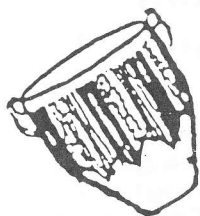
Isidro Gomez, Asst. Director of Religious Affairs of the Communist Party (imagine such a position in the Republican or Democratic Party in the US!) gave us a run-down of religious policy. He said the Cuban Government's beef has always been with the Catholics because the Catholic Church took an institutional stance supporting the overthrow of the Castro regime. For many years the government was philosophically anti-religious, following classic Marxist tradition. This was a dark period for Cuban Jews, who, like anyone else acknowledging religious identity, paid a heavy price in terms of social advancement.

But the Cuban Congress of 1991 ended that policy, in part because the government had recognized that a number of clearly committed (to the revolution) and accomplished individuals were being left out because of their religious

Clearly, religious missions like the one our B'nai B'rith group was conducting, had much to do with this more positive attitude of the government's, along with the advent of liberation theology in the Catholic Church itself. You might say the policy today is pro-religious pluralism. Gomez seemed to want to downplay the Catholic Church, saying that the prevalent religion in Cuba is not really Catholicism but Afro-Cuban religion, hiding behind many saints and virgins.

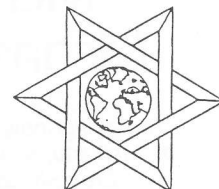
And, oh yes, I did get to see where I used to live. A house that our family moved into two years before we left Cuba was still standing there. Today it is the Turkish embassy. What a fitting end to a property that once belonged to my parents, two Jews born in Turkey! How glorious to see the Turkish flag flying over the house, as if to say, "Your house has been liberated!"

A poster in the Patronato says, "Am Israel de Cuba Chai" ("the people of Israel of Cuba live") -- proving once again that "Haverim Kol Israel" ("all of Israel are friends"). With the help



KULANU

Helping Lost Jewish Communities



Announces the production of

Shalom Everybody Everywhere!

A recording of the music of the

ABAYUDAYA Jews of UGANDA

Kohavim Tikvah Choir

...singing in English, Hebrew, Luganda, and Swahili

Enjoy these moving renditions of traditional Jewish liturgy set to African melodies and rhythms, as well as new compositions created by the Abayudaya for religious services and daily Jewish life.

"What I love about this music is the joyfulness that comes through. Several of the tunes should be integrated into the repertoire of cantors, Jewish singers, and choral groups across the U.S."

--David Shneyer, Judaist, cantor, founder and director of Am Kolel Judaic Resource Center

On this tape one can get a taste for Jewish music in a refreshing flavor unlike any other in the world.

We've had fun trying out one of these melodies in our synagogue!

--Ethan Seidel, rabbi of Tifereth Israel Congregation, Washington, DC, piano graduate of Oberlin Conservatory of Music

ABAYUDAYA

The history of Abayudaya dates from 1919, when an eastern Uganda governor, Semei Kakungulu, read the Bible and realized nothing but Judaism from his study. He and his followers self-converted, and a core of 500 has maintained their commitment to Judaism up to today, despite severe impediments, including extreme poverty and the anti-Semitism of Idi Amin. In June 1995 a Kulanu teaching and fact-finding delegation visited the Abayudaya in Uganda and found a community with a deep understanding of and commitment to Judaism. Kulanu is assisting the Abayudaya with school education and Jewish education in preparation for formal conversion. PROCEEDS OF THIS RECORDING GO TO THE ABAYUDAYA.

KULANU is a nonprofit organization of Jews from varied backgrounds and practices dedicated to helping lost and dispersed remnants of the Jewish people and assisting those who wish to (re)join the Jewish community. For further information, contact KULANU at 11603 Gilsan St., Silver Spring, MD 20902, tel. 301-681-5679; fax 301-681-1587; Kulanu@ubmail.ubalt.edu; <http://www.ubalt.edu/www/kulanu>.

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Memories of the Bnei Menashe on Sabbath Eve

By Yaakov Levi

(The author now lives in New York and is planning to help the Jews of Timbuktu, Mali, on behalf of Kulanu.)

Erev Shabbat is a good time to think a lot of my friends in Kiryat Arba who came a very long way for their own personal realization of Torah -- to live in Israel, in a Jewish lifestyle, among their Jewish brethren.

My first contact with the Bnei Menashe was when I moved to Kiryat Arba. I encountered 13 of them at the little *shul* I began attending; they were the most loyal of all, making all three daily prayers. And on Shabbat they were always there. At first I just nodded and smiled a greeting, which was returned, but they were quiet, polite and a little shy, and I did not want to be intrusive.

A week later I began *ulpan* (a Hebrew language course). There were seven Bnei Menashe in that class, and from day one, they were friends to all. It is impossible not to be won over by their ready smiles.

The first one I met was a special guy named Gideon Manlun, and we are friends to this day. He and his wife have just had another baby this past year, born in Israel, to add to their others. Their oldest boy broke his leg last year, which is probably the only thing in his life that ever slowed him down. They all dote on their children, and the little ones are a joy.

Gideon is a man I wish everyone reading this could meet and come to know. He is quiet and very serious, but has a ready smile and a real love for life and for his family. He has more "traditional, old-fashioned values" than almost anyone else I know.

He has a burning desire for his brethren in Manipur to join them in Israel and lives for the day that some from Israel can return to Manipur to teach and prepare those left behind. I have sat in Gideon's kitchen many hours, sharing tea and listening to his dreams for his people to rejoin their heritage. He is a quietly convincing man, and as I listened to him, I too began to share his dream.

I have served in the US Army in Vietnam, in the highlands on the Cambodian border, with the Montagnards. I have also taught in Thailand, west of Chiangmai, along the Burma border among the tribal people there. I am somewhat familiar with the customs of some of the ethnic tribal peoples of southeast Asia. They are not the customs and traditions of the Bnei Menashe -- far from it. It is an ancient difference, dating back to their origins from their patriarchal figure Menashe.

In our *ulpan* class was a couple who were expecting a baby, and daily I would tease the mother-to-be with, "What are you doing here? Get home and have the baby!" We would all laugh. When she did have it, they sent me a special message to come and see, and the whole Bnei Menashe community was there. All children are beautiful, but, if you like big dark eyes and smiles, then....

I have many cherished pictures of my friends there, most of whom lived in a "caravan" area where I also lived. Their caravans, unlike most others, had neat, trimmed gardens, flowers and vegetables. Inside their sparsely furnished homes is always a bookshelf with *siddurim*, *makzorim* and commentaries, well used and cherished.

Go by on *Erev Shabbat* and the singing follows you through the area. Knock on a door and you are ushered in with blessings and greetings. Isn't this how life is supposed to be? I think that is my most cherished memory of my Bnei Menashe friends -- showing me how sweet and joyful life can be. May all of *HaShem's* blessings be theirs!

Gideon is the correspondent for the community in Kiryat Arba, and you can write him at: Gideon Manlun, Ramat Mamre, Kiryat Arba 90100, Israel. It would be helpful to include some postage money.

This Shabbat, and every one, my prayers are with Gideon and

The Jewish Kingdom Of the Khazars

By Joe Hantman
Kulanu Syndication Service

A little over a thousand years ago, in the area of the former Soviet Union now known as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Dagestan, Chechnya, et al. there existed a vast kingdom called Khazaria. It was bounded on the west by the Black Sea and on the east by the Caspian Sea. The Khazars were a Turkic people who probably migrated from the east in earlier times.

They controlled great trade routes between the still pagan Russ (Russia) to the north and Christians and Moslems from the west and south. Most interesting, however, is that Khazaria was a Jewish kingdom.

Its kings, nobility, high officials, and most of the population were practicing Rabbinite Jews observing Torah and Talmudic law -- as distinct from the neighboring Crimean Karaites, who rejected Rabbinite Talmudic authority.

The story of the Khazars was first documented in about 920 C.E., when the ships of Chasdai Ibn Shaprut, the Jewish grand vizier to the caliph of Cordova, returned to Spain with first-hand reports of the Jewish kingdom of the Khazars. Chasdai was a statesman, linguist, rabbi, and great advocate for the Jewish people. Through his ships' captains, he conducted an ongoing correspondence in Hebrew with King Joseph of Khazaria, through which he learned the history of the Khazars and of their life as Jews.

In about 740 C.E. monotheistic religions were spreading throughout the area. The story was told that King Bulan of Khazaria pondered on the choice among Christianity, Islam and Judaism. He interrogated representatives of each religion, and when the Christians and Moslems conceded that they each stemmed from Judaism, he chose the path of Judaism.

A more pragmatic possibility is that in the fierce competition between Christians and Moslems for trade routes through the area King Bulan sided with neither, and for about 250 years the Jewish kingdom was maintained. (cont., p. 7)

Chinese Torah (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 2)

It was in wonderful condition. It was made from very soft animal skins, perhaps sheepskin or goatskin, and the sections were attached by hand stitching. On the back of each section, a Hebrew number was inscribed to identify the section number and to assure that the sections were assembled in the proper order. The Hebrew of the Torah was inscribed in black ink and was in very good condition, for the most part. Some sections were a bit faded, probably due to being exposed too long to bright lighting when it was first put on exhibit. To prevent further damage, the Torah is now kept in a wrapping and stored in a dark vault. I was able to read the words with absolutely no problem.

Mr. Thomas told me that the Torah had been bequeathed to the university around 1977 by a wealthy Dallas collector of antique manuscripts. He did not have any other information about its travels since Bishop White brought it back from China in the early part of this century. Mr. Thomas took a picture of me sitting and reading the Torah, a picture that I will always treasure. He also presented me with copies of several pictures that had been taken of the Torah up close and of the ancient pointer that has accompanied the Torah in its travels from Kaifeng. I was most grateful to this gracious gentleman for all his efforts on my behalf. I also learned that Michael Pollak lives in Dallas and took down his phone number.

We left Dallas that afternoon, and I shall never forget that

The Jewish Kingdom Of the Khazars (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 6)

It is known that the Khazars had contacts with Jewish groups already existing in Central Asia and with that historically elusive Jewish group, the Rhadomite traders, who traveled by sea, rivers and overland throughout Europe, Africa, Arabia and China.

The story of the spiritual conversion moved Yehudah Halevy, the great rabbi and poet of the Golden Age in Spain, to write his epic work *HakKhazari*, expounding the virtues of Judaism over all other religions. Both Shiprut and Halevy were among the courtier Jews who flourished under Islamic rulers during the Golden Age in Spain.

The Khazar kingdom lasted until about 1000 C.E., probably defeated in the southern portion by Islamic forces that dominate the area today. The northern portion, including Kiev, the capital of Christian Russia, was defeated by the Russians, who, even until now, dominate that area.

While the Jewish Khazars do not exist today, they have left their mark in history. Chronicles of early Russia make many references to them. Their capital city, Itil, is believed buried underneath the Caspian Sea, possibly destroyed by the powerful earthquakes which still trouble that region today and by the rise in the water level of the Caspian Sea. Their main fortress of Sakil was inundated by a man-made reservoir lake during the early Stalin era.

Among the documents found by Solomon Schechter in the *geniza* of the Cairo Synagogue was correspondence between Khazars and other Jewish communities.

Khazars are known to have traveled north to Russia, and stone markings by them in their language have been found in Hungary. (It is interesting to note that one linguistic family, shared only by Hungarian and Finnish languages, known as Finno-Ugaric, has many Khazar characteristics. This might support the contention that at least some Khazars took their language with them as they traveled west.)

Both Jewish and Russian authorities have been very quiet on the subject of the Khazars. Just as rabbis today have been skeptical about the validity of their conversion to Judaism, the Russians have had no enthusiasm for reporting about a Jewish kingdom hundreds of years before Prince Vladimir brought Christianity to Russia.

Some traces of Khazar origin can still be found in parts of Europe. In fact the possibility that some European Jews are descended from Khazars, however vague, has been used over the years by some Jews -- and some anti-Semites -- to further their own purposes. Jews at times falsely claimed Khazar origin as proof that they were innocent of deicide in the crucifixion of Jesus since their ancestors never were in Palestine. Anti-Semites even now use Khazar origin to deny that today's Jews are of biblical descent. (As we of Kulanu know, throughout history other peoples have converted to Judaism and diversified the genetic composition of the Jewish people. Thus today's Jews make no claim to be direct-line descendants of the patriarchs.)

In this connection, one should read *The Thirteenth Tribe* by the renowned author Arthur Koestler (*Darkness at Noon*, et al.) This is a well documented, erudite history of the Khazar Jews, although his conclusion -- that the Jews of Eastern Europe are of Khazar origin rather than Judean -- is not shared by any other serious historian. The prevailing view is that most Jews of Eastern Europe originated in Palestine and, well before 70 C.E., spread throughout Europe during the Roman Empire. Their number, of course, greatly increased after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E.

Many facets of Khazar history await archeological

Do a Mitzvah: Write Letters to Uganda

By Irwin Berg

The pen-pal project was born when I took a walk through the countryside between Nabukaye Hill and Gangama in June of 1995 with four Abayudaya teen-agers. They asked me if I could arrange for them to correspond with young American Jewish pen-pals. I agreed, feeling that American youth would be inspired by these young Jews' remarkable commitment to their religion despite the adverse conditions in Uganda.

Unfortunately, the project has been only marginally successful. I have received the most cooperation from Nifty, the Reform movement's youth organization. During the past 20 months more than 15 members of that organization have participated. For reasons that were not explained to me, the youth organization of the Conservative Synagogue movement refused to cooperate. The Hershel School (a liberal Jewish day school) at first showed some interest but then stopped answering my telephone calls. The Ramaz Yeshiva in New York simply didn't answer me. The Westchester County Solomon Schechter Day School circulated my letter among its students, and two or three letters resulted. The Jewish Theological Seminary has a program (the Prozdor program) for teen-agers. After several telephone calls to the rabbi who runs the program, my letter was posted on a bulletin board, but I am unaware that it produced any results. Some letters were sent as a result of my own personal contacts.

Correspondence means much more to the Abayudaya than it does to Jewish American teen-agers. A letter from the United States helps to dissolve the feeling of isolation which envelops the Abayudaya. To many American teen-agers who are unaccustomed to writing letters, it is a chore. They write one or two letters, lose interest, and then stop writing. I have received letters of disappointment from Abayudaya youngsters when this happens.

I would like all members of Kulanu to contact the Jewish schools in their area and present the pen-pal project not only as a Jewish service project, but also as an educational one. Recently, because of the famine that the Abayudaya experienced, American youths received letters describing the famine. An American child can learn much about conditions in a third-world, subsistence economy from such correspondence.

I have the names of about 30 Abayudaya youngsters, ages 9 to 24, of both sexes, who would like to write to American Jews. Please contact me at 333 West End Ave. #8C, New York, NY 10023 (212-724-9987) or bergiande@aol.com. It is a mitzvah.



KULANU BRIEFS

Next Meeting

The next Kulanu meeting will be held at noon on Sunday, August 31, at the party room of The Forum, 11801 Rockville Pike, Rockville, MD (immediately south of Randolph Road, opposite Sym's). The guest speaker will be Yaffah daCosta of Texas. A Christian community leader who teaches Torah to non-Jews and speaks out against the proselytizing of Jews for conversion to Christianity, daCosta recently discovered her Azorean Crypto-Judaic roots. The Abayudaya recording will be available (save postage charges!) Refreshments will be served.

Important Mailing Info

Please note Kulanu's new office address is 11603 Gilsan St., Silver Spring, MD 20902-3122. Checks (for any purpose) should continue to go to our financial office: Kulanu c/o Bea and Joe Hantman, 3520 Tarkington Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20906.

If you are a "snow bird" (spending summer and winter at different addresses), please send us both addresses and let us know when you will be where.

A reminder: We do not send out renewal notices. Please send in your tax-deductible donation annually to assure that you will continue receive your newsletter.

Kulanu Officer Changes

Yasher koach to **Bob Lande**, our hard-working treasurer for the past four years. He is switching offices to become Vice President for Peruvian Affairs. **Ruth Silverman** is our new Public Relations Consultant and **Diane Zeller** has become our Communications Director.

Lemba Contacts

The Balemba are Africans of Southern Africa whose tradition teaches of their Jewish roots. Kulanu officers met with two Lemba leaders in two separate meetings this summer: Simon Masala, a businessman, and Sam Moeti, vice president of the Lemba Cultural Association as well as a member of the South African Parliament. Kulanu's Mel Laney will be helping them set up their own school system. In addition to discussing Lemba customs, the leaders extended to Kulanu supporters an invitation to attend their annual international convention, which will be held this year near Venda, South Africa, on October 11. This date coincides with Yom Kippur, not currently celebrated by the Lemba, but they would welcome visitors who would teach some Yom Kippur prayers at the convention. For further information contact Simon Masala at PO Box 669, Louis Trichardt, South Africa 0920.

Mound Plans Tours

Dr. Gloria Mound, eminent expert on the history of the Jews in the Balearic Islands and Sao Tome, is planning lecture tours in the US in late October 1997 and March 1998. Consult her new web site for details and topics: <http://www.gezernet.co.il/marrano>. She particularly needs more bookings to cover the expenses for the October-November tour. Congregations and other groups are invited to contact her at Casa Shalom Institute for Marrano Studies, POB 66 Gan Yavneh 70800 Israel, 972-8-573-150, marrano@gezernet.co.il.

Keeping Up with Judith Cohen

Judith presented aspects of her research on musical traditions in Crypto-Jewish regions of Spain and Portugal at two conferences this summer in London and Jerusalem. In London she also spoke on Women Musicians in the Three Cultures of Medieval Spain (Jewish, Muslim, Christian), and gave a concert of Sephardic songs and music collected in her fieldwork in Portugal. Between conferences, she is working on with her research along

Halevy Speaks

Schulamith Halevy presented a paper on "Prayers of Portugal's Anusim in Contemporary Brazil" at the World Congress of Jewish Studies meeting in Jerusalem this summer.

Meyer, Fein Write

Yasher koach to Matthew Meyer, whose "Letter from Uganda" article was placed on page one of the June 6 *Forward*. The article describes a Shabbat Meyer spent among the Abayudaya during which he presented a Torah scroll to the community.

Judith Fein's article "A Journey to Hidden World," appears in the summer issue of *The Jewish Traveler*. The article reports on a trip to the Jewish sites of Brazil led by Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn last year.

"Shabbat Shalom from India"

Romiel Daniel, who produced the acclaimed cassette of Bene Israel Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur music last year, has just produced a compact disk featuring Sabbath melodies. Due to the dwindling number of Bene Israel left in India (less than 5000), preservation of this heritage is imperative. Daniel, who was president of the Magen Abraham Synagogue in Ahmedabad, India, in 1986-90, now lives in New York and frequently lectures about his people, the Bene Israel. To order the CD, entitled "Shabbat Shalom from India," send a check for \$15 (includes postage) in the name of Romiel Daniel, 95-19, 64th Road, #19D, Rego Park, New York, NY 11374-3143. These melodies, a thousand years old or more, were handed down orally from one generation to another. The songs have Indian music accompaniment provided by Pandit Ramesh Mishra, a leading Sarangi artist from India.

The earlier audio cassette, "Yom Kippur & Selichoth Melodies of the Bene Israel Jews of India," is available for \$12 at the same address.

Bene Israel Holiday Services

Bene Israel Jews of the New York area will be holding Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services in October at The Village Temple, 33 E. 12th St., New York, NY 10001. The Kulanu community is invited to attend; there is no ticket charge. For info, call Romiel Daniel at 212-290-2558 (office) or 718-897-8718.

Another Uganda Pilgrimage!

Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn, who led the first Kulanu teaching-study mission to the Abayudaya in June 1995, is contemplating another trip next January or February if there is enough interest. Contact him at Temple Beth Israel, 840 Highland Rd., Sharon, PA 16146 (tel. 412-346-3722 or email JacquesC@pgh.net).

Todah Rabah

Our thanks to **Congregation Adas Israel in Sag Harbor, NY**, for donating prayer books and to Kenny Schultz for arranging their shipment to a congregation in Ghana.

And to **Congregation B'nai Shalom in Buffalo, NY**, for sending a shipment of books *siddurim* and *machzorim* to the Bnei Menashe in India.

Wanted: Canadian Volunteer

Kulanu is in the fortunate position of having a growing number of Canadian supporters. Unfortunately, it is very difficult for us to process contributions that are in the form of checks made out in Canadian dollars. And it is an imposition on our Canadian

BRIEFS (Cont.)

Internet Notes

A new listserve about Portuguese genealogy may be accessed at Portugal-L@rootsweb.com.

The Kulanu listserve coordinator, **David Turetsky**, is recovering from a week in surgical intensive care following complications from a gall bladder operation. David received get-well wishes and prayers from listserve subscribers from all over the globe. He is touched by the outpouring from his Kulanu family!

Indian Items Available

A publication by Ashe A. Bhende and Ralph Jhirad, "Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics of Jews in India," is available for \$18 plus \$2 handling. Make check out to "O.R.T. India" and send by registered mail to Mr. Ralph Jhirad, Director, O.R.T. India, 68 Worli Hill Rd., behind Worli Dairy, Worli, Mumbai 400018, India.

A documentary video, "David Sassoon -- The Great Philanthropist," (20 minutes long) is available for \$50 plus \$15 postage and handling for individuals, \$75 including postage for institutions and libraries. Please indicate PAL or NTSC format. Send as indicated above.

Replicas of traditional Bene Israel ritual objects are also available, including a Chanukah oil lamp, a standard *hanukiah*, mezuzahs, Sabbath lamp holders, and matzah covers. For details contact the same address above.

Historical Society Meeting

The North Shore Jewish Historical Society's November 2 meeting will feature a talk by Steve Gorban, Kulanu's outreach vice president for New England. His topic will be: "Unexpected Links Between the Cape Verde, Madeira, Azores and Iberian Jewish Communities." For information about the meeting, in Lynn, Massachusetts, contact Dr. Richard Winer at 617-593-2386.

A Jewish Travel Network

The Jewish Travel Network matches Jewish travelers seeking the hospitality of a Jewish home while traveling with individuals and communities that would like to host Jewish travelers from around the world. The Network is seeking communities to either host Jewish travelers for a few nights or serve as contacts or guides within the community. Each visitor pays a small gratuity to the host to cover any expenses incurred. The Network would be pleased to have applications from the Jewish communities to whom Kulanu has extended outreach.

Contact Del Silverman, Jewish Travel Network, PO Box 283, San Carlos, CA 94070, tel. 415-368-0880; fax 415-599-9066; email jewishtn@aol.com, web site <http://www.jewish-travel-net.com/>.

Exhibit on Kaifeng Jews

For the first time in more than a decade, there will be a major exhibit in the US on the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng. The exhibit is being co-sponsored by the Albert L. Schultz Jewish Community Center of Palo Alto and the Sino-Judaic Institute. The SJI is in the process of aiding the Judaic Wing of the Kaifeng Municipal Museum in expanding its own exhibit on the history of these Jews.

The exhibit opens at the JCC in Palo Alto on September 14, 1997, and is expected to travel to Los Angeles and then possibly the East Coast. For information call Leo Gabow at 415-493-4096.

A Correction

An error occurred in our editing of Irwin Berg's book review of *Greek Jewry in the Twentieth Century*, as seen on page 14 of our Spring newsletter. The 100,000 Jews who came from Spain to

My Crypto-Jewish Self

©1997 by Alberto Omero Lopez
(edited by Karen Primack)

Many years ago, when I returned from Vietnam, my mom told me, "There are big family secrets, but you will never know them," and she didn't explain further. This only prompted my curiosity, and through the years I've learned more and more about my family heritage.

I grew up Hispanic in South Texas in the 1950s. I left the Catholic religion about 15 years ago because it wasn't meeting my needs and I never felt comfortable with it. Religion had always been a topic of discussion and I remember hearing a lot of arguments about it. My mother's family had been Catholic but for the most part are now Protestant. My mom and dad are Catholic. My sister and I attended parochial school when we were young. She and her family remained close to the Church.

My discovery of a hidden ancestry began when I intentionally mentioned to my cousin Olga that I had left the Catholic Church, to get some sort of reaction, knowing it would get back to my parents. Sometime later the topic of religion came up again with Olga and she said my mother's youngest brother Noe had told her a family secret: We were descended from German Jews. Later I asked Tio Noe for more information. He was then in his early 60s, and he told me he recalled his mom (my grandmother Maria) asking for a family meeting in the kitchen when he was about 15 years old. She announced to everyone she was descended from German Jews. Since then I've tried to ask my mother if she remembered the meeting, but she refused to talk to me about it then, and has maintained her silence to this very day.

As a child my *guelita* (*abuelita*) -- as I called my grandmother -- would cook chicken soup, a recipe I couldn't find in a Mexican cookbook. Her soup, just a broth really, was made with the chicken feet. The empanadas we ate in my mom's family were made of sweet potatoes or yams, never from the meat that other Latin Americans used. We'd have corn tamales and although my father's family made them out of venison and pork, and the whole family would eat them, I never saw ham served at my mother's family table. Other foods we ate from time to time were *leche quemada* (creme caramel made from goat milk), *pan de semita* (semitic bread) and flour tortillas (unleavened flat bread), that the Jewish American Archives identify as having Sephardic origins.

I vacationed in Germany for the first time in 1971, and again in 1973. I realized that German chicken soup came closest to tasting like my grandmother's soup. I noticed that Germans referred to their pet cats as Mik-mik, and I remembered my grandmother called her tomcat "Mique." I looked up "Mique" in the Spanish-English dictionary but never found it.

When I came to Washington, I met people who presumed that I was Jewish. I laughed and said, "No, I'm Hispanic and Catholic. Why do you ask?" They responded that I had a Jewish nose. I didn't know what that meant. I barely knew what a Jew was, or a Star of David. I knew that I'd seen six-pointed stars on Christmas trees in southern Texas.

Ritual Slaughter

It was spring at my Uncle Juan's ranch. I was about 15 years old. My grandfather Rosendo asked that I help him slaughter a calf. I cringed at the thought. I'd seen slaughters before; there had been a lot of noise. But I couldn't say no. My grandfather asked that I pet the calf, and hold it lying down, and calm it. The animal got very quiet, and he tied its front and hind legs after about 20 minutes. He cut a slit at the throat. The blood wasn't pumping out, it was seeping out. The animal kicked briefly but it was all very peaceful. And the animal just went to sleep. We didn't say a prayer, but we talked about how we had to take the animal's life to eat. It was only just recently that I read in the Jewish American chronicles about other Hispanic Americans who had also witnessed a Jewish ritual slaughter. The experience was not as disturbing as I had expected. My grandfather was very gentle. I get upset

My Crypto-Jewish Self (Cont.)

(cont. from p. 9)

grew up with. I'd seen other slaughters with rifles, and the animals so frightened, squealing. But my grandfather was very humane. I never imagined it was something related to Judaism. Later I found out that his profession had been that of a butcher when he was younger. He was retired when I knew him, and spent much of his time gardening, beautiful gardens with fig and orange trees.

Traces of Another Ritual

When I was around 25 years old, I traveled to New York to visit a girlfriend at Christmas time. We talked of marriage, but nothing ever came of it. My mother was curious and asked, "What's happening with that woman in New York?" I told her that she wanted me to get a circumcision. My mother blurted out, "Did I scar you?" I said, "What do you mean?" She said, "It's a custom with my mother's family to cut some of the skin off the male organ." She did say how many days it was after birth, but I don't remember. I asked her what they did with the skin and she said they buried it. She, my grandmother, and another woman buried the skin in the back yard, and placed a stone over it to identify it. The circumcision was done in such a way as to hide it. No one would know it had been done unless you look closely. It left only a tiny, hidden scar, really just a gesture.

* * *

Last winter I joined the DC Jewish Community Center nearby, and signed up for a session of classes regarding the "Lost Tribes of Israel" and other displaced Jews. I met Jonina Duker and became familiar with "Kulanu," an organization that helps find lost and dispersed remnants of the Jewish people, and aids those who want to join the community. They provided me with copies of "Sephardim in America," Special Edition, American Jewish Archives Records from 1992. On the list of suspected names of Jews submitted to conversion in Spain I found my family names: Gonzalez, Perez, Garcia and Lopez, the names of families persecuted by the Inquisition in Mexico in the 16th century. I found the names of my uncles: Adan, Jose, and Noe, and I discovered that Maria (my grandmother's name, my mother's name, and my older aunt's name whom we called "Tete") is a translation of the name Miriam.

I devoured books about my people's history: I learned that during the Crusades, Jews were expelled and massacred as early as 1189-90 from the German Rhineland, 1290 from England, and 1307 from France. They were allowed to enter Aragon that same year. The Papal Inquisition was established in Aragon in 1238. By 1391, there were riots in Seville and other Andalusian cities and Jewish businesses and neighborhoods were destroyed and many were forced to convert. They were expelled from Cologne in 1424 and Mainz in 1462. In 1449, there were riots in Toledo and Ciudad Real, and *conversos* were persecuted in Cordoba. By 1478, Pope Sixtus IV had established the Castilian Inquisition. The Castilian Cortes prohibited relations between Jews and *conversos* in 1480. In 1492, Granada was captured by the Christians, ending the 800-year war of reconquest. The Catholic monarchs, King Ferdinand of Aragon and Queen Isabela of Castile, felt Muslims and Jews were a threat to the monarchy, and on March 31 of that year they issued the "Edict of Expulsion," giving the Jews four months to settle their affairs and depart or convert. Jews were barred from taking anything of value with them except what they could carry. A tremendous wealth of Jewish art, jewels, gold, and property went to the Catholic Church.

According to one chronicler, by the mid-16th century, 25 percent of the Spaniards living in Mexico City were Jews, and if "New Christians" (i.e., *conversos*) were counted, Jews would have outnumbered Catholics. By the mid-17th century there were 15 synagogues in Mexico City and about a dozen more scattered throughout New Spain. In the beginning, as in Spain, Jews were treated with tolerance and many rose to high positions, married nobility and attained great wealth, but when they grew too open

From the American Jewish Archives I learned that in the 1570s, the governor of the New Kingdom of Nuevo Leon, the prominent merchant Luis de Carvajal de la Cueva, was tried for Judaizing and died in prison as a *converso*, sometime between 1589 and 96. Nearly 200 other souls were tortured for confessions, tried for Judaizing and "relaxed," (garroted, mutilated or burned at the stake) as late as 1736 in Peru. As a result of this persecution, *conversos* migrated in large numbers to the unpopulated northern frontier territories. Secret Jews, wishing to continue with their lives in the New World, fled to the remote regions of northern New Spain, the vast territory of Nuevo Leon and the lands claimed by New Spain that now constitute the southwestern United States, parts or all of Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and California. Most of my family is in Nuevo Leon, Mexico, or in southwest Texas.

Sometime between 1907 and 1909, Mexican revolutionaries confiscated the Gonzalez maize crop to feed their armies. My *guelita* told how the soldiers came on mounted horses, how they forced their way into the large family home and pointed a rifle at her 14-year-old belly. A feisty young woman; she stood up to them, but after they left, her family feared for their lives. Her husband and her mother fled with her from Agua Leguas, Nuevo Leon. Later, enroute to Texas on a mule-driven wagon, my great-grandmother, *Mama Lola*, had her first encounter with a steam locomotive. Frightened, she jumped off the wagon and hysterically ran in the opposite direction fearing the train would follow! *Mama Lola* died in Texas a few days before my first uncle was born. My grandparents returned to Mexico several times thereafter. My grandmother described how they would wade or swim across the Rio Grande on a galvanized washing tub and on one occasion the tub overturned in the muddy river and she saved her husband's life.

I'm a very spiritual person, and I believe in God, in a superior being. I believe in doing good and helping others on a daily basis. In the early '80s, I would go to Mass at lunch time practically every day during the work week. But I came to feel the Church no longer met my needs, and over a five-year period I managed to wean myself away from the Catholicism. I've seen how people live in Third World countries, and I've witnessed dismal sights -- children prostituting themselves in the streets, mother and children sitting in mud and squalor begging for coins -- and I've thought, "Why can't something be done? Why don't they make an effort to avoid pregnancy? Why is the Catholic Church so against abortion and family planning amid such misery?" I've also found it very disturbing that the Church has seemed so self-serving in backing dictatorial governments in Latin America and other parts of the world. I'm resentful of the Spanish Inquisition.

It's Been a Great Shock

My family didn't mean to hurt me by not telling me the dreaded family secret sooner. But every time I learn something else about our Jewish past, something I'd always thought was "Mexican-American" or "Spanish," I feel as if a rug has been pulled out from under me. With every new fact I learn, I feel I have to brace myself for a fall. It's been a great shock. There's resentment at not having been told the truth until I was 43 years old. Anger, because leaving a religion (Catholicism, this time) was a very painful experience, no less so than being forced to do so. Had I been told about my ancestry sooner, I might have had different perceptions about religion and perhaps wouldn't have suffered as much spiritually as I did and continue to do. It's too soon now, but conversion is not out of the question.

The Catholics and the Protestants don't get along, and as a child it affected me. I don't have a yellow parchment or amulet that was passed down through the generations to show any historical connection. I just have knowledge, oral traditions passed down from generation to generation, and the semblance of past traditions that I now realize are not "Mexican-American" nor

Jewish Voyagers to the New World

A recent conference at Brown University on "The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West" attracted 30 scholars from the US, Brazil, France and Holland. A *New York Times* article (July 29) by Andree Brooks summarized some of the scholars' findings:

*Jews were far more significant in the earliest exploration, settlement and development of the Caribbean and South America than has previously been acknowledged.

*Virtually all Jews playing a significant role in the earliest development of the New World were involuntary converts (known as New Christians, Conversos or Marranos).

*The trade potential was especially appealing to these Iberian

Jews, expert traders throughout the Mediterranean since the Middle Ages.

*Deportation to Brazil was a customary sentence meted out by the Portuguese Inquisition in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries.

*In the region around Rio de Janeiro and the state of Bahia, New Christians constituted 20 percent of the European population by the 17th and 18th centuries; the number rose to 50 percent in the Paraiba sugar trade region near Recife.

*Today, so many Brazilians are eager to retrace their roots that "*la sangre llama*" (the blood is calling) organizations are forming for people who want to reclaim their Jewish ancestry.

*In Dutch Curacao, Jews were so important in commerce, Jewish schools were allowed to stay open on Sunday.

*Young family members would first be sent to Amsterdam for a commercial education and then on to the Caribbean to serve as company agents. Marriages were arranged with an eye toward expanding the network.

*One measure of their success in commerce was constant accusations of unfair competition and of practicing black arts through the use of secret signs and symbols (Ladino was often written using Hebrew characters). Another was the arrival of the Inquisition in the New World.

Choose-A-Mitzvah!

- \$ 36 will send holiday gifts to children in Peru, Ghana, India, and Uganda
- \$ 36 will support an Abayudaya child in primary school for one year
- \$ 50 will send tapes and haggadahs to Ghana or India
- \$ 75 will support an Abayudaya youth in secondary school for one year
- \$100 will buy 6 Spanish-Hebrew prayer books for Peruvian-Inca converts
- \$100 will help print a Bnei Menashe newsletter in India for a year
- \$180 will buy ritual items for new communities in Peru, India, Mexico or Ghana
- \$300 will take care of absorption needs for a Menashe immigrant in Israel
- \$360 will pay for a *converso* web site in Brazil for a year
- \$500 will reprint a booklet in Portuguese for Brazilian *conversos*
- \$600 will pay to transport one Menashe immigrant from India to Israel
- \$600 will underwrite the cost of one edition of the Kulanu newsletter
- \$1000 will allow Kulanu to raise funds by advertising in national publications
- \$1200 will send an Abayudaya student to university for a year in Uganda
- \$5000 will underwrite the production of an audio cassette/compact disk featuring Abayudaya music of Jewish liturgy set to Ugandan melodies and rhythms
- \$5000 will fund a Spanish-language newsletter linking groups of *conversos*
- \$10,000 will pay for emergency medical care for Shinlung immigrants in Israel
- \$10,000 will pay for two Abayudaya students to study in Israel for two years
- \$18,000 is needed to send a rabbi to live with the Abayudaya in Uganda, Incans in Peru, or Menashe in India for six months to teach them in preparation for formal conversion to Judaism

Remember Assemau!

Assemau Getahun, 16, is the blind sister of Tebka and Enguday Getahun, young Ethiopian Jewish girls in Addis Ababa who were reunited with their grandparents in Israel after a public campaign on their behalf. According to the Israeli government, Assemau was left behind because her father had to be found, somewhere in Ethiopia, to give his permission. He has now been found and has given permission for Assemau to make *aliyah*, but she remains living in poverty in Addis (along with 3000 other Jews).

The North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry is urging all concerned readers to write to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to urge that Assemau be reunited with her family in Israel. Write to him c/o the Israeli Embassy, 3514 International Drive, NW, Washington, DC 20008.

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

SUPPORTER APPLICATION

☐ I/We would like to become a Supporter of KULANU (Mail to KULANU c/o Hantman, 3520 Tarkington Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20906)

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone(s): () _____ day () _____ evening _____

LETTERS TO KULANU

Others Like Me!

It was Friday, the 13th of June, shortly before Shabbat, that I went to collect the mail. There it was, a copy of Kulanu with a wealth of information regarding others -- like me!

The impact this had on me, the sudden warmth and love, of belonging to each and every community written about in the fascinating 16 pages of the newsletter made me realize I was not alone. By Shabbat I became one of "All of Us", a connection I am most grateful for.

Having a Crypto-Jewish heritage, I thought I was unique, without a past, misplaced and disconnected. Until recently, this anger and frustration remained hidden deep inside me, as the secrets of my family had remained within each member.

Over the last five years, after lots of research, questions, visits to family in Portugal, and being "disowned" by family members, enlightenment finally dawned: I was one of many. What a relief to open the door on the hidden secrets of centuries, to try and make sense of the forgotten past. This, unfortunately, proved a huge mistake. No one believed me, no one had heard of the "nonsense" I was talking, of secret Jewish practices in Portugal! Spain, yes, many years ago. Did I make a mistake to open up, to feel the pain once more? I thought so, and went back into "hiding" with my secrets and frustration.

Although I was baptized in the Catholic Church, my parents became Protestants soon after, when I was four or five years old. I went to a predominantly Jewish school, mixed mostly with Jewish children, and when the time came went out with Jewish boys. It was the most "natural" thing for me to convert to Judaism. As I have nothing to "prove", having converted to Orthodox Judaism nearly 30 years ago, many people can't understand my anger and pain at having been robbed of my heritage and culture.

As I studied art and sculpture after school, the form of choice to express the *saudade* ("haunting loss") has been with a paint brush. Words do not come easily, but as part of my catharsis, and in order to reach out to others like me, I am trying.

My grandmother, also called Rufina, was thought odd in the little village where our family had gone to seek refuge and anonymity so necessary in order to survive. "Odd" because once a year she would go to the fields for a whole day and night (on Yom Kippur). How pleased she would have been had she known that today Rufina, her grand-daughter, many years later and many miles away, observed the *Antepur* (Yom Kippur) openly and with pride as a Jewess with Portuguese heritage. Her suffering was not in vain.

Rufina B. Silva Mausenbaum
Johannesburg, South Africa

Remember Our Needs

Shalom. We received the following books from you with thanks: *Shabbat Shalom*, *My Hebrew Dinosaur*, *Bible Stories*, *A Rosh Hashanah Walk*, *Shai's Shabbat Walk*, *Two By Two*, *Prayer Workbook*, *A Family Haggadah*. Once again, I thank you for bringing Judaism among us through this kind of book.

I sincerely and prayerfully request you to raise enough funds for our synagogue requirements; due to heavy rains, we need to remake the roof urgently and also flooring. We also need an honest rabbi who can come and stay with us to teach us Torah, Hebrew, etc. You are requested to remember our community needs in your daily prayers.

Sadok Yacobi, Guntur, A.P. India
(Bene Yacob Telugu Jewish Community)

Ethiopian Jew Joins

It will be a great pleasure to work with your group. I am an economist by training and profession. Helping people achieve economic security is my business. I will be able to contribute a great deal to your projects. I will also learn quite a lot from your group. Please consider me as a member of Kulanu and include me in your family of Ethiopian Jews.

Cheers, Sam Taddesse, Arlington, Virginia

"Kulanu Enriches"

Kulanu enriches one's vision of the larger Jewish community. I know one otherwise detached Jew who, through Kulanu and the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies, has developed a deep sense of commitment to the Jewish people. Keep up the good work.

Jerry Snyder, Chevy Chase, MD

Sharing from Tucson

Laura Stone was a *Converso* who spoke to our Tucson chapter of Kulanu earlier this year. She had her bat mitzvah and is passionate about being a Jew. This is what she told us about Elijah:

Laura was raised by her grandmother in Panama. One of Laura's responsibilities was to provide any beggar who came by with whatever might be in the "Elijah Box for Beggars". One day Laura asked her grandmother why she called the box the "Elijah Box". Her grandmother replied that one day one of the beggars would be Elijah.

If anyone is starting a Kulanu chapter, I would be very happy to share our Tucson experience.

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Kulanu

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