

KULANU

"all of us"



Helping Lost Jewish Communities

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

Bnei Menashe and Bnei Yehuda, Sharing a Common Destiny

By Jack Zeller

"Menashe's Children" is the title of a two-paged, color-photographed article in the April 25th international edition of the Jerusalem Post. The author, Michael Arnold, describes the superb quality of the absorption of the Bnei Menashe community in Israel, their reception by Rabbi Avichail, and the modern-day Theodore Hertzl of the community, Mela Chala, who had predicted that the community would be gathered back to Israel.

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KULANU MEETING FOCUSES ON PORTUGUESE DIASPORA

Emerging Bruised, Shamed, and with an Identity Crisis

By Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum

(A talk given at the Kulanu quarterly meeting in Washington, DC, on February 15, 1998.)

I'm just going to tell you a little part of our history that's been untold, untaught in our schools or yeshivas. It is born out of a people that has just about disappeared. It's about a Holocaust that has lasted 500 years, or more, devastating in its destruction of all things Jewish. It's about what happened 500 years ago in the oldest country of Europe -- Portugal.

The Jews as a people had been in Portugal and Spain long before those who expelled and persecuted them. They were not a different race. They were Portuguese; they were Jews, but they were Portuguese, long before Christianity and Islam. Today, 500 years later, we, the descendants of the *anousim*, are still affected, emerging bruised, shamed, and often with an identity crisis. Torn between two worlds, brought up within Christian boundaries, we struggle to cope with the rejection of family and friends when we decide to return to the religion of our forefathers. Then we have to prove our "Jewishness" to be accepted into Judaism. We the descendants of those wretched souls who suffered untold terror and humiliation for so many centuries are today who we are, what we are, Jews or Gentiles, due to the decisions taken 500 years ago or more. We continue to feel that pain until we can be accepted.

My name is Rufina. It was first recorded in Jewish history in Smyrna, Turkey, between the second and third centuries. It was given to me to honor one of my grandmothers, possibly the one who suffered the most. She, like many others, cherished knowledge and learning, but gave up her education and worldly goods. People were terrified. If you could read, you became a suspect. Today we know that the Inquisition was the most important factor of social control in all aspects of life. So

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A Jew on Training Wheels

© 1998 by Clara Y. Castelar

(A talk given at the Kulanu quarterly meeting in Washington, DC, on February 15, 1998.)

You have before you a Jew on training wheels. How I got here is a continuation of the story of my Portuguese ancestors and their life in northeastern Brazil. In the 16th century, many Iberians felt called to serve Christ and king, and to make a killing in the spice market -- not necessarily in that order. Some of them headed for Brazil to reinvent themselves; my ancestors may have been among them.



The author (right), with daughter Ilana, whose birth in 1979 spurred her to research family roots so that Ilana "could know who she is."

As Crypto-Jews, my ancestors had compelling reasons to leave behind much of their past history and to assume an identity that might keep them safe from the Inquisition; not all of them succeeded. That is probably why, by the mid-17th century, some of them sought to start a new life in the semi-desert Brazilian wilderness of southern Ceara, arguably one of the most inhospitable outposts of the Portuguese empire. There, they burrowed in a fiefdom that seems to have been a world unto itself. There, each one of them came to embody Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa's lines: *Fiz de mim o que nao soube...quando quis tirar a mascara,/estava pegada a cara.* (I made of myself something unknown...when I tried to take off the mask, it was stuck to my face." But the heart never wears a mask and in their hearts, my ancestors remained Jews.

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LETTERS

Sefardi Siddurim Needed in Brazil

After the expulsion of Jews from Spain and Portugal, thousands of families escaped to Brazil. Since the Inquisition did not formally establish itself in Brazil (rather, the authorities were satisfied to dispatch individual inquisitors and police to this land), the observance by the immigrants of their Jewish roots and their attachment to Judaism were relatively well preserved. And now, many of them are stirring, are organizing in groups, and are returning to their Jewish roots.

It is noteworthy that these children of the Marranos did not intermarry with the local population but only married within their own families — in keeping with what they called in ancient Spanish *cuatro castas*, which indicates that all four lines of grandmothers and grandfathers were Jewish. Even though many details of our Holy Torah were lost to them, because of the strong and long arm of the Inquisition, they were not conquered and their bravery stands as a merit for this generation.

Soon I hope to be in Brazil among the descendants of Marranos to teach them and to do this I have a great need for *siddurim*. It seems clear to me that they must learn to pray in accordance with the *nussach* (liturgy) with which Sefardi Jews pray the world over, such as (1) *Tephilah Kol Peh* from the Holy Congregation Talmud Torah of Holland, (2) *Shefta Zadikim* from Montreal, or (3) *Seder Hatifiloth* that Rabbi de Sola edited. Donations of these books would be greatly appreciated. Please send them to Judge Geraldo Apoliano Dias, Rua Antonio Carlos Zarzar, 15 Ap. 1702, Candeias, CEP: 54.450-190 — Jabotao dos Guararapes, Brazil.

Rabbi Jacob de Oliveira, Jerusalem

(Editor's note: Shipping costs about \$1 per book. Kulanu will reimburse siddur donors for shipping costs for the first 500 books. We are seeking donors to fund shipping costs for the next 500.)

34 Bnei Menashe Arrive in Israel

I am happy to inform you that after months of great difficulties and suffering, we welcomed a group of Bnei Menashe on Tuesday morning Feb 3rd. There are 34 arrivals, at a cost of \$26,000. This pretty much cleans us out. We have received a positive response from the Chief Rabbi for bringing of 211 more people, and we are, again, seeking God's help through our supporters to pay for their transportation and absorption.

Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail, Jerusalem

Bnei Menashe: Israel's Redemption

I have been absorbing the Bnei Menashe for quite some time and therefore feel qualified to recommend them to you as a most worthy cause. They study here in *ulpanim* for Hebrew and Judaism and are eager to learn and become part of our society. They are a quiet and modest people who are willing to do any kind of work. Their children are already completely integrated and play in Hebrew with the rest of the children. You would have been moved to tears, as we were, to hear their first Bar Mitzvah boy read his portion in the Torah. They were so very proud of him.

We in Neve Dekalim look upon their successful absorption among us as an important part of Israel's redemption. You can do much good by adopting this tribe of Israel and helping them come home and find their place among us.

Esther Liliental, Director of Absorption
Neve Dekalim, Israel

The Bnei Menashe Need Our Support

The Bnei Menashe badly need our support, and they need heavy political support NOW! I lived in Kiryat Arba, and had the Shinlung

(Bnei Menashe) for my immediate neighbors, prayed with them daily, worked, studied, and drank coffee and tea in the evening with them. They are good folks with a strong spirituality and work ethic.

But, it is really irrelevant what their contributions are or could be; what is relevant is that they are kin to us, are Jews, and are actually suffering under tremendous discrimination from a great many racial snobs. Israel has a lot of blatant racists, both in the government and locally in Kiryat Arba. No 'cross burnings,' but they make themselves felt in more insidious ways: Refusing to let them have affordable housing that is sitting empty while offering luxury apartments that they cannot possibly afford; making them come back day after day to local government offices to get the most basic things that anyone else can get in minutes; withholding services; refusing to certify them for some jobs. This happens daily. If I had to suffer this I would not be a happy camper, and they are not either, but they bear it well and go through their lives with a peace that is truly admirable.

The Shinlung need our political and financial support. Attend the next federation meeting and urge the directors to send letters of support to the Israeli ambassador to the US and to the Interior Ministry in Israel. Put yourself on record where it counts.

For those wanting to correspond with members of the Shinlung to offer personal support, I suggest that you write to Gideon Manlung, Mamre, Kiryat Arba, Hebron Hills, Israel. Gideon is a gentleman of the first order, articulate, and sincere. He will respond truthfully and accurately, and you will get to meet and know a fine person.

Yaacov Levi, Nunda, New York

(Editor's note: Write to Ambassador Eliahu Ben-Elissar, Embassy of Israel, 3514 International Dr., NW, Washington, DC 20008.)

An Unexpected Passover in Uganda

I still can't believe it, but I had seder with the Abayudaya on Pesach. During my spring break I had planned to spend the week tutoring in a friend's classroom in Mississippi. I was shocked when I heard that a very close friend of mine in Nairobi had died. I was baffled by it, could not sleep, was not eating, and finally decided to go.

We laid my buddy to rest, and I found myself with a few spare days before returning home, so I gladly jumped over to Mbale. When I walk through the Kenya-Uganda border now they take me right to the *matatus* (small taxis) for Mbale. They have seen me enough to know where I want to go!

Pesach was interesting. They were shocked by my arrival and named me Elijah for much of the night! The seder itself was a small ceremony held at their synagogue — about 25 people. El Nino storms wiped out many area bridges last November so the walk to Nabugoye is that much more treacherous for many, including Joab (the Abayudaya community chairman) and his family. It rained hard on Friday evening, so Joab did not make it to Nabugoye until the following morning.

As always, they expressed their thanks to Kulanu. With Gershom nearly completing his degree, the community is starting to realize some of the fruits of the educational revolution Kulanu initiated. Gershom discussed with me several options upon graduating. He says his professors are discouraging students from applying for jobs as teachers but encouraging them to start their own schools. He is considering seeking funding to start a secondary school on Nabugoye Hill. I emphasized that he should not give up his rabbinic dreams. He received a

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letter in 1993 from a professor at the University of Judaism advising him to get a degree in Uganda, then to seek rabbinic training in the US, Israel or elsewhere. I encouraged him to write the professor back and not to simply give up.

Matt Meyer, Washington, DC

(Editor's note: Readers can assist this remarkable community by purchasing their wonderful recording of Ugandan Jewish music, "Shalom Everybody Everywhere!" Use the order form on page 14 of this newsletter.)

Assisting Kaifeng Jews

On a recent trip to China, a friend and I were able to meet with some of the Kaifeng Jewish descendants. We were moved by their interest in Judaism as well as by their lack of resources with which to learn about the traditions of their ancestors.

My friend and I were also able to participate in the Judaic Studies class of Professor Xu Xin who provided us with some additional background on the Kaifeng Jews, and we are currently furthering our knowledge by reading books on the subject.

We would like to try to mobilize Western Jewish communities to provide assistance to the Kaifeng Jewish descendants. A logical first step would be sending a teacher to live among them for a year, or providing an opportunity for a couple of young people to study in Israel or North America. If there are members of Kulanu with a particular focus on the Kaifeng Jews, we would greatly appreciate hearing from them.

*Scott Savit (215) 563-5533 savitz@eniac.seas.upenn.edu
2400 Chestnut St., Apt. 2104, Philadelphia, PA 19103*

Jewish Books in Spanish Needed

I'm the president of "La Javura," the smallest USCJ synagogue in the universe at this time. Please visit us at our web site at <http://www.uscj.org/world/valencia>. We are in great need of children's and teenagers' Jewish books in SPANISH.

I would be grateful for any information as to where I might find such books and whom to contact. Of course anything that can be donated to us would be accepted with cheers. Funds are limited but we can pay the mailing fees.

Alba Toscano, atoscano@arrakis.es

*Plaza Musico Lopez Chavarri #5, Pta 13, 46003 Valencia, Spain
(tel. 391.91.92)*

Grateful in Ghana

Many thanks for your gift to our community here in Ghana. We found in a big box lovely *siddurim*. May all of us, in the name of Adonai blessed be his Name, bless you all who thought in your heart to offer our community this gift.

We are giving a greeting for happy Passover.

David Ahenkorah

PO Box 57, Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana

Tudor Parfitt Requests Information

I am a professor of Modern Jewish Studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies in the University of London. I am currently working on a book on the Lost Tribes of Israel. I am anxious to collect as much information as possible on groups throughout the world who have identified or been identified as Jews—and the consequences of such identification. If any Kulanu member can help with references I will be most grateful.

During a recent trip to India I made brief contact with the Jews of Manipur and went to visit another interesting group not far from Delhi which claims Jewish descent and who call themselves Bani

Konkan coast). Apart from my anthropological work, I am part of a team doing DNA work with some of these remote Jewish groups. Intriguing new light on Judaism in Africa among the Lemba tribe is revealed in the new edition of my book *Journey to the Vanished City* (Phoenix, London). What is being shown is that ancient oral traditions are often confirmed by genetic evidence.

Tudor Parfitt tparfitt@compuserve.com

Place de l'église, 12400 Montlaur, France.

Vindication for Indian Jews in Israel

Just as a follow-up to the marriage issue of the Bene Israel in the last Kulanu newsletter, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel have unequivocally reasserted that there is no doubt about the Bene Israel ancestry or its Jewishness. What is unfortunate is that such rabbis as Rabbi Solomon, who are unashamedly biased, ignorant and show discrimination, are appointed as chief rabbis for a particular town and that they are allowed to continue their disservice to Jewish communities.

A serious effort is being made to see that Rabbi Solomon is made to step down and I fully agree with this move. How this rabbi can have the name Solomon, who was wise, and act in such a foolish manner is beyond my understanding. His ignorance of the Bene Israel history is no excuse for his foolish actions.

Romiell Daniel

Rego Park, New York

Misinformation on the Lemba

I want to correct information about Mutenda Mbelengwa as given in the Kulanu newsletter vol. 4 no. 3. The Lemba Jews wish to reject this statement as false and unfounded: "Belengwa had worked in the kosher kitchen of Dr. and Mrs. Cohen in the town of Louis Trichardt and had noted many similarities between the customs of his people with that of the Jewish traditions observed by the white owners of the farm."

Mutenda Mbelengwa never worked for Dr. Cohen or anyone else, as he was a student who trained as a teacher from the Lemba practices and upbringing. He was forced to join Christianity in order to attend the school but remained a Lemba-Jew up to his death. The Lemba Cultural Association wishes to reject the account about Mutenda Mbelengwa adopting the customs from some white farm with the contempt it deserves. Let Carel Birkby (a newspaper correspondent who reported on the Lemba prior to World War II) apologise to the Lemba Jews for what he wrote about our Lemba leader.

The Lemba Cultural Association requests you to send them religious books about Judaism.

Prof. M. E. R. Mathievha, President of Lemba Cultural Assn.

Thohoyandou, South Africa

(Editor's note: Contributions of religious books to the Lemba can be arranged through Kulanu. Please contact the Kulanu office.)

Whom To Thank?

During the last part of 1997, we received 69 copies of Daily Prayer Books in Hebrew and English from the USA, but we do not know whom to thank, as the senders are not known to us. We are very grateful to those who sent these valuable books to us and we have been making good use of them. The books have been distributed to our Jewish communities at Kangpokpi, Imphal, Moreh, Ortsion, Phailien, Buoljang, Matejang and Churachandpur. Those enthusiastic young people now have the opportunity to read prayers in Hebrew. Kindly convey our thanks to those who sent these books through Kulanu.

T. Aviel Hangshing

Manipur, India

Order Kulanu's Important New Book Today!

Here are some quotations from the back cover of Kulanu's acclaimed new book, *Jews in Places You Never Thought Of*. If these whet your appetite – and we know they will! – we hope you'll order at least one copy of the book (it will make a great gift) by using the order form on page 14 of this newsletter. This is the most important fund-raiser for Kulanu. Please help!

Messages from some of the 45 authors of *Jews in Places You Never Thought Of* --

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

"Valderama longed for a Torah scroll for his shul. He approached the shul in Lima with his request, but the congregants refused to give him anything, even though there are a large number of Sifrei Torah decomposing in the basement of the Lima shul. I opened one at random and was shocked to witness the escape of numerous cockroaches. The Sefer Torah is permitted to house repulsive insects but is forbidden to the Inca Indian Jews." --RABBI MYRON ZUBER

"Although no one knew it at the time, the arrival of the first forty-one Bnei Menashe in Israel in August 1993 marked the beginning of one of the most successful homecomings in Jewish history. While it is only a ripple of immigration, the quality of the absorption and the historical significance of the return of a Lost Tribe make the story a stirring one." --KAREN PRIMACK

"The Marranos' Jewish claims are genuine and strong. They are the last stubborn remnants of one of the most tragic episodes of Jewish history. Now, an amazing event – dare I say miracle? – is occurring. They want to finish this horrible chapter of history in a positive way, in a way that will represent the triumph of the Jewish spirit over the forces that have tried to destroy us. How can we reject them?" --RABBI JACQUES CUKIERKORN

"The Abayudaya Jews of Uganda are ready to die for the sole reward of being Jewish. They are willing to die out rather than intermarry with their neighbors. They are ready to let go of all they have received in the oral tradition of their own elders in order to be accepted into the family of the Jewish people." --RABBI J. HERSHY WORCH

Jews of Cochin Focus on Education and Preservation

By Karen Primack

It is common knowledge that most Cochin Jews of Kerala, India, have emigrated to Israel, but until recently I was under the mistaken impression that there was less than a *minyan* left in Kerala. An interview in April with Isaac Joshua, president of the Association of Kerala Jews, set me straight. Joshua, a resident of Madras, was in the US for a cousin's wedding.

In fact, there are 74 Jews left in the area, including 25 young people between the ages of 5 and 30. They are clustered mostly in Mattanchery (10 families), Ernakulam (9 families), and Parur (4 families).

To backtrack a bit: According to Joshua, oral history teaches that Jews arrived at the Malabar coast of India from Israel at the time of King Solomon and brought back from Kerala sandalwood used in the construction of the first temple as well as ivory used in King Solomon's throne. Oral history, derived partially from folk songs, also states that 10,000 Jews settled in the ancient port city of Cranganore following the destruction of the second temple.

The earliest surviving physical evidence of the presence of Jews in Kerala is an edict written on 11th century copper plates giving the Jewish leader, Joseph Rabban, the authority to rule over his people in a 24-square-mile principality called Anjuvanam. This Jewish Kingdom came to an end as a result of infighting as well as attacks by Moors (14th century) and the Portuguese (15th century). The Jews fled and resettled in the

towns of Calicut, Chendamangalam, Mala, Parur, Ernakulam and Fort Cochin under the protection of maharajas. A particularly well-remembered tragedy struck in 1662, when the Portuguese invaded Cochin, burned down the Paradesi synagogue and other synagogues in Mattanchery, and destroyed every single book and religious object. (When the Dutch defeated the Portuguese in 1663, they took control of Cochin and helped the Jews to return, even providing them with religious books from Amsterdam.)

A census taken in 1839 revealed a Jewish population in Kerala of only 1500, although it had risen to 2500 by the early 1940s. The establishment of the state of Israel is seen by them as a double blessing. The Cochin Jews had not changed with the times, and most refused to send their children to secular schools or to take jobs that would interfere with their observance of Sabbath and holidays. Also, privileges once enjoyed under the maharajah of Cochin were gradually withdrawn, including membership in the Cochin legislative council, permission for Jewish employees and students to take off Sabbath and holidays, and reserved places for Jews in schools and colleges. Emigration to Israel started in 1949, and by the late 1970s there were fewer than 100 left in Kerala.

As president of the Association of Kerala Jews, Isaac Joshua plays two roles.

First, he looks after the present community's needs in order to preserve their Jewishness. The main problem, he says,

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Join Us on an Upcoming Expedition to Jodensavanne!

By Rachel Frankel

(Editor's note: The author is a New York architect.)

In a continued effort to document, research and preserve the synagogue remains and cemeteries of Jodensavanne in Suriname, South America, I will lead an expedition during the first two weeks of August 1998 to survey and document two of Jodensavanne's three cemeteries. One of the cemeteries dates back to the 1660s and is laid with about 200 tombstones engraved with Hebrew and Portuguese inscriptions and illustrative images. The tombs of this cemetery, and one established a generation later containing about 500 tombstones, also at Jodensavanne, are engraved stones carved in and imported from Europe. The other cemetery to be studied, the so-called Creole Cemetery, is marked by unusual wooden and concrete tombs with African and Christian symbols and Dutch language inscriptions.

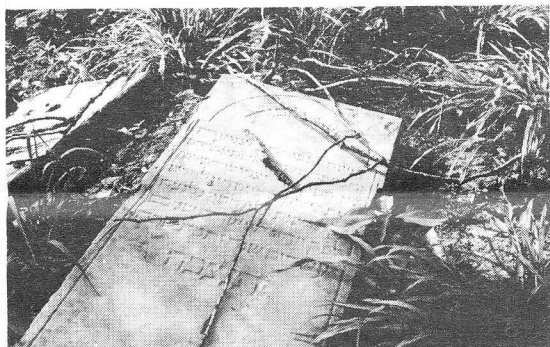
In addition to the three cemeteries, what remains today of Jodensavanne, the first permanent Jewish plantation settlement in the Americas, settled by Sephardic Jews and enslaved West

ies Aviva Ben-Ur. The expedition team will create a plan of the cemetery grounds and inventory, photograph, transcribe, and translate the tombstones of the cemeteries. It is hoped that the findings of the expedition will be published and made available to those historians, genealogists, travelers and others who wish to study them.

My research and analysis done so far will appear in an essay in the upcoming 1998 two-volume publication tentatively titled *The Jews and the Expansion of Europe to the West: 1450 to the Revolutions for Independence in the Americas*, edited by the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

Funding for the expedition has thus far been provided by the Vogelstein and Littauer Foundations and the International Survey of Jewish Monuments. Additional funding is being sought.

Individuals interested in joining the expedition as volunteers may contact Caribbean Volunteer Expeditions, Box 388, Corning, NY 14830; <http://members.aol.com/ahershcv/>; or Rachel Frankel, AIA, 10 Park Ave., New York, NY 10016



Africans in the 1660s, is a brick ruin of the formerly grand synagogue, the first synagogue of any architectural significance in the New World, built in 1685.

I initiated my study of the architectural remains of Jodensavanne in 1994. The upcoming expedition will mark my third trip to Suriname. In 1997, with the help of Caribbean Volunteer Expeditions (CVE), a non-profit organization that recruits volunteers from the US and Canada to work on preservation projects in and around the Caribbean, and STINASU, a semi-governmental Suriname foundation for nature and heritage preservation, I surveyed and documented the remains of the synagogue of Jodensavanne.

This information and continued research and analysis permit the creation of architectural drawings of this unusual synagogue, *Berahka ve Shalom* (Blessings and Peace). It differs from its great precedent, the Sephardic synagogue in Amsterdam, built 10 years prior to it, and those which followed it elsewhere in Suriname and the New World. *Berahka ve Shalom* has a uniquely configured gallery for women and a Dutch vernacular profile. Also, it was the centerpiece of a progressive open, orthogonally oriented town plan, highly planned and in contrast to the walled towns of the time.

This year's expedition will include professional photogra-

Conversion Web Site Update

By Lawrence J. Epstein

The Conversion to Judaism Home Page <www.convert.org> is now averaging about 100 hits a day. As of this writing, almost 33,000 people have visited the site. The Home Page provides clear and concise information about all issues regarding conversion to Judaism.

The site has direct e-mail links to 99 rabbis from all movements in Judaism. Interested readers can contact these rabbis to ask questions, receive information, or arrange meetings or classes. In addition, there are mailing addresses and phone numbers for additional rabbis and other Jewish professionals.

The Home Page relies solely on donations from supporters, as does its sponsor, the Conversion to Judaism Resource Center. The Resource Center provides advice and information internationally to those who inquire about joining the Jewish people.

Many people find the anonymity of visiting a web site or sending a private e-mail to be extremely valuable as they explore a subject as sensitive as conversion. This anonymity also gives people the opportunity to ask questions that they might otherwise be reluctant to ask – questions that they would consider too personal or too simple.

A large number of those who come to the site are people with a Jewish background. Some are descendants of *anousim*. Others had parents, grandparents or other ancestors they know or believe were Jewish. Indeed, conversion has become a mechanism by which those with a Jewish ancestor can forge a reunion with the Jewish people.

The Conversion to Judaism Home Page is also trying to do its part to assure that born Jews will welcome these converts. This welcoming attitude can, in turn, lead to a larger number of converts entering Jewish life.

We welcome comments, questions, and suggestions. Our e-mail address is inform@convert.org.

Bruised, Shamed, and with an Identity Crisis (Cont.)

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they gave up knowledge, learning, education, and status so that they could find secrecy and practice their religion behind closed doors, in remote areas. My grandmother found anonymity in a little town called Calheta, Madeira, that beautiful island situated in the Atlantic and shrouded in mystery. Today no one on that island will admit to anything Jewish, and the old Jewish cemetery bears silent testimony to the past, lying in ruin and forgotten.

I am extremely proud to be a descendant of very special, tenacious people. To say that I am Portuguese, and of the Jewish faith, is a wonderful feeling. I am the soul survivor of Judaism in my entire family. I'm proud because I survived. Proud to honor my Portuguese Sephardic ancestors who, against all odds, managed to keep their faith alive. Proud because I chose to be Jewish. I often think how proud they would have been to know that I survived. Their pain was not in vain; they managed one survivor.

That Portuguese Judaism survived at all is a miracle -- because, unlike the Spanish, the Portuguese Jews were not given a choice beyond baptism or martyrdom. They were not allowed to leave. Many Portuguese Jews, as well as Spanish, who had found refuge in Portugal, got trapped when the exit doors were closed. This is truly a story of survival and honoring those that went before, our ancestors, immaterial of whether we are Jewish, Christian or Muslim today.

I was born in Capetown, South Africa, and I was perceived by all, myself included, to be Christian. I experienced what is known as Not Belonging. Not Belonging because I was not an Afrikaaner, I was not English, I was not African, and I was not Portuguese. (It was important for us to blend.) I chose Judaism, and believe I was chosen. We were three daughters, and I was the only daughter sent to a predominately Jewish day school. I was always told how Jewish I looked, how Jewish I was, behaved, and I took this as a compliment; it was intended as such. My/our parents instilled in us a deep love for all things Jewish, for Israel and the Old Testament.

When I converted to Orthodox Judaism, I faced the *beth din*, possibly as my ancestors may have faced their inquisitors many centuries ago. A young girl, frightened, in awe and intimidated, but I did it so that today I can practice my religion, your religion, their religion, openly as Portuguese and of the Jewish faith.

What happened in Portugal 500 years ago is what binds us, all of us (Jews and the majority of Portuguese) by blood and *saudade*. Our histories intertwined, born in pain and sadness. There is no explanation, no word, to describe what *saudade* means. *Saudade* is a longing, a sadness, a melancholy, a missing part. It is all that and more. It is the very essence of my Jewish soul.

For me, *saudade* was born in Portugal 500 years ago, when the Jews were trapped in that country and could not get out. This gave rise to Crypto-Judaism when the persecution of the "New Christians" or "conversos" began.

Scenes of indescribable horror took place -- parents

actually killed their own children and committed suicide. Babies were dragged from their parents' embrace. It was a really traumatic experience (and period) because up until then the Jews had lived relatively peacefully and protected in Portugal. That's why so many Spanish Jews had found refuge there. It was perceived as a "haven" by Iberian Jewry.

Saudade is for a country that may have been, for my ancestors who lived in fear and died in shame. It's for many who chose anonymity so that they could survive. *Saudade* is what I feel as the sole survivor of Judaism in my family, and for my lost Sephardic culture that I will never know. It is for my own family, who do not understand my pain.

This is not about recrimination. This goes far beyond that, beyond religion. It is about our complex roots and relationships, of building a new unity and collective pride.

The Portuguese and Jewish Diaspora spreads far and wide. We can celebrate our combined past that gave so much knowledge to the world. We must acknowledge our commonality, embrace each other and our differences, and continue to explore all the manifestations of our identity. We must form a new sense of unity, a collective pride, as we join together in our future towards the next 500 years.

Cochin Jews (Cont.)

(Continued from page 4)

is the lack of Jewish education for the children. Formerly, Jewish schools provided instruction in Hebrew, Jewish laws, culture and history. Today, there are no Jewish schools or trained personnel, save one Hebrew teacher -- his grand-niece studied at an ulpan in Israel, courtesy of the Joint Distribution Committee, and has returned to give weekly classes. He would also like to develop a "welfare scheme for the social and economic development of the Jewish community."

Joshua's second role is as an advocate for the preservation, protection and maintenance of four existing synagogues. He used his time in the US to bring his cause to the attention of the World Monuments Fund, the American Jewish Committee, and B'nai B'rith. He says the Kerala Jews are issuing a "special appeal to have some help so that these synagogues can be kept intact and not go into ruins."

One of the four synagogues, in Ernakulam, can be refurbished and used for services. Another, at Chendamangalam, "a most beautiful synagogue" with an ark carved of wood with gold leaf, is in ruins and no longer usable, but Joshua would like to see it preserved as a museum. The synagogue at Parur, and the second one in Ernakulam, could be rehabilitated and used as community halls, cultural centers or museums. (The famous rebuilt Paradesi synagogue in Mattanchery is already receiving funding through the World Monuments fund and India, which considers it an historic monument.)

Joshua travels from Madras to Ernakulam monthly for Shabbat and holiday services at the Thekumbhagom synagogue, of which he is managing trustee. Owner of an engineering firm, he has four grown children -- one who is a dentist in Israel and three in India, all practicing Jews.

Is there a future for a Jewish community of only 74 members? Joshua believes, "The future is there if the congregation is encouraged. Today they want to remain there -- and to have some sort of Jewishness."

CHINA BRIEFS

Xu Xin at Harvard

Prof. Xu Xin of Nanjing University in China spoke about the Jewish descendants of Kaifeng at a meeting of Kulanu's Greater New York chapter in March. Xu is currently on a six-month scholarship from the Center for Jewish Studies at Harvard, working on a book on Kaifeng Jewry. While at Harvard, Xu also hopes to create a curriculum of Jewish education for Chinese scholars, to include Jewish history and culture, Hebrew literature, and the Holocaust. He also spent three weeks as a research associate at the US Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC, and will work at the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. This is his fourth trip to the US.

Jewish Studies Popular in China

Xu Xin reports that a number of Jewish Studies research centers have been established in China. With the recent achievement of diplomatic relations between China and Israel, Jewish topics are no longer considered politically sensitive, a growing number of scholars have been attracted to Jewish Studies, and more books have been translated and published. Xu hopes the scholars studying Jewish topics will incorporate this information into the world history or western civilization courses they teach at colleges in China.

Seeking Information on Manchurian History

Ruth Kurzbauer, former US Consul in Chinese Manchuria, seeks information from researchers on Manchurian history and Harbin. Contact her at 1235 R. 200 South, Apt. 802, Salt Lake City, UT 84102, phone and fax 801-364-2407, e-mail ruth@utah.uswest.net.

A Library of Judaic Studies

A new Library of Judaic Studies has been established at Nanjing University's Center for Jewish Studies. It now contains 3000 volumes in Jewish history, religion, literature and philosophy, and is believed to be the largest Jewish library in China, second only to that of the Hong Kong Jewish community. The Library is seeking additional volumes. Send to Prof. Xu Xin, School of Foreign Studies, Nanjing University, Nanjing, 210093, China. (Mailing cost for books sent by sea is about \$1 per book.)

Americans Urge Education in Kaifeng

Matthew Trusch and Jonathan Shulman were among 15 travelers who visited Kaifeng last December. Hoping to produce an educational video documentary, the two Americans visited the descendants of Kaifeng's ancient Jews on Shabbat and concluded that the main need of the community is education. "What is the point of rebuilding a synagogue in Kaifeng with no one to lead prayers, or if no one understands the Torah? For future minyans in Kaifeng to exist, the Jewish descendants, particularly the younger generation, need to be taught basic Jewish precepts, Jewish festivals, Hebrew, and Torah," the two wrote in a joint article. They hope to find resources to fund teaching materials, translation of the *siddur* and other materials into Chinese, and improving the Kaifeng museum's Judaica collection.

Gottschalk Talk Attracts 500

Dr. Alfred Gottschalk spoke on "What Is Judaism" last October in China to a crowd of 500 scholars in a lecture hall that seated 400. Chancellor of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Gottschalk was an official guest of Nanjing University at the invitation of Prof. Xu Xin.

Shanghai and the Center for Jewish Studies, Shanghai. Ten years ago, no Chinese in Shanghai knew Hebrew, but by last summer 20 Shanghainese had received their diplomas from an advanced Hebrew course.

A Holocaust Exhibition

Thousands of Chinese in various cities in China visited a photo exhibition on the Holocaust during 1997. Sponsored by the Israeli Consulate General in Shanghai, the exhibition coincided with the 60th anniversary of the Nanjing massacre of the Chinese people by the Japanese army.

For Further Information...

To keep up with information such as that featured in this column, join the China Judaic Studies Association (a subscription to the China/Judaic Connection newsletter is included) by sending a check for \$25, made out to "Xu Xin" to: Beverly Friend, Ph.D., Oakton Community College, 1600 Golf Rd., Des Plaines, IL 60016. The Shanghai Jewish refugee experience is featured on a web site at <http://www.bnaibrithwest.org/rickshaw/>.

Meet *Points East* and Edward Zhao

By Jack Zeller

If I had the time and energy I would like to comment on every issue of *Points East*, the quarterly of the Sino-Judaic Institute that arrives in my mail. Volume 13 marks their 13th year and I strongly recommend reading all back issues for those who want to know more about the history of Jews in China in ancient and modern times. The editor is Rabbi Anson Laytner, who can be reached at <layt@seattleu.edu>

The lead article in Volume 13 is a review by Albert Dien of the fury surrounding the translation of "Jacob of Ancona" by David Selbourne, grandson of a famous rabbi and Oxford University tutor. You might recall that this topic was initially covered in the press Sept. 22, 1997, as a front page article of the *New York Times*. Jacob was an Italian rabbi and a trader who went to China and described life there in great detail at about the time that Marco Polo was doing the same.

But, the most interesting of all, on page 18 is an article that begins with "My name is Edward Zhao. I am a descendant of the Kaifeng Jewish community. Since 1985, my dream has been to revive Jewish life in Kaifeng. I waited for 12 years before finally making it to Kaifeng on July 10, 1997."

Edward Zhao and I spoke for close to an hour by phone. He had never heard of Kulanu, met Xu Xin, or knew of Amishav in Israel and Rabbi Avichail, its founder. He knew

(Continued on page 8)

A JEW ON TRAINING WHEELS (CONT.)

(Continued from page 1)

How do I know this? I could tell you that this knowledge is inscribed in my soul and in my bones; but that hints at an excess of Luso-emotionalism. A more sober answer is that after 20 years of research I have finally gathered enough evidence to believe without question that it is so. This evidence shows that cut off from the world, in drought-stricken Ceara, my ancestors kept alive a number of traditions that, however distorted and truncated, reflect their desire to hold on to their hidden Jewish identity. For years I heard the muted song of this desire echoing in my mind like a fountain the eye could not discern.

Ask me to pinpoint the precise moment of my epiphany and I might fumble. Memory is always somewhat suspect. Be that as it may, my memory tells me my ancestors' desire crystallized with diamond-like clarity on Yom Kippur 1979, when I heard a prayer that spoke of who shall die and who shall live, who shall perish by fire, by the sword, by wild beasts, by strangling, and by stoning. All these deaths and many more dealt out by the Inquisition must have haunted my Crypto-Jewish ancestors. In spite of that, their legacy is life and light.

The most luminous presence in my childhood was that of my maternal grandmother. It was she who tried many years before to teach me the prayer I recognized on that Yom Kippur. I did not learn well, but until recently I kept the promise I made to my grandmother: I guarded our ancient secret. Secrets do have a way of jumping up to seize you by the hair demanding that you make sense of them. Ours popped out of its box in 1979. I had by then become deeply interested in Judaism as a way of life. I continued my delving with gusto. Imagine my elation when I found listed in books on Jewish observance many of the rules followed by my family!

The easier rules to identify were food-related, such as abstaining from eating blood-speckled eggs, avoiding the flesh of animals with imperfections or killed by accident, refraining from eating eels and shellfish, keeping meat and milk containers separate. I agreed with the skeptic who told me that the rules suggested nothing more than the hard-earned common sense of desert dwellers. But in 1997, after Kulanu came into the picture, skepticism was blown to pieces. Extensive correspondence with Bob Feron, Schulamith Halevy and Karen Primack encouraged me to continue my search for other signs of my family's Jewish past. I read the work of Roth, Sachar, Gerber, Anita Novinsky and Gitlitz, all authorities on Crypto-Judaism. I telephoned Brazil every week to ask my parents countless new questions.

Their answers astonished me. My mother, who became my primary source, helped me understand what I had previously construed as family eccentricity. What she told me reached far beyond food prohibitions. She talked of traditions encompassing the entire life cycle. Almost invariably they match, with minor variations, Judaic or Crypto-Judaic practices. Friday, for example, was a special day. On that day, the house would be cleaned and festive food prepared. The entire family would change into clean and dressier clothes. There were no candles, no prayer in which Adonai was mentioned, but neither is a constant in Crypto-Jewish practices.

Births, deaths and some holidays had their own rituals. For example, when a baby was born the mother remained in seclusion for a month. At the end of the month she would take a full bath. Only then could she appear in public and only then could her husband return to the marital bed. My mother's description of her babies' first bath echoes information collected by David Gitlitz -- gold jewels were placed in the bath water. Another significant Crypto-Jewish practice my relatives followed was that of changing their children's baptismal

name.

Prayer was a private affair. So much so that only two generations ago my mother's family still kept its own chapel. Death was also a family matter with its own protocol. As soon as someone died, all the water containers in the household would be emptied -- I have read that the same practice was followed in some Eastern European *shtetls* to remind the survivors that life is like water. To prepare the body for burial relatives washed it in salt water, clipped its hair, toe and fingernails, and when applicable, shaved its beard. The grooming complete, they would wrap the body in a white cotton shroud and place it in a plain coffin.

The funeral procession started at home and included women lamenting their loss in loud voices and praising the deceased -- I remember a man whose best quality seems to have been the ability to provide ample quantities of meat for his family. Returning home after the funeral, mourners covered their heads, sat in low hammocks and remained in seclusion for a week. During that time, men did not shave or have haircuts and women did not comb their hair. Subsequently, visits to the grave were marked by placing a pebble on it.

One of the unusual holidays my relatives observed came around Easter. At that time they went into the woods to build a little house out of greenery. Around the house they planted banana and other trees. I have been told that this may be a celebration of Lag B'Omer.

This is only a portion of what I have learned so far. I thank you and Kulanu for the privilege to share my story with you. My purpose is to provide you with a thumbnail sketch of a way of life that survived for five centuries. I hope some day to share this story with the people for whom it is most important -- the descendants of Portuguese Crypto-Jews in southern Ceara -- knowing that it might help them make an informed choice about where they belong spiritually. So far, no one in my own family has made any such decision. This is due in part to a lack of interest in organized religion. My mother accepts our connection with Judaism and she fully supports me in writing and speaking in public about it. "We are what we are," she says.

As for me, besides having evolved into a Jew on training wheels, I have become, to quote one of my friends, an artifact. But before I become a museum piece I hope to come home to stand in the light never completely extinguished in my ancestors' hearts.

Zhao (Cont.)

(Continued from page 7)

nothing about the recent Kulanu attempts to support the community in Kaifeng. Our conversation covered a great deal of ground. I will introduce him to the members of Kulanu who I know are actively involved with the Kaifeng community. But, if there is anyone whom I might miss, please send me a private correspondence and I will provide an introduction. When I asked Edward Zhao if he would be willing to give the Kulanu newsletter a biographic sketch of his family, and his life now in Puget Sound (Washington State), he said it would be a pleasure. For all of us, *Kulanu*, it will be.

Yasher Koach to Kulanu's
New Treasurer

Publications of Note

Cordeiro Has New Magazine

Judaismo & Cultura is a new monthly magazine, published in Portuguese in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Edited by Helio Daniel Cordeiro, it is also available on the web at <http://www.net-ten.com.br/judaismo/>. For information on subscribing, contact the publication by e-mail at sefarad@stbnet.com.br.

Jewish-Portuguese Website Launch

Kulanu has launched a new link from its homepage to LusaWeb's "SAUDADES: The Next 500 Years." The new link explores the connections between the Jewish and Portuguese communities, and the longing many Portuguese have to learn more about their common heritage. Kulanu's welcome page is found at <http://www.ubalt.edu/www/kulanu/> while LusaWeb is found at <http://www.lusoamerican.com/saudades/>.

Casa Shalom Journal Debuts

Gloria Mound's Casa Shalom – Institute for Marrano-Anusim Studies has just started publishing a formidable quarterly, *The Casa Shalom Journal*. The inaugural issue (spring 1998) includes a report of a 1930 visit to Ibiza, an article by Charles Meyers on the Elizabethan Marranos, a piece on Portugal Marrano memories by Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum, and an article about Crypto-Jewish customs in Puerto Rico, as well as poetry, a bibliography, and a biographic piece. To join Casa Shalom (which includes a subscription), send a contribution of at least \$36 to Casa Shalom, PO Box 66, Gan Yavneh, 70800 Israel.

Lilith Features Novel Excerpt

The Winter 1997 issue of *Lilith* features an excerpt from *Suleika*, the first novel of Ruth Knafo Setton, a Sephardic Jew born in Morocco. The title character is a martyred young Jewish woman who dies at the hands of Arabs in Fez in 1834 after refusing to accept Islam.

Kudos to Portuguese Tourist Office!

Congratulations to the Portuguese Tourism Information Department and Air Portugal for their production of a beautiful illustrated history of Portuguese Jewry, *The Jews in Portugal*, and an equally beautiful travel guide to places of Jewish interest, *Journey to Jewish Portugal*. For a complimentary copies of either or both, try the Portuguese Tourism Office, 590 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10036-4704; tel 212-354-4403; fax 212-764-6137. Hurry --- they have only a few copies left. Kulanu has some copies to lend out; contact our office.

Eighteen Women in One Issue

The Winter 1997-98 issue of *Bridges* features the stories of 18 women who are descendants of Spanish, Portuguese, Middle Eastern and North African Jews. Articles include fiction, interviews, poetry, and narrative.

It's Live from SantaFe!

A new magazine on the web, *Live From Santa Fe*, currently features several articles of Jewish interest. Included are Art Ben

eveniste's piece on Ladino, a letter from Crypto-Jew Isabelle Sandoval, and Judith Fein's article, "A Rare Visit to the Crypto-Jews of Brazil." The magazine is located at <http://www.livefromsantafe.com>.

Silverman Writes on Sefardi Pesach Food

Ruth Silverman's article, "Jews of Spanish Heritage Celebrate Passover with a Wide Variety of Foods," appeared in Chicago's *Daily Herald* in April. The article surveyed customs and cooking practices of Sephardic Jews, including rice in tomato sauce, whole eggs boiled for four hours in onion peel (they turn a beautiful deep purple!) and leek patties. It also provided a history lesson on the Expulsion from Spain and the rise of Crypto-Judaism for the paper's 100,000+ readers!

A Multicultural Web Site

The IVRI-NASAWI Jewish Multicultural Association's web site features essays and a calendar of events, and will include a magazine starting in June. The site is at <http://www.ivri-nasawi.org>. By the way, the acronym stands for "National Association of Sephardic Artists, Writers, and Intellectuals."

Haidara Publishes in Mali

The president of Zakhor, the Timbuktu Association for Friendship with the Jewish World, Ismael Diadie Haidara, has written a new book on the relations between Muslim Spain and sub-Saharan Africa before and after the expulsion of Muslims and Jews in the late 15th century. The book is entitled *L'Espagne musulmane et l'Afrique subsaharienne* and was published last year in Mali (in French). Ismael's forthcoming book on the Jews of Timbuktu, *Les Juifs a Tombouctou*, is expected to be published this year.

Portuguese Articles in Avotaynu

The winter 1997 edition of *Avotaynu*, (the International Review of Jewish Genealogy) features three articles of interest to Kulanu supporters: Paulo Valadares' history of Jews who stayed in Portugal during the last 500 years, Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum's personal Portuguese odyssey, and Sallyann Amdur Sack's portrait of Jewish life in modern Portugal.

Sephardic Studies Booming

The quarterly publication *Erensia Sefardi* notes that Sephardic studies are booming in universities and synagogues, six years after the 500th anniversary of the Expulsion – in Spain, Israel, Turkey, Germany, France, Belgium, Portugal, Italy, Australia, Latin America and the US. This publication can be ordered by sending \$30 to *Erensia Sefardi*, 46 Benson Place, Fairfield, CT 06430. The web site is at <http://members.aol.com/erenia/ErensiaSefardi.index.html>.

Web Site on Northeastern Brazil

Clara Castelar's web site, Sepharadchai, offers information on crypto-Jews and their descendants in northeastern Brazil. See <http://www.geocities.com/Paris/LeftBank/1300>

KULANU BRIEFS

Commemorate an Occasion with a Kulanu Gift

Making a Kulanu donation is a wonderful way to commemorate a birthday, anniversary, graduation or other special occasion, or to honor the memory of a loved one. Donate at least \$18 to Kulanu, and we will gratefully acknowledge your contribution with a special card to the recipient, notifying them of your gift and explaining how it is helping lost Jewish communities. We will also mention the gift in the newsletter. Please send checks and instructions to Kulanu c/o Hantman, 3520 Tarkington Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20906.

Give Us Your E-Mail Address

If you are on the Kulanu mailing list (you're on it if you regularly receive this newsletter) AND if you have electronic mail, please send your e-mail address to jdzeller@umich.edu. This will enable Diane Zeller, our Communications Director, to notify you of any Kulanu activities scheduled on short notice in your area.

Visit the Medici

Barbara Taverna has discovered a most fascinating and relevant web site, Johns Hopkins University's Medici Archive Project, at <http://www.jhu.edu/~medici/jewish/jewish.htm>. The project's aim is to compile all letters relevant to Jewish affairs in the 6429 volumes of correspondence of the Medici Grand Dukedom, covering the 15th-17th centuries. Included on the web site are several samples (in Italian with English translation) of Jewish-related documents such as a letter from Duke Cosimo protecting Jacob Abravanel from a false accusation of judaizing. Highly recommended!

A Transliterated Siddur

Visit <http://members.aol.com/jordanleew/siddur/> for a transliterated *Siddur on the Web* intended to help Jews who are learning to recite the traditional prayers. Although copyrighted in 1997 by Jordan Lee Wagner, permission is granted to individuals to download pages for personal study and for insertion into the corresponding pages of their Hebrew-English *Siddur*.

Pen-Pals Needed!

Irwin Berg reminds Kulanu supporters that, although 25 Abayudaya youngsters are corresponding with American friends, another 40 would like to have pen-pals. The program has expanded to include men and women in their 20s and 30s. Irwin reports, "I received a letter from Rebbech Miriam, married, age 26, who has asked me to obtain a Jewish young woman to write to her. Rebbech is the youngest child of Rabbi Samson Mugombe, the most respected leader of the Abayudaya. He more than anyone held the community together when they were suffering terrible oppression during the reign of Idi Amin. I would very much like to interest someone to write to her. Her address is: P.O. Box 53, Mbale, Uganda. If you write, please let me know."

If you would like to write to another one of these remarkable Jews of Uganda, or if you know of a Jewish school teacher

who might be interested in an Abayudaya pen-pal project, please contact Irwin at 212-692-2800 (office), 212-724-9887 (home), or bergiande@aol.com.

David Has Quintuplets!

Kulanu's webmaster and listserv manager is at home recovering from quintuple coronary artery bypass grafts performed by Dr Levi Watkins at Johns Hopkins Hospital on March 16. The operation was completely successful and completely resolves the cardiac circulatory issues Dave had been confronting in recent years. The hospitalization did not prevent David from staying in touch with the lists he participates in. He managed to commandeer the accounts of nurses and anesthesiologists and was back online within three days after the surgery.

Cohen in Iberia for Pesach

Ethnomusicologist and singer Judith Cohen spent Pesach in Belmonte, Portugal, doing more fieldwork and interviews both there and in villages in YTras-os-Montes. She and her daughter, Tamar Ilana, sang at two universities in Madrid, and then she returned to Portugal for more fieldwork.

A New Kulanu Web Board

The new Kulanu Web Board provides a convenient way to access messages by topic, author, or date. Because the web board postings are accessible to Internet search engines, it makes our message available to a wider audience. It is possible to respond to a particular thread (topic) and it is simple to read only a particular thread of interest. The web board can provide embedded links to the author, to referenced web pages, or incorporate graphics that many e-mail services lack. The Kulanu web board can be accessed at <http://webteach.ubalt.edu/kulanu>. To secure posting privileges, write to kulanu@ubmail.ubalt.edu.

South Florida Chapter Meets

Under their tireless organizer, Yaakov Gladstone, the South Florida chapter of Kulanu met twice in March. On March 1, supporters traveled many miles to the meeting, which Gladstone describes as a "friendly and festive occasion, more like a family reunion." Guest speaker was Julio D'Gabriel, who, with his wife Myra, lived in Natal, Brazil for 10 years. He spoke on the descendants of Marranos living in that northern city and made a passionate plea to help them with educational materials and instructors. At the meeting Sylvia Stipelman, a Jewish educator in Montreal, proposed the establishment of a Kulanu Work-Study program to assist suitable candidates from lost and dispersed Jewish communities.

On March 17, the group gathered to commemorate the abduction in 1493 of the 2000 Portuguese Jewish children deported to Sao Tome, an island off the coast of West Africa. According to Gladstone, a Puerto Rican descendant of Crypto-Jews "gave a fascinating account of Crypto-Jews in Puerto Rico and shared with us some moving stories about his own family." The South Florida chapter hopes to suggest to the American

KULANU BRIEFS

(Continued from page 10)

Jewish Education Association that the subject of *Anousim* (Marranos) and their descendants be included in the school curriculum.

Support Group Forms

Silvia Medina, MSW, has announced the formation in El Paso, Texas, of a Crypto-Judaic support group for descendants of Spanish Jews whose family history has included membership in the Catholic Church. For information contact her at 3215 Mountain Ridge, El Paso, TX 79904, tel. 915-755-4743.

Rahel Museleah Speaks and Sings about Calcutta Jews

Rahel Museleah, a journalist, author and singer, delivers lectures and musical performances for adults about the Jews of Calcutta (she is the seventh generation of a Calcutta family that traces its roots to 17th century Baghdad). See her article in the November 1997 issue of *Hadassah Magazine*, "Bazaar of Generations," about her return to Calcutta after 33 years away. She also has compiled more than 50 songs on a cassette entitled "B'Kol Arev: Songs of the Jews of Calcutta." The cassette can be ordered for \$10 (plus \$2 shipping); an accompanying book is available for \$18 (plus \$3); the set costs \$25 (plus \$3). Send check to Rahel Museleah, 98 Old Mill Rd., Great Neck, NY 11023. For information call 516-829-4866.

A Zimbabwe Jewish Music Project

Inspired by their Shabbat visit with the Rusape, Zimbabwe, Tabernacle (see Kulanu newsletter, winter 1997-98, p. 14), Paul Zeitz and Mindi Cohen are trying to raise \$11,000 in loans or donations to fund the development of a master tape and the production of tapes and CDs of the moving and colorful music (in Hebrew, Shona, Ndebele, and English) of this committed congregation of native Africans who practice a form of Judaism. If you can help or want further information, contact them c/o USAID/Lusaka 2310, Washington, DC 20521-2310; fax 011-260-1-254-532; e-mail mcohen@zamnet.zm or pzeitz@usaid.gov.

Ugandan Jewish Orphans Need You!

The Lorna Margolis Memorial Fund for Abayudaya Orphans Education continues to need your generous donations. Currently Kulanu, through this Fund, is subsidizing primary and secondary education for more than 120 students who are members of the community of these remarkable Jews of Uganda. We have received word that Samari Nakamwaga was the best in her class in primary school. Please support Samari and her colleagues by sending checks, payable to "Kulanu" and earmarked for the Margolis Fund, to Kulanu c/o Hantman, 3520 Tarkington Lane, Silver Spring, MD 20906.

Sadly, we have had to discontinue support for post-secondary education due to a lack of funds. If you are acquainted with a foundation that might be interested in funding college expenses for worthy Abayudaya students, please contact the Kulanu office.

Spanish-Speaking Congregations in Miami Beach

thodox Sefardi congregation, features sermons in Spanish. Ninety percent of members are of Cuban origin, with others from Argentina, Uruguay and elsewhere in South America. The Cuban-Hebrew Congregation of Miami is a Conservative, Ashkenazi congregation with Spanish-oriented cultural activities and visiting Spanish-speaking rabbis.

A Birth and a Refuah Shleimah

A young Abayudaya couple, Zerida and Uri Katula, have a new baby girl whom they have named Hofesh Chalom. Although the baby was born healthy, it is now in the Municipal Hospital of Mbale Uganda. Let us pray for a *refuah shleimah* (complete recovery).

Sonora Archives Yield Genealogy Data

The University of Arizona History Department has begun a project to preserve on microfilm millions of archival documents from the Mexican state of Sonora, dating back 300 years. Genealogical information pertaining to Crypto-Jews is included, such as travel documents. For further information, contact Michael Weber, UA History Dept., Social Sciences Bldg., Rm. 215, Tucson, AZ 85721-0027.

A Conference on Babylonian Jewry

The Second International Congress for Babylonian Jewry Research will be held June 15-18, 1998, in Or-Yehuda, Israel. Lectures will be in Hebrew and English. Two additional conferences are planned for late 1998, at UCLA and Columbia University. For information contact the Babylonian Jewry Heritage Center, 83 Hahagana St., PO Box 151, Or-Yehuda 60251, Israel; fax 972-3-5339936; tel 972-3-5339278-9; e-mail babylon@babylonjewry.org.il; web <http://www.BabylonJewry.org.il>.

Annual Genealogy Conference: "Hollywood Chai"

The 18th annual seminar of the Association of Jewish Genealogy Societies will be held in Los Angeles July 12-17. Dubbed "Hollywood Chai," the event will feature Art Benveniste, editor of *HaLapid*, as one of 50 speakers, and the banquet speaker will be Theodore Bikel. For registration information, contact Hollywood Chai, PO Box 55443, Sherman Oaks, CA 91413 or www.jewishgen.org/jgsla/seminar.htm.

Yasher Koach, Bloomingdale's!

We note with satisfaction that during the Pesach season Washington area Bloomingdale's department stores donated a portion of the proceeds from sales of assorted Passover items to a special UJA project to benefit Ethiopian Jewish youth in Israel.

**Bring a Friend into
Kulanu!**

Bnei Menashe (Cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

Indeed, Chala's predictions have been advanced one more step as Chief Rabbi Bakshi Doron has recently advocated the additional aliyah of 211 Bnei Menashe refugees, who will join over 300 of their kin, most of whom are already converted and settled in Israel.

But there is also the awkward side, the part we must all work to overcome. One of the Bnei Menashe interviewed by Arnold says, "Everywhere we go people stare at us. I feel like telling them: 'I'm a human being too. We're Jews too!'"

But who are we? Or, more to the point, who are Yehuda's children? Do we believe our seed is holy, or do we believe our thoughts, prayers and behavior are holy? Perhaps the greatest rabbi of all time, Rabbi Akiva, did not have a single Jewish gene. I don't know whether the Bnei Menashe share our gene pool, and indeed we will never know what the tribe of Menashe gene pool ever was in its original form. If we are honest to ourselves and to our prayers in the *Shemonah Esra* on behalf of the righteous converts, it makes no difference.

In the United States, our biggest problem is couch potato Judaism. We are interested in everything, but responsible for much less. Perhaps this includes, unlike the Bnei Menashe, our own destiny. So, how, in this malaise, can we get involved with Oriental-looking Jews who are halfway around the world?

Do we believe our seed is holy, or do we believe our thoughts, prayers and behavior are holy?

We can, if we can repeat the skills of the Soviet and Ethiopian Jewish movements' great leaders. We need the creative equivalent of those leaders to step forward and form a fiercely focused advocacy group for the Bnei Menashe. Anything less will fail. And if we fail, what does this say for our own destiny --- Diaspora destiny? Are our destinies not intertwined?

On Sunday, May 3, Rabbi Avichail spoke to the quarterly gathering of New York's Kulanu chapter. I hope that one outcome of this talk will be the development of an advocacy leadership group which will visit the Bnei Menashe in Israel and India, will invite members of the Bnei Menashe to tour their synagogues and Jewish communal organizations, and will describe the Bnei Menashe in all the conclaves of the Jewish dialogue. (Please see Yaacov Levi's Letter on page 2.)

Leadership is rapidly evolving. For example in Toronto, *V'ahavta*: the Canadian Jewish Humanitarian and Relief Committee has begun some impressive advocacy for the Bnei Menashe. Specifically, I refer you to the *Jewish Tribune*, Canada's largest Jewish newspaper, which published on March 26 a cover story, "Lost Tribe Longing To Go Home," written by Stephen Epstein, the president of *V'ahavta*. The article is available on the web (in an updated version) at <http://www.virtualshops.com> and is also linked to the Kulanu web.

While Rabbi Avichail is doing his good works in Israel,

Mizoram, and Manipur, Rabbi Marvin Tokayer, an authority on Oriental Jewish communities, who visited the Bnei Menashe even before Rabbi Avichail, has taken significant leadership in the United States. We will owe the new leadership all we can give and then a little more! Our common destiny deserves no less.

A Long-Lost Tribe Is Ready To Come Home

By Stephen Epstein

(Editor's note: This is excerpted from the author's complete article, which can be found at <http://www.virtualshops.com>.)

In North East India, in the land mass that lies between Myanmar (formerly Burma) and Bangladesh, there lives a small group of people who have been practicing Judaism for more than 25 years. They have not taken on a "new" religion. These people, in fact, have returned to the religion of their ancestors. They call themselves Bnei Menashe, descendants of the Tribe of Menashe, one of the ten lost tribes.

In the time of the first Temple, Israel was divided into two kingdoms. The southern kingdom, known as Judah, was made up mostly of the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and Levy. Most Jews today are descended from the southern kingdom. The northern kingdom of Israel was made up of the remaining ten tribes.

In approximately 721 B.C.E., the Assyrians invaded the northern kingdom, exiled the ten tribes living there and enslaved them in Assyria.

The oral history of Bnei Menashe that was passed down for 2,700 years describes their escape from slavery in Assyria to Media/Persia. From there they moved on to Afghanistan, mostly through less-traveled areas, ever on the lookout for kings or powerful people who might drag them back to slavery. From Afghanistan they traveled toward Hindu-Kush and proceeded to Tibet, then to Kaifeng, reaching the Chinese city around 240 B.C.E.

The Bnei Menashe believe that while in China their ancestors were enslaved yet again. During their years there, large numbers of the Israelites were killed and their assimilation started.

These events caused the Israelites to flee and live in caves. The group was expelled in 100 C.E. and their "leather scrolls" were confiscated and burned. At that point different groups went in various directions. Some went down the Mekong River into Vietnam, the Philippines, Thailand and Malaysia, while some of the Israelites moved to Burma and west to India. Till today, some people refer to these people as "Shinlung," the "cave dwellers."

Today, the descendants of those Israelites who settled in India and Burma have different names depending on where they live. Some are known as Shinlung, some Kuki, Mizo, Lushai or Mar.

In 1894, Christian missionaries arrived to the Manipur area of North East India, intent on converting the local population. The Kukis, having been brought up with an oral history of their link to their ancestor "Manmaseh" and other stories, recognized some of the Bible stories. They eventually converted to what they thought was the religion of their ancestors and began practicing Christian-

Would YOU Like To Give a Book Talk?

KTAV Publishing House and Kulanu are seeking volunteers to give book talks about our new book, *Jews in Places You Never Thought Of*, at the following Jewish Community Centers that have book fairs. Readers like YOU who are knowledgeable in one or more areas of Kulanu's involvement and/or have read the book (or plan to) are needed. You will be given suggestions on areas to highlight or sections to read aloud to your audiences. Please contact Karen Primack (301-565-3094; primack@mindspring.com) if you live near one or more of the following centers and are interested in this stimulating assignment!

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BOOK ACCLAIMED!

Booklist, the publication of the American Library Association, calls *Jews in Places You Never Thought Of* "a unique book that will be of interest to Jews and non-Jews alike."

The Washington Post listed *Jews in Places You Never Thought Of* on its Bookshelf entitled "A Timely Medley of Jewish Reading". It was one of five books reviewed that "offer new looks at the history of Judaism and its impact on the world."

Order your copy today by using the order form on page 14

Publications (Cont.)

(Continued from page 9)

Something Special for Children

Well known modern Orthodox rebbetzin and feminist Blu Greenberg has teamed up with Linda Tarry, an African-American Christian activist, to write *King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba*, an updated version of the biblical-era story for children that emphasizes strong role models for Jews, Christians, African-Americans and women. Preview information describes a book with clever riddles, a magical journey, and ingenious answers by King Solomon. A forward is written by Barbara Gordon, director of the North American Conference of Ethiopian Jewry.

On Indian Women

Hoohly Tales is Sally Solomon's autobiographical journey of a Sephardic Jew growing up in Calcutta in the 1930s. Consisting of short stories and pencil sketches, it can be ordered by sending a check for \$20 (includes shipping) to Julia Lipman, 133 Dawson Dr., Needham, MA 02192.

On Being Jewish, Indian and Women is an "occasional communication" published by two Indian women, one Jewish and one Hindu, that examines issues such as anti-Semitism, wife burnings and biographies of notable Indian women. For information write VACHA, 5 Bhavana, S.V. Road, Vile Parle West, Mumbai 400 056 India, tel. 002-671-3469, or e-mail swatija@faow.ilbom.ernet.in.

The Late Josie Gimble

By Jack Zeller

Dr Josephine Gimble, a Kulanu stalwart, has died tragically in an automobile accident in March in New Mexico. Josie, as she was affectionately called by her friends, had spent the winter in Tucson with her fiancé and Tucson Kulanu Chapter founder Israel Rubin. Israel was in the automobile at the time of the accident and escaped with a broken clavicle and other injuries. Israel's grief is boundless. They had just purchased a new home in Tucson in preparation for their forthcoming marriage. Josie devoted herself to Crypto-Jews in the Southwest.

It is impossible to describe Josie in simple terms. She was warm, charming, focused and very involved in many aspects of life—especially the aging process and care of elderly in nursing homes where she applied her skills as a nurse and nursing educator to the more generous treatment of the elderly. She was also very committed to Kulanu projects and when we were having a difficult time, we would ask Josie for help. We knew that if Josie couldn't make it happen, no one could.

This is a sad time for us and Kulanu. It is also a reminder that our time is often less than we think, that time is precious, and that we have to work for others before the time is over. We appeal unselfishly to those of you who have the time and energy to share it with Kulanu. People who feel or think or practice Jewishly all over the world need our encouragement to give them a fair measure of Jewish dignity. Josie was there for them. In order to help carry on her work, an anonymous donor has given Kulanu \$500 to start **The Kulanu Josie Gimble Fund**.

Now that Josie is gone, others must step forward.

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The Negative Effect of Barros Basto

By Inacio Steinhardt

(Editor's note: Steinhardt co-authored **Ben Rosh**, a biography (in Portuguese) of Captain Arthur Carlos de Barros Basto, who initiated a doomed movement to bring Crypto-Jews back to Judaism in Portugal 70 years ago. Steinhardt's co-author, Elvira de Azevedo Mea, is a Catholic professor of history in Portugal, specializing in the Inquisition. A publisher for an English edition is being sought.)

I think that everyone wants to know much more about Barros Basto and the status of the people in Tras-os-Montes and Beiras regions whom he helped to invigorate. Is the status of the community still Crypto? More Crypto? More secular and *intelligencia*? Was there a permanent effect?

The effect was negative. Not because of Barros Basto himself, but as a consequence of his "defeat" and the new environment, political and religious.

I mean that if the captain had not started his propaganda to lead the Crypto-Jews "out of the closet," there would probably be still thousands of Crypto-Jews in the villages. Returning to secrecy was by far more difficult than staying in it. Today you can hardly find one or two practicing Crypto-Jews in places where, in the time of the captain, 60 or 70 years ago, there were hundreds.

The curious thing is that when I arrive in any of such villages and towns, I have no difficulty in identifying, with the help of the rest of the population, the remaining "judeus." But they are "judeus" in the eyes and tradition of the non-Jews. They keep no Jewish practices and many are even devout Christians.

I have had many moving experiences. Two old ladies

whom I met on a Sunday, on their return from the Church, still knew many of the "Jewish" prayers in Portuguese. But most important, the day after I left they sent the son of one of them, a lawyer, after me, a distance of 40 kms., with a small package, wrapped in an old newspaper. It was an old oil lamp and a note: "This is our last 'candeia do Senhor'; it was made by our late father. Please take it to Israel."

In another place, an old lady who did not remember anything at all took me to the entrance to the church when the bells were ringing. There she identified two women, brought them to me, and introduced them to me saying "He is one of ours...."

In another place, people known as "judeus" wanted to show me the vestments used in the yearly procession, claiming that they were "sambenitos". (A *sambenito* was the garment, in the shape of a sack, that the convicted had to wear before taking part in the *auto-de-fe*.) They took me to the church and asked the sexton to show them to me. Those were not *sanbenitos*. But when I left, the sexton came after me and gave me a package, again wrapped in newspaper. "What is this?" I asked. "It is one of those vestments. Take it." "Why?" I asked. "Because, because, I also belong to you..."

In some villages there still are separate quarters where all the inhabitants are "judeus" and mixed marriages are rare. But no traditions are kept. All the ex-pupils of the yeshiva Barros Basto founded, that I know, have married with non-Jews. Even his daughter, Miriam, has married a Christian.

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Edited by Karen Primack

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