

KULANU

“all of us”



Helping Lost Jewish Communities

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BNEI MENASHE UPDATE **100 New Immigrants in 2000!**

*By Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail
Director of Amishav*

The past several months have seen a flurry of activity with regard to the Bnei Menashe in Israel. After a period of uncertainty, the Interior Ministry has now reaffirmed the arrangement whereby 100 Bnei Menashe will be allowed to immigrate to Israel. Visas have already been approved for the next group of 51 men, women and children, all of whom are slated to arrive shortly after the festival of Sukkot, in mid-November. Arrangements are being made for an additional 49 Bnei Menashe to come to Israel in December, bringing the total for this year to 100 people. The community is looking forward with excitement to welcoming its friends and relatives home to Israel.



Recent Bnei Menashe arrivals in Israel

Once in Israel, the young men will study in a new educational program in Efrat under the auspices of Rabbi Shlomo Riskin and other distinguished rabbis, while the young women will attend Maayan Bina seminary in Jerusalem. Upon completion of their studies, which usually last for six to nine months, the Bnei Menashe will undergo formal conversion by the Chief

Rabbinat.

To ensure that the Bnei Menashe have the proper tools for integrating fully into Israel's high-tech society, an arrangement has been made with the College of Judea in Kiryat Arba to accept 13 young men and women from the community who have already completed the conversion process. The group will study computer science and will graduate in four years' time with degrees in engineering.

We are also creating an absorption and community center for the Bnei Menashe in Gush Katif. We have identified a suitable site with eight homes next to the community of Atzmona, and will begin looking for teachers and counselors once the matter is finalized.

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Drawn Back to the Abayudaya

By Lucy Steinitz

Although my flight arrived 20 hours late, Joab Jonabab (JJ) Keki was there at the airport, where he had waited the whole night long. We greeted each with shouts of joy: This was a true friendship rejoined, after a long absence. "Now we must hurry to Mbale (on Uganda's eastern border) well before Shabbat. The whole Abayudaya community is waiting for you, eager for your return."

JJ escorted me through the chaos of Kampala's taxi car-park, where we squeezed ourselves into a mini-bus -- happy that there were only 16 of us, as in some other vehicles of the same size I counted up to 21. After a three-hour ride, we arrived and JJ then searched for a beat-up old pick-up truck with "Semei Kakungulu High School" proudly painted on the sides. "This comes from Rabbi Gershom," he explained. "For many months last year his salary was delayed. When it finally came in one lump sum, he bought this vehicle. None of the instruments work and it needs to be pushed all the time for a running start, but it gets us to where we want to go."

And so it did. Half an hour later, we arrive on Nebagoye Hill. Most buildings look relatively unchanged from my earlier visits, four and five years ago. The synagogue has a beautiful wooden door in the center, but the two side-entrances are still completely open. Inside in the middle, the community built a Sephardic-style *bima* (prayer-platform), with heavy cement pillars and roof. I saw the decorated metal box in which the Torah which Bernd and I and the children carried to the Abayudaya by hand in 1996 is now stored and someone else showed me the wiring that has been installed along the synagogue walls in the hope that one day electricity will come to the village.

Just across from the synagogue, Gershom Sizomu and his wife Zipporah still live with their two children in two tiny rooms, each measuring about seven-foot by ten. Here Zipporah showed me her bed, which would be mine over the next two nights. She would take Gershom's bed just next to mine, and he would sleep in the next room with other (local) guests on the floor. Across the yard, in what once was the school headmaster's house, a weaver sat busily at work at a huge loom. This represented Rabbi Hershy Worch's latest addition to the community. They had only recently bought the colored cotton threads, however, so I got to witness the completion of their first tallit (prayer-shawl), on which they still had to add the *tsitsit* (ritual fringes) but would then be ready to sell to visiting tourists and supporters overseas. (I ordered one immediately for our son Sergio's bar mitzvah next year!)

There were several other changes, too. Although the kitchen hut
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KULANU ("ALL OF US") is a tax-exempt organization of Jews of varied backgrounds and practices dedicated to finding lost and dispersed remnants of the Jewish people and assisting those who wish to (re)join the Jewish community. Kulanu is undertaking a variety of activities worldwide on behalf of these dispersed groups, including research, contacts, education, conversion when requested, and relocation to Israel if desired.

Coming Home to Israel

By Avishai Guite

I was born and raised in Imphal, the capital city of Manipur, India's easternmost state and home to many Bnei Menashe. In the mid-1990s, Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail of Jerusalem opened the Amishav house in Imphal. It consists of a synagogue, two guest rooms, a *mikveh* (ritual bath) and one classroom, in addition to the living quarters for the center's staff. It was at the Amishav house that I was able to acquire a basic knowledge of Judaism and *halacha* (Jewish law).

Thanks to the generosity of some Australian well-wishers, religious books and primary Hebrew textbooks were donated, enabling us to open a library which I was proud to administer. As I advanced in my Hebrew studies, I also began teaching others the language of our forefathers. Shortly thereafter, I began to serve as the *chazan* (cantor) of the Beth El synagogue located in the Amishav house.

In mid-1999, I received the long-awaited and much hoped-for news: permission to go to Israel. Finally, my dream was coming true: I was to return to the land of our ancestors. After over 2,000 years of exile, I was going home.

As excited as I was, I was at a loss as to the rules and procedures for obtaining the necessary visas and undergoing the requisite formalities. In addition, I did not have the funds to pay for the cost of airfare and transportation from Manipur to Israel. To my great relief, friends in Israel informed me that it would all be taken care of by the Amishav organization. Rabbi Avichail would shoulder the burden of arranging the visas, purchasing the airline tickets, organizing places to stay in Israel and meeting all of our initial basic needs. I cannot begin to imagine what troubles and hardships were involved in making it all succeed, and I am very grateful to Rabbi Avichail for his dedication and efforts.

After the arrangements were made, I left my home in eastern India and landed at Ben-Gurion Airport on October 8, 1999. The moment my feet touched the holy ground of the Promised Land, I felt transformed into a new person, both physically and spiritually. Whatever fears and anxieties I had melted away instantly when I saw the familiar faces of friends and relatives who had come to greet me at the airport. Among them was Rabbi Avichail, whose big smile radiated warmth. Just as my friends had told me, Rabbi Avichail had arranged for my accommodations in advance, and I was able to rapidly begin my absorption into Israeli society.

After staying with my brother (who had come to Israel previously) for four or five days, I moved into the Machon Meir yeshiva in Jerusalem. I took a range of Judaic studies courses and I was able to complete the formal conversion ceremony in about seven months. I enjoyed the learning immensely and I continue to study there so that I can deepen my knowledge and appreciation of our rich and beautiful heritage.

I have now been in Israel for a year and I am very happy. But as the saying goes -- even on the bright side of the moon, there are dark spots. It is now five months after my conversion was completed, but I still have not been issued a *Teudat Zehut* (identity card) and various other documents that go along with having full Israeli citizenship. I just hope that this will get sorted out soon.

I was very excited to learn recently that another 100 Bnei Menashe will be coming by the end of this year, as well as 100 more next year. I left behind so many relatives and friends in India who dream of coming home to Israel -- I pray that I will be reunited with them again soon here in the Jewish state. Though the financial burden on Rabbi Avichail and Amishav is immense, I hope that Jews around the world will help to make this dream become a reality.

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A KULANU PROFILE

Meet Michael Gershowitz

Mike Gershowitz, who recently wrote a three-part article for the Kulanu newsletter on his visit to the Jews of Ghana, is a management consultant to educational and non-profit organizations. He is also Kulanu's new vice president for Ghana affairs. In addition, he is the father of Gabi Gershowitz, whose article about *his* teaching visit to Ghana appears in this issue of the newsletter.

Gershowitz encourages travel to visit the Sefwi Wiawso community, and says they would love to host 40 visitors per year. They are building a guest house adjacent to the synagogue to accommodate visitors, which will soon be finished.

Gershowitz recently sent a package to Sefwi Wiawso with a fellow Jew from Des Moines, Joel Friedson. The precious parcel contained a shofar, a used but serviceable 35 mm SRL camera to replace David Ahenkorah's camera which has been malfunctioning, \$200 Gershowitz raised from the sale of kippot made in Sefwi Wiawso (the cost of production of which was \$30), and a letter committing \$800 for the purchase of 10 acres of prime land that the Jewish farmers (about 20 of them) want to purchase. The land is flat, in contrast to the steeply sloped farms they now have. (To contribute to the land fund, see KULANU BRIEFS.)

Yasher koach, Mike. You are surely making a difference!

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Gone to Ghana

By Gabriel J. Gershowitz

“God is close to all who call upon him; to all those who call upon him with integrity...” -Ashrei, Psalm 145

A Bit of History

Imagine . . . a beautiful, sparkling summer day working on your farm. The cassava and yam still have to be harvested, the cows milked, and the water gathered from the well. But wait – sundown is approaching. Returning home from the farm, you notice that utter chaos surrounds the village. Everyone in sight is busy cooking, cleaning, and bathing. Everyone in sight, including you, is preparing for Shabbat.

Unbeknownst to the rest of the world, the Sefwi people of West Africa have diligently practiced the same religion for countless centuries. Characteristics of the religion include belief in one God, circumcision of males eight days after birth, separation between husband and wife during the woman’s menstrual period, strict observance of the Jewish dietary laws, and observance of a Sabbath every seventh day. Amazingly, the scene depicted above is the one that existed in every Sefwi village and town as far back as 2,000 years ago. Their name for the religion is “Sefwi,” but you undoubtedly recognize it as Judaism.

For close to two millennia, the Sefwis have resided in Africa, living a life of subsistence and demonstrating tremendous dedication to their religion. Although there was occasional persecution during their long history, it was not until the 20th century that adverse conditions

caused big changes within the group. In an attempt to eschew diversity, a high government official declared that no Sefwi (or any other member of a minor ethnic group within Ghana) could practice his/her native religion; rather, all people in Ghana must be either Christian or Muslim.

For understandable reasons, many of the Sefwis refrained from practicing their religion – at least in public. After all, they could ill afford to alienate the government, lest they starve. Yet, in 1977 a Sefwi man named Aaron experienced what he called a “vision” that directed him to return to the “true” religion of his ancestors. Like most “prophets,”

Aaron was at first taken as mad; later, his message was heeded. With biblical zeal, this man picked up the fragmented Sefwi religion and rebuilt it. When Aaron passed away in 1991, the leaderless community collapsed. Many of the Sefwis even attended church during this period, since they were afraid of being further persecuted. In 1993, a man named David Ahenkorah experienced his own life-changing vision and re-founded the community. David has been leading the community and fostering its growth. Currently, the center of Sefwi/Jewish religious life is Sefwi Wiawso, a village of 4,000, where there is a new synagogue and a core group of around 800 people practicing Judaism.

Personal Experiences

Along with my friend Nate Asher from Kansas City, I traveled across the world to Ghana on June 6. I am grateful to Des Moines’ Tifereth Israel Synagogue, the Tifereth Israel Chapter of United Synagogue Youth, and Kulanu for financial support for this trip. Though I understand the deep historical significance of my finds relating to the Sefwi people’s Jewish practices (and sheer size), my trip was far from a mere observational study. Rather, it was an extremely rewarding, fulfilling, and meaningful endeavor.

The people who greeted us were warm and friendly, and throughout the five-week visit, they continued to be that way. Indeed, despite the harsh economic conditions that force them deep into poverty, the people of Ghana as a whole are the most cheerful, respectful, and hard-working people I have ever met. The people of Sefwi Wiawso take all

of those positive character traits and apply them towards their Judaism. They wake up at 5 A.M. to attend synagogue before going to work, they feed their animals before they feed themselves, display an affection for every human being they meet, and all the while have unflinching smiles on their faces. Yet one thing amazed me more than anything else – they gave up their very beds so that Nate and I would have a place to sleep – that is how much they care about their Judaism and Jewish education.

Nate and I had our work cut out for us: teach a large group of people, many of whom don’t read any language, how to read Hebrew. Although we were only there for five weeks, we accomplished that goal, along with teaching them about Jewish history, modern Jewish practice, and the state of Israel (until a decade ago, they never knew it existed). Each day, we held two classes, one for the children and one for the adults. Between classes, we would ascend the village’s mountain and give private lessons to adult students – merchants and tradesmen – when they were not too busy with customers. While in the downtown area, we would play ping-pong, eat roasted corn and drink pineapple juice. After the classes were finished for the day, an exciting game of football (soccer) would begin on the large, rocky playing area with only one goal. Toward evening, I would help prepare (and then eat) dinner; the nights were spent relaxing with all of my new friends.

After spending a month and a half in Sefwi Wiawso, I thought I

never wanted to leave. Living among such decent, upright people and becoming accustomed to their simple but caring culture made it difficult for me to get on the plane that would take me home. Sefwi Wiawso made me utterly happy, calm, peaceful, and thoughtful. I can’t wait to go back.

What Must Happen Now?

Connections with the Jews of Ghana must be strengthened. More teachers and rabbis have already started to visit the community, more educational and religious materials have been sent to them. It must be understood that even a single dollar of charity will mean a lot to them. For example, they are currently hoping to build a guesthouse with running water (which is rare) to serve unexpected visitors. The entire project,

including labor and materials, is under \$1,000. To Americans, that is very inexpensive. To Ghanaians, that is an unreal sum of money.

We must strive for more interaction with their community, both by sending members of our community there, and by bringing members of their community here. While we have much to teach them, they also have a lot to teach us. We have the ability to help them tremendously, so we must act on it.

I feel that I accomplished all the goals I set for the trip. Yet, the job is far from finished. Only when the Sefwi Ghanaians are universally accepted as Jews around the world, when they read and speak Hebrew with the fluency that now evades them, when they are able to live in Israel, or have at least visited it, only then will the job be finished. Or perhaps that is when the real job will start.

While I was there, I kept a daily journal of my activities and thoughts. If any readers would like to learn more, I would be happy to send them a copy of my journal. Simply e-mail your request to me at gobbstoppa@aol.com. In addition, Nate and I are putting together a documentary on the Ghana Jews that will be ready for distribution in a few months.



Gershowitz and Asher with Ghanaian children

Radio Waves in SA

By Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum

To my knowledge, the subject of the "Black Jews" of Southern Africa has never *officially* been addressed. The silence has been quite deafening. Recently this has been corrected by a spell-binding three-hour talk show on the subject on "Radio 702," hosted by Jon Quelane. Quelane invited Rabbi Norman Bernhard to be his guest in the studio, with a live link-up to Professor Mathivha, leader of the Lemba Cultural Association in the Northern Province.

Jon Quelane introduced the subject by inviting Professor Mathivha to guide the audience through the oral history, traditions and culture of the Lemba people. The Lemba are extremely proud of their Jewish heritage, which is rooted in ancient Judaism. Many of the traditions are similar to Jewish tradition, and although corrupted over centuries of living in isolation from normative Judaism, still recognizable.

Rabbi Bernhard addressed the subject in a warm and sensitive manner, giving the halachic views and explaining the reasons and need for a halachic return by conversion, to enable those who may be interested in rejoining their Jewish brothers and sisters in following traditional Judaism once more. I cannot stress enough the enormous contribution made by this radio show-- to the Lemba, to the Jewish community at large and to the general public.

Jon Quelane was sensitive to the subject matter which he handled with professional diplomacy, leaving a huge audience wanting and hoping for more. This was first-class radio and from what I hear, not the last time we hear Rabbi Bernhard on the air!

At the Old Ashkenazic Cemetery in Paramaribo

By Irwin Berg

(Editor's note: The last newsletter featured Part I of this multi-part article on Berg's adventure volunteering for a Jewish cemetery project in Jodensavanne, Suriname.)

Part II

Later that Shabbat morning back at the Eco Resort, there was a meeting of the American volunteers and Guido Robles, president of the foundation, told us what to expect. We would be housed in the "Paranam Country Club," a mining outpost of Alcoa about 20 miles south of Paramaribo. There would be a 6 a.m. wake-up call; breakfast at the "country club's" dining room at 7 a.m.; departure for Jodensavanne at 8 a.m. on an open boat on the Surinam River; work in the Beth Haim Cemetery of Jodensavanne until 5 p.m. (with a break for lunch); return by open boat to Paranam from 5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.; and supper at the "country club" at 7:30 p.m. We would leave from Paramaribo for Paranam that evening and begin work on Sunday, and continue to work for the following 12 days with rest only on the intervening Saturday. As Mr. Robles was giving us our schedule for the next two weeks, Elaine and I looked at each other in disbelief. In her eyes, I could read that she was asking herself if she had made a mistake in volunteering. I, too, was having doubts. In fact, we followed that schedule every day for 12 working days until our scheduled departure.

Saturday afternoon Adriana Van Alen Koenraact, a most unusual woman, took the volunteers to the old Ashkenazic cemetery on Kwattaweg or Kwatta Road in Paramaribo. Adriana has a vast store of information about the history of Jewish life in Suriname. She was raised a Catholic in Holland and came to Suriname at the age of 12. She is married to a Jew who does not share her interest in the Jewish cemeteries of Suriname. During the course of many discussions with her about Jews in Suriname, she expressed the opinion to me that, of

(Continued on page 5)

Betar-Lemba Update

By Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum

A big Thank You to donors who made possible our second mini-camp for 10 Lemba youths and their counterparts in the traditionally white Jewish youth movement Betar. The Lemba youth will be benefiting from your concern and funding. The Shabbat had an amazing spiritual effect on both Betar and Lemba youth. I guess it was the genuine interest of the Lemba to learn about their roots and Judaism that inspired our Betar youth. They spoke about the experience with awe. Something really special took place that weekend. We also recently had a workshop for the Betar councilors and a meeting for the parents. Everyone is hugely excited and looking forward to our continued programs

I want to share an experience with you of what happened recently. One of the many visitors who were interested in finding out more about the Lemba youth went on a "fact-finding mission" to the Northern Province. I received a telephone call from a distraught person, who was "*shocked that the Lemba were wearing beads and living in huts.*"!! <grin> I continue to be amazed at our ability to "not hear" or comprehend the situation. The separation of over 2,000 years -- the cultural difference of being African instead of our version of perceived "Jewishness." I am pleased to say that the experience was a positive one with firm friendships developing.

It reminded me of when I first saw Jews from Arab lands, who had newly arrived in Israel, living in a transit camp. The very foreignness to what I had perceived as "Jewish" all my life living in South Africa --taking my image of Jews from the local [South African] Ashkenazi community who mostly hail from Lithuania -- was quite a shock. I remember standing transfixed, staring with wonder and awe that these colorful and exotic people were part of us.

It takes time and it takes knowing -- possibly as I do on a personal level as a descendant of Portuguese crypto-Jews -- the feeling of having been separated from the main body of Judaism -- to fully comprehend the enormity of the Lemba phenomenon. The fact that they can and do strongly identify as "Jews" is a miracle in itself.

When I spoke at a school assembly recently, I made a point of inviting the youth to "get involved." I'm pleased that both Bnei Akiva and Habonim have contacted me regarding our Lemba projects and hope to have them fully involved next year. As Betar were the only ones to date, I credit them for their courage in leading the way for the rest.

In South Africa, the youth are writing end-of-year exams and then we have the long summer break, which lasts until mid-January. We intend having another program with the Lemba before the summer break.

100 New Immigrants (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

As you can see, things are moving. But there is an urgent need for additional funding. The cost of airfare and transportation alone is approximately \$800 for each Bnei Menashe immigrant (or \$80,000 for 100 immigrants annually). Thus far, we have raised \$26,000. If we are to succeed in bringing 100 new immigrants by December, we will require an additional \$54,000. I am turning to our friends and supporters in Kulanu in the hope that you will assist us in this important endeavor. For over 2000 years, the Lost Tribes were cut off from the people of Israel. Now they are returning. We cannot squander this precious opportunity. Please join us in bringing the sons of Menashe back home.

For further information, please contact me at 3-B Epstein Street, Jerusalem, Israel 96555 (phone/fax 972-2-642-4606).

At the Old Ashkenazic Cemetery in Paramaribo

(Continued from page 4)

all the white settlers, only the Jews came to stay and establish a community.

I was surprised to learn that there was an old Ashkenazic cemetery in Paramaribo. The gravestones told me that their numbers were not inconsiderable and that some had come to Suriname even before 1700. This would make them among the earliest Ashkenazi settlers in the Western Hemisphere. Why had they come to Suriname?

The answer lay in part in the Ukraine.

The first Ashkenazim arrived in Amsterdam from Germany about 1620, and a congregation was established in 1635. They were preceded by Sephardim from Spain and Portugal who settled in Holland as New Christians (Jews who converted to Catholicism) when Holland came under the dominion of Spain in the 16th century. Some of these New Christians were Marranos (Christians in public, but secretly Jews) who openly returned to Judaism when Holland won her independence from Spain in 1579. The German Ashkenazim were joined by Polish and Ukrainian refugees fleeing the Chmielnicki programs of 1648-1649. (Jewish chronicles mention 100,000 Jews killed and 300 Jewish communities destroyed during the Chmielnicki massacres.) By 1673 the German and East European Jews outnumbered the Portuguese Jews in Holland but not in affluence or influence. The overwhelming number of Ashkenazim in Amsterdam earned a meager living. Some were not able to earn any living at all, but had to be supported by the more affluent Portuguese-Sephardic community.

The Sephardim didn't have to be rocket scientists to realize that one of the ways to be rid of this financial burden would be to send these poor Ashkenazi Jews to the Dutch colonies in the New World. In time, the Dutch Jewish community would offer money to the poor, the orphaned and the widowed, Sephardi as well as Ashkenazi, on condition that they not return to Amsterdam. Those who went were called "despachados."

The old Ashkenazi graveyard in Paramaribo was in use from 1700 to 1836. There has never been a systematic study of the transcriptions on its tombstones. The graveyard is about 135 yards long and the width varies from 50 yards to 20 yards. In 1700, the graveyard was outside the city limits of Paramaribo, but it is now located in the middle of the city. For years it was neglected and covered with undergrowth. More recently, it even became a meeting place for drug addicts.

When Adriana Van Alen Koenraadt first visited the graveyard in 1997, she expected to find only a few worn stones. To her surprise, she found row upon row of beautifully engraved stones, some in excellent condition. At her prodding, the Jewish community funded a Graveyard Maintenance Foundation. In July 1998, Adriana, with workers whom she procured, cleared out the vegetation. She then discovered that the brick foundations for some of the gravestones as well as the sand between the graves had been stolen, with the result that many of the stones had tumbled over or were out of place. In October 1998 she had the cemetery weeded again, filled in the holes with sand and reset the stones. When we visited the cemetery in August 1999, there were still workmen in the cemetery laboring under Adriana's direction. The cemetery is still unfenced, since the Jewish Community does not have sufficient funds to build a fence. Adriana is now seeking to interest an American Jewish organization that preserves Jewish monuments to assist with the funding.

Time did not allow a careful examination of the cemetery. I took some photographs of the cemetery and of a few individual stones. The cemetery has the same appearance as that of the Sephardic cemetery on the other side of Kwattaweg; it is also similar in appearance to the Beth Haim Cemetery (literally "House of Life" or metaphorically "House of Eternal Life") which we were soon to study in Jodensavanne. In the main, the stones lie flat on the ground; even the ones that are elevated on a bed of bricks are horizontal and not vertical. The stones are generally about 6-7 feet long, 3-4 feet wide and 6-8 inches

thick, mostly limestone, some marble, some brownstone and a few cement.

Almost all the inscriptions on the stones in the Ashkenazic cemetery are entirely in Hebrew, although a few are in Dutch. The stones in all the Jewish cemeteries, Sephardic as well as Ashkenazic, were carved in Holland and shipped to Suriname as ballast. The similarities between the stones of the two communities totally overwhelm any of the minor differences.

The use of acronyms on Jewish tombstones is universal in all Jewish communities, since there is a need to say as much as possible about the deceased in a limited space. The most common of these acronyms (in Hebrew "roshey tayvoth") is T N T s B H that stands for: (T)heeh (N)afsho (T)sirurah (B)itzrohr (H)ahayyim. The phrase means: "May his soul be bound up in the bond of eternal life (Sam 25:29).

Both communities used largely the same acronyms. The fact that the stones were cut and engraved in Holland -- probably by the same stonecutters and engravers -- may be responsible for the essential similarity of the stones in Kwattaweg and those of Jodensavanne. There were, however, some minor differences in the abbreviations that were used. Virtually, all stones in Kwattaweg began with the letters "P N" or "P T" for (P)oh (N)ikbar or (P)oh (T)imunah - the former standing for "here lies buried" for a male and the latter for a female. Virtually all stones at Jodensavanne began SA for "Sepultura" -- Portuguese for sepulcher or grave. Also common in Kwattaweg but absent at Jodensavanne were the well known Ashkenazic abbreviations "Z L" and "Z T s L" for (Z)ichronoh (L)evrachah and (Z)ichron (T)sadik (L)evrachah -- the former meaning "May his memory be blessed" and the latter "May the memory of the righteous one be blessed." On the tombstone of Arye Judah deVries was the acronym "A N S V" which I have never seen elsewhere and which I believe is rare. It stands for (A)men (N)itsah (S)elah (V)aed -- which means "Truth, Irrefutable, Forever and Ever."

Most other acronyms were used by both communities.

Since I was not at Kwattaweg long enough to make a list of the names of those buried there, I have only the names on the photographs that I took. Among the stones that I photographed there appeared the following names:

Chaim Falker - a young unmarried man

Leah Getkah Sanatsis - died in childbirth

Bilha daughter of Joseph Nardi - born in 1729, died 1791

Arye Judah deVries - a *mohel* (ritual circumciser)

It is interesting that deVries was the *mohel* for both communities, Ashkenazi and Sephardi. Relations between the two communities were often strained. At one time, the Ashkenazi community imposed fines on its members for visiting a Portuguese synagogue and demoted a member to an associate member if he or she married a Portuguese. This regulation was repealed in 1814. Only in five instances between 1788 and 1814 did a male Sephardi marry an Ashkenazi woman and only three times did a Sephardi woman marry an Ashkenazi male. Given the strained relations between them, one wonders why Arye Judah deVries was allowed to act as *mohel* for both communities.

Our first day of work was Sunday, August 1, 1999. We were duly awakened by Adriana at 6 a.m. After a very pleasant and plentiful breakfast at the "country club" in the town of Paramaribo, we walked to the west bank of the Surinam River just around a bend (and almost out of sight) from Alcoa's enormous industrial complex. In two open boats, ten of us including our two helmsmen made our way up the Surinam River from Paramaribo to Jodensavanne, a trip of about 15 miles as a crow flies but considerably longer on the winding Surinam River, an estuary at least up to Jodensavanne which is about 40 miles from the sea. Thus, depending on the tide, the trip could take as little as 1 1/4 hours - or as much as 1 3/4 hours.

(Continued on page 7)

Drawn Back to the Abayudaya (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

and pit latrines looked unchanged (i.e., water still has to be carried up from the valley, 40 minutes below), a large heifer now looks out on all the comings and goings -- one of six cattle given to the community (along with 15 to their non-Jewish neighbors) as part of Heifer Project International, where Kulanu helped to make the connection.

At the far end of the hilltop sit the two schools. The primary school still consists of seven unfinished or broken-down classrooms, but the Uganda government recently abolished all school fees for the primary years (grades one to seven) so everyone was happy about that. **Much more important as a NEW project is the two-year-old Semei Kakungulu (private) High School, with Gershom as principal and four teachers (none of whom are Abayudaya). Tuition is US\$20 per term (\$60 per year), but with so few students in the upper grades, especially, they can only afford to pay the teachers \$12 per month. Examination fees cost extra.**

Someone showed me the end-of-year exam for Hebrew and Jewish studies (both of which are required subjects, even for the Christian and Moslem students). It ended with a trick question: "Who in the Bible had no mother?" it read. My mind scanned all of the early ancestors I could think of. Finally, I confessed that I didn't know. "Adam," laughed Gershom, happy that he "got" me.

School supplies and furniture are still desperately needed. The school has no library, no laboratory, no calculators, and few supplies. Textbooks are scarce: at best there is one per teacher, plus two or three for the students to share in groups. They yearn for a computer, figuring that they could charge up the battery in town and then use it for a period of time until it needed recharging.

Walking around, I ran into another group of visitors. JJ had warned me already: these came uninvited, as many do over the course of each year. This group were Hebrew Christians from Baltimore, staying in Mbale, and planning to be around for 10 days. Earlier in the afternoon, a delegation of Abayudaya met with them to debate their missionary stance. I think Gershom, in particular, enjoyed the philosophical challenge. The Abayudaya had a whole list of 23 questions prepared for the debate, based in part on the "Jews for Judaism" literature sent to them some time ago by Kulanu. Late at night, after Shabbat services, a group of us talked in depth about what to do about their decision to remain for 10 days. "They are confusing your traditional African hospitality with the belief that you want to listen to their propaganda," I said. "I know this group (from Baltimore). They are missionaries, intent on making you believe that Jesus is the Messiah."

This posed a difficult dilemma. The Abayudaya don't want to be rude. "We say everyone is welcome. We can still tell them that they may worship with us, as anyone can. Yet we do not need to make time for more discussions. Here, we must put limits."

The next day after services (with these visitors not present), one of the elders summed up the decision. "Our Jesus-worshipping visitors from Baltimore said to us that they are Jewish," he explained to the entire congregation. "But this is not what we were taught. Do you remember when Kulanu first came to visit? They described five different groups of Jews: Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, Reform, and cultural Jews (secular). **But this group, the Hebrew-Christians, do not belong. They accept a trinity, which is more than one God. And our Bible says, 'Do not accept any other God before Me.' So we must reject their message, and send them to the Christians in the valley. They can preach to the Christians, but not to us.**"

The rest of Shabbat passed peacefully. The community's Jewish knowledge and comfort level has progressed enormously over the past few years. Whereas during my first visit in 1995, only two people

could lead services in Hebrew, now about 15 can. (The community still retains some of their original musical melodies, but intersperses them with Ashkenazi tunes.) During the services, a lot of time was devoted to the Torah and haftarah readings: the initial paragraphs in Hebrew, and then the remainder in Luganda, the local language. One of the elders gave the Priestly Blessing, his arms shrouded in a white robe. The kiddush is still over banana-beer, however: "... borai p'ree ha-matoke." It's the best they can do (as there is no wine), and it bears special meaning, as plantains ("matoke") are the local staple food. Women sit on benches along the side of the synagogue, Orthodox-style, but are encouraged to participate in the Torah discussion after the services. Most leave, however.

I was asked to deliver a "d'var Torah" (commentary), which was translated into Luganda so that everyone could understand. We read from Ke Tavo, in Deuteronomy, where our ancestors were given a choice between good and evil in their lives. According to scripture, God promises great rewards for living one's life according to the commandments, and horrible punishments for any long-term transgressions. This is Judaism's testament to free will. It felt appropriate to make a connection to the Abayudaya community itself.

"Look how you have grown and flourished," I said. "The community is healthy and strong. You have become so much more secure in your worship and your beliefs. You've built new institutions and sustained new developments. Since my last visit, several of your members have almost completed their high school degrees, while still others have already continued to post-secondary education. There have been few deaths and no new orphans. (Given Uganda's high rate of HIV/AIDS, this is truly remarkable.) Moreover, you've made a successful transition to a new chairman (Jacob Mwosuko, following JJ Keki), and brought all factions of the community together. Are these not proof enough that you have made the right decisions?," I concluded.

I meant what I said. **Currently, however, the community's focus is on other issues: for example, How to assist each other during hard times (like now, with minimal rainfall and withering crops), and, How to make the university payments required by Aaron and Jacob and Seth and Israel.**

In the early afternoon, several of the youth performed some songs and poetry. One of the orphans from five years ago gave thanks to Kulanu and to her grandparents, for helping her after her parents died. Afterwards, the community's leadership sat around the synagogue, talking. First I joined the women: we talked about children and about how people survive in Namibia (where I live), where it is mostly desert. There was also some talk about the Lemba tribe in South Africa (where a biological connection has been established to the ancient Israelites); several Abayudaya expressed interest in the group, and wondered if the Lemba might eventually become a source of marriage partners for some of their own young men and women.

Then the men held a long debate on whether there were absolute human rights that superceded cultural autonomy. The example used was another local African group that continue to practice female circumcision. Should this practice still be allowed in the name of cultural integrity, even though it is painful and oppressive to women? Though no one condoned the practice, I am sure that in the back of everyone's minds was the memory of when the Abayudaya were themselves threatened to abandon their ways and their synagogues burned down in the 1970s, under persecution of Idi Amin and his thugs.

Around four o'clock in the afternoon we ate some more matoke (cooked banana paste, which had been prepared before Shabbat), beans, and ground-nuts, and then we took a short walk. Later, a small group sat in conversation, trying to advise their fellow university students about how to best outline their end-of-term essay papers, and where they might borrow some of the books they needed in the library.

Back to the Abayudaya (cont.)

(Continued from page 6)

lightening beckoned from the distance, but there was no rain. It is worrying: the grass is much browner than I have ever seen before in this part of Uganda.

After Havdalah (marking the end of Shabbat), in the glow of a single kerosene lamp, Jacob Mwsosuko called together an Executive Committee meeting. Here are my notes:

Attendance: Jacob Mwsosuko, chairman; J.J. Keki, ex-chairman; Rabbi Gershom Sizomu; Uri Katulu, education committee; Israel Siriri; Aaron Kintu Moses, secretary; Nehemia Jabingo, treasurer; and Zipporah Sizomu. A formal agenda was adopted and accepted. Jacob opened with a welcoming speech, with special thanks to Kulanu for their ongoing support over the years. Education is key to the success of the community, he echoed. But he reviewed problems facing the community:

ON EDUCATION

The high school is in great demand, but woefully under-resourced. Jacob, Zipporah, Moses (Sebango), and Samson (Wamani) are sitting for their final exams, largely as returning "older" students. At least four more members will follow in the next couple years: Rachel, Nora, Eric, and Joas. Most want to become teachers (though not all -- for example, Rachel says she wants to study law), but first they must attend a post-secondary college or university. Already Aaron, Uri, and Seth are in university, but Aaron -- in particular -- worries that he won't be able to continue past his first year because he still lacks tuition fees. Israel, with his two-year vocational certificate in civil engineering, also wants to continue his education.

The community's idea is to require that all members "repay" the assistance they receive with service back to the Abayudaya -- be it in the form of teaching or construction (as with Israel), or as a medical assistant or lawyer (which are two professions that they community does not yet have). In addition to tuition, however, it was noted that there are living expenses, books and supplies, and transport costs which must be met, especially for the part-time students who engage in distance learning (as several do).

ON THE "DROUGHT"

A lack of rainfall over the past 15 months has resulted in sporadic harvests, up to 75% lower than expected in some areas. Although people aren't starving yet, their diets have become much more limited. Some families are surviving entirely on community donations. Whatever little income people have is now being spent for food, rather than clothes, or kerosene (for their lanterns), or school fees. Even grass has to be purchased for the community's heifers, as most of the Abayudayas' own fields have produced too little grass on their own. If rain does not come soon, then a real drought, with famine, could follow.

OTHER DREAMS

Ultimately, the community wants to develop its own nursery school, which will also free some of the women to work outside the home. The electricity grid to Nabagoye Hill (where the synagogue is located) has been designed and received official approval, but it has not yet been installed, and now the local officials say that the Abayudaya must pay twice what had been originally estimated. As mentioned above, the community also seeks a community computer for word-processing (to be powered by battery, or eventually by electricity, when this is installed). Additionally, some of the women seek a communal sewing machine (foot-operated tressle), plus someone to teach them how to sew.

More heifers are needed, too: apparently the community had signed an agreement for a total of 60 cows (not all of which would go to the Abayudaya), but now the project leaders want \$250 per animal, and this is too much for any of them to pay. Already, they explained, there is the cost of putting up a coral and shed, and planting the necessary grasses. Some speculate that there is anti-Abayudaya discrimination involved, because now only the wealthier farmers can afford the animals (which does not include any of them). (Personally, I don't see

this motivation, but that is what some suggested. In any event, the Abayudaya feel cut out.) Finally, a request was made to Kulanu to help market their tallitot (made on the loom that Rabbi Worch brought). Although originally they wanted to sell these at US\$100, I suggested that probably half that amount would better suit the market. To this, they agreed.

The Executive Committee expressed appreciation for the school supplies and especially the three huge boxes of condoms that I brought. (They had asked for these items by e-mail, ahead of time.) Before leaving the group that evening, many of the young men stuffed their pockets full of the condoms (we all laughed) and Zipporah confided to me later that, by preventing unwanted pregnancies, condoms have allowed her to continue her education. They also responded gratefully to our family's financial contribution to the community, which we targeted to education (or, if necessary, to emergency relief). Although the Abayudaya will welcome help with gratitude from anyone who is willing to assist (for example, from the woman who reached out to Rachel by correspondence), their preference for the future is for the money to be given to, and administered by, the Abayudaya community as a whole. This allows them to set -- and follow -- their own priorities, and would avoid mishaps such as misdirected funds.

The next morning, we visited 91-year old Samson Magombe, disciple of Semei Kakungulu, and grand-elder of the community. He is alert and enjoyed the visitors, although his eyesight is diminishing and he must be carried everywhere by others. (There is no wheelchair, which would allow him to attend synagogue down the road.) Gershom then added one more idea: he yearns for a tape-recorder and video, in order to document the history of the Abayudaya, including the elders' wisdom. If we don't do this very soon, it will be lost, he said. And our young people must be taught to remember.

Finally, for the record, the Abayudaya now have access to e-mail, by going to a local shop in town. Addresses are all in lower-case. For Gershom we can write: Steno@swiftuganda.com or Rabbiger-shom@hotmail.com. He also has a cell-phone: After calling the international code for Uganda, one dials: 77-457-233. (He turns this off for Shabbat, however). To reach Uri, write: Urikat@hotmail.com. The post-office box remains the same: P O Box 225, Mbale, Uganda. **Members of the Abayudaya love mail: their parting request was, "Please write!"**

(Tax deductible contributions to Kulanu can be earmarked for the Abayudaya community.)

Paramaribo (cont.)

(Continued from page 5)

The interior of the country is virtually uninhabited. There is a lone village half-way between Paranam and Jodensavanne, and perhaps ten other scattered homes visible from our boats. Timber and dredging for sand were the only activities on the river. Occasionally, we saw a light, narrow boat resembling a canoe, either powered by a small motor or more often being paddled. The occupants, we learned, were Maroons, the proud descendants of black slaves who escaped from bondage and established villages in the jungle where they had some protection from their pursuers. Otherwise, both banks of the river for as far as we could see were empty of people and populated only by thick tropical vegetation.

How did Jews get to this patch of jungle 40 miles from the sea? *(Part III will appear in the next newsletter.)*

KULANU BRIEFS

Kulanu is starting an **email address campaign!** Please include your email address when you renew your subscription or purchase items. And why not email Diane Zeller, our Director of Communications, (jdzeller@umich.edu) with your email address right now? We want to be able to reach you quickly in case a Kulanu program is due to arrive in your region without much prior notice.

[WWW.choosejudaism.org](http://www.choosejudaism.org) a related web page to www.convert.org, is a welcoming **site for those seeking to explore conversion** to Judaism. A bumper sticker which states the address of the web page (www.choosejudaism.org) is being distributed by Rabbi Stuart Federow, free of charge. He can be contacted at federow@blkbox.com.

Sephardic House will be expanding its Sephardic internet discussion list by merging with two of the best known **Sephardic interest email lists** -- the "Turkish Jews" discussion list operated by Jeanne Gold of California and the "Sephardic-List" operated by Moise Rahmani of the European Sephardic Institute based in Brussels, Belgium. The new discussion list will be available at the Sephardic House site at <http://www.sephardichouse.org/>, and will be open for all those interested in discussing Sephardic history, family, genealogy, tradition, and culture--all in one central place.

WWW.Sephardicconnect.com is a large and rapidly growing international Cyber Community built around the subject of Sephardic Judaism and Sephardim, their history, culture, literature, languages, genealogy, and their past, present and future struggles and concerns.

Barbara Ribakove Gordon, executive director of NACOEJ (the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry), issued a Rosh Hashanah **report on her recent visit to the Jews in Ethiopia**. On her trip, which she called sorrowful and heartbreaking, she saw many seriously malnourished children and adults among the 26,000 who have been waiting years for permission to join their relatives in Israel. The people live in hovels with starvation and disease, while the Israeli government slowly processes aliyah applications, accepting a trickle that NACOEJ hopes will become a stream. And on a later visit, Andy Goldman of NACOEJ reported that the children are "so raggedy they're hardly dressed at all. Just tatters...(and) our nurse says over 90 percent of the kids are underweight by *Ethiopian standards*, many of them grossly." NACOEJ is requesting emergency donations so that it can supply more food. Send checks to NACOEJ, 132 Nassau Street, Suite 412, New York, NY 10038.

Over 1000 **Ethiopian immigrants in Israel protested** outside the Ministry of Immigration Absorption in September, demanding that the government speed up bringing their family members from Ethiopia. The demonstration was organized by South Wing of Zion, whose president, Avraham Neguise, noted, "Israel goes to Russia to try to persuade people to immigrate to Israel, and here the Ethiopians are begging, but their pleas are ignored. This is clear discrimination." Neguise said the protest was aimed at achieving two goals: to bring the remaining Ethiopian Jews to Israel and be reunited with their families, and to ensure humanitarian living conditions for them until they are able to arrive. There are presently 26,000 Jews remaining in Ethiopia.

The Memorial of Auschwitz-Birkenau has 19 commemorative flagstones in 19 different languages. Out of 360,000 Sephardim living in Europe, 160,000 were murdered by the Nazis. Judezmo was their

mother tongue. During the Second International Conference on Judeo-Spanish organized in Salonika (Greece) April 16 and 17, 2000, the survivors of Shoah and their descendants asked that the memory of the martyrs be honored by the **addition to the Memorial of Auschwitz-Birkenau of a flagstone in Judeo-Spanish**. If you wish to support this endeavor, please go to the Sepharad Shoah web-site at: <http://www.sepharadshoah.org/En1.htm>. The history of the Shoah will not be complete without the addition of this flagstone.

Russian authorities have promised Greek president Kostas Stephanopoulos to return 300 boxes containing the **archives of the Jewish Community in Thessaloniki**. The archives were snatched by the Germans just before the end of WWII and finally ended up in the hands of the Red Army. Among the valuable archive materials are the municipal roll of the Jewish Community in Thessaloniki, official documents and correspondence dating back to the 19th century.

The University of Washington is jump-starting a Sephardic Studies initiative that will include interdisciplinary course offerings on Sephardic Jewry, a Sephardi/Mizrahi annual film festival and a conference on Ladino literature slated for next year. To lead the initiative, the school has hired a new assistant professor of history, Sarah Abrevaya Stein, a specialist in Eastern European Ashkenazic and Ottoman Sephardic History. Sephardic Studies promises to be fully integrated into the Jewish Studies Program at the university, and into other disciplines as well, including Spanish and Portuguese Studies, Political Science, Sociology, Near Eastern Languages and Civilization, and Turkish Studies

Ivri-NASAWI, the New Association of Sephardi/Mizrahi Artists & Writers International, was founded in 1996 in Los Angeles, and also has chapters in New York and San Francisco. The organization opened a Washington-Baltimore chapter on September 17 in a program featuring Turkish poet Murat Nemet-Nejat and popular Bosnian vocalist Flory Jagoda, who sings and writes songs in Ladino. Check its web site at <http://www.ivri-nasawi.org>.

The Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia scheduled a six-week program and exhibition in October and November focusing on "**Jews out of Africa**." Participants include Moroccan, Tunisian and mainstream South African Jewish artists and speakers. The program features discussions with and a photo exhibit by Jay Sand, writer, photographer and musician who has visited Jews in Uganda, South Africa, Ghana and Tunisia. Another participant was noted fiber artist Shirley Waxman, who led a workshop on Ethiopian and Yemenite embroidery techniques. The exhibit of paintings, photographs, South African pottery mezuzas and Ethiopian embroidery runs through November 28.

Jay Sand has been invited by the Jewish Music Festival in Berkeley, California, to present three **lecture/workshops on music of the Jews of Africa**. The 16th annual Festival will take place in March 2001. He will be discussing the Jewish musical traditions of the communities he has studied and visited, illustrating with recorded examples as well and singing and playing his guitar. This appearance will be part of a **national tour**, to include over 20 Hillel college programs and JCCs, during which Sand will present a multi-media discussion of African Jewish communities. For further information, contact Sand at jaysand@yahoo.com.

KULANU BRIEFS

Michael Gershowitz, who wrote a three-part article in this newsletter about his visit to the Jews of Ghana, has initiated a **fund to help Ghanaian Jewish farmers** to purchase an \$800 piece of sorely needed land. Send checks, payable to "Tifereth Israel Synagogue," with a clear notation on the check "Sefwi Wiawso Fund." Send to Rabbi Neil Sandler, Tifereth Israel Synagogue, 924 Polk Blvd., Des Moines, IA 50312.

Kudos to NY Kulanu activist Mike Sachs, who set up a **four-lecture Kulanu series at the 92nd St. Y** this season. The Y entitled it "Exotic Jewish Communities." The first lecture took place on Sept. 17 with Michael Gershowitz discussing his work with the Jews of Ghana. On Oct. 31 the series hosted a talk by Marvin Tokayer, who served as rabbi in Japan. On Nov. 29 the topic will be the Jews of India, and on Feb. 28 the Jews of Cape Verde. For information contact Sachs at <mike_sachs@aipac.org>.

Kudos to Shahanna McKinney for developing an exciting **one-credit course for UMass-Amherst**. It is titled Jewish Diversity--exploring strategies for creating inclusive Jewish communities. It covers diversity in Jewish communities in the US and around the world. The description notes, "Working from the framework of social justice, this course will challenge students to examine ways in which certain groups in Jewish communal life are privileged while others are marginalized, and to reevaluate monolithic stereotypes of Jews and Judaism. For more information, call 413-549-1710 or email Shahanna McKinney at shahanna@educ.umass.edu.

In October and November **Gloria Mound**, head of the Institute for Marrano-Anusim Studies in Israel, was on a lecture tour at Sheffield and Manchester Universities in England, as well as in Pennsylvania and Florida, and conducted field research in Jamaica and Cuba.

PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE: *Secret Memories: A Personal Account of Coming Home*, by **Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum**, was sent to all subscribers of the Root and Branch list serve in September.... *Turbulent Souls* by **Stephen Dubner**, editor of the NY Times Magazine, is a beautifully written book about his journey back to Judaism.... *Heretics or Daughters of Israel? -- The Crypto-Jewish Women of Castile*, by **Renée Levine Melammed**, was recently published by Oxford Univ. Press in NY....*Fragile Branches: Travels Through the Jewish Diaspora* is **James R. Ross's** account of his journeys among the world's most far-flung Jewish communities in countries including Uganda, India, Peru, and Brazil....**Gabe Levenson's** "Remote Destinations" in the October 27 edition of *The New York Jewish Week* advises readers to consider visiting the Bnei Menashe in Israel and other "Kulanu communities"....**Jill Yesko's** article, "Spaniards Resurrect Their Jewish Past," appeared in the Fall 2000 issue of *The Reporter* (Women's American ORT) "Wandering Jews - and Their Genes," by **Hillel Halkin**, appears in the August issue of *Commentary*; it discusses recent genetic studies involving Jewish identity and the possibility that "more varieties of Jews once existed in more far-flung places than have been seriously reckoned with."

Mo Fleming, who is working on a **book on Jewish women of African descent**, is seeking people to interview on this topic. Please contact her at PO Box 422, Cranbury NJ 08512, tel 609 275 1078, emails: jbergtjc@aol.com or bcabooks@home.com.

In October, **Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum** addressed the

Linksfield Synagogue in Johannesburg on the Lemba.

The Key from Spain is a **new documentary film about Flory Jagoda**, singer and writer of Ladino songs of the Balkans. Directed by Dr. Ankica Petrovic and Mischa Livingstone, it covers the well-known singer's early life in Yugoslavia and Italy up to her present life as a *nona* (grandmother) in Falls Church, Virginia. For information on purchasing the film, contact Mischa Livingstone at PO Box 251 692, Los Angeles, CA 90025, tel (323) 663-5275, email mclivingstone@hotmail.com.

PERSONALS

Condolences to the Abayudaya community on the loss of one of their elders, **Sollonko**.

Refuah Schley ma to **David Mausenbaum**.

Mazel tov to **Alison and Stevy Epstein** on the birth of **Zoe Noa** in September.

Mazel tov to **Amichai and Shana Heppner** on their marriage in August.

Mazel tov to **Eytan Berman and Sara Bhonkar** on their marriage in September on Kibbutz Netzer Sireni in Beer Yaacov, Israel.

Mazel tov to **Jen Engel and Brian Primack** on their engagement.

TODAH RABAH

To **Aron Primack** for his generous \$1500 donation to the Lorna Margolis Fund for Abayudaya orphans' education, to **Lionel Okun** for his generous \$1000 gift, to **Abe Pollin** for his generous \$1000 donation, to **Alan Moskowitz** for his \$360 contribution to the Margolis Fund and his \$150 donation to Kulanu's treasury, to **Bernard Korn** for his \$250 contribution to the Lemba and to **Rita & Sherman Shapiro** for their \$150 donation to the treasury.

To members of the \$100 club: **Bernard & Rena Shapiro, Marilyn & Frank Seiden, Diane & Jack Zeller** (in honor of Joe Hantman's 80th birthday), **H. D. Gordon**, and **Cecelia Appelbaum**.

To **Rabbi George Driesen**, who shipped a box of books from his private collection to the Jewish community in Ghana.

To **Irving Goldberg**, chair of religious affairs for the Jewish residents of Leisure World in Silver Spring, for a contribution of taleisim and tefillin for the Bnei Menashe.

HAPPY CHANUKAH!
For gift ideas, see page 12

Kulanu subscribers please note:
You will not be billed yearly, since we do not want to devote precious funds to hire a bookkeeper.
Your mailing label indicates the date of your last payment. Your newsletter subscription expires after one year without further payment.
Please use the form on page 11 to renew your subscription.

Thank you.

LETTERS TO KULANU

Xu Xin Reports

I agreed with Dr. Beverly Friend to close the print format of the newsletter *China/Judaic Connection* after she has devoted 10 years single-handedly editing it. But our work or mission to promote the study of Jewish subjects among the Chinese will continue. The Kaifeng Jews are my concern too. I keep visiting them and providing whatever support I can. I am glad to report that a good relation has been established and I won trust from them as well as from the local government. My last visit was a week ago. I had discussion with some of local officials there. The result is good. Some of Jewish descendants are trying to meet and learn more about their heritage.

*Xu Xin, professor and head of Jewish Studies Dept.
Nanjing University, China*

Abayudaya Officers Listed

These office bearers are honoured and trusted by Abayudaya members. This letter is to direct anyone to use the officers as per his or her duty assigned on behalf of the Abayudaya.

Chairman – Jacob Mwsuko
General secretary – Aaron Kintu Moses
Treasurer – Nehemia Jabingo
Education director – Uri Katula
Youth leader – Gershom Sizomu
Elders' leader – K. Bumba
Chair of Abayudaya Women's Association – Naome Sabano
Chair of guest house department – Aaron Kintu Moses
Headmaster of Semei Kakungulu High School – Gershom

Sizomu

Chair of handloom department – Jacob Mwsuko
Ex-chairman – J. J. Keki
Mohels – Uri Katula and Gershom Sizomu
Committee members – Israel Siriri, Kasakya Yokolamu, Rachel

Jabingo

*Jacob Mwsuko, chairman of Abayudaya Congregation
Mbale, Uganda*

Two Very Different Visitors in Uganda

We had a nice visit with Lucy Steinitz. She donated scholastic materials and \$1000.

At the same time we were visited by the messianic Christians, who claimed that they are Jews (contradiction). They unsuccessfully tried to convince us that Jesus was God and God was three in one (contradiction) like a jackfruit, which contains the outer cover, the flesh and the seed. I then told them that worshiping the three gods in one was equivalent to eating the outer cover, the flesh and the seed all together, which does not make sense. I made it clear to them that the Abayudaya believe in the unity of God which is equivalent to eating only the flesh of the jackfruit. I asked them not to bother discussing anything with members of the community; and currently they have been invited by members from the neighbourhood who share their ideology.

*Gershom Sizomu, Abayudaya spiritual leader
Mbale, Uganda*

Abayudaya Youth Hold Elections

I am happy to hear that everyone of you has succeeded to reach the New Year and Sukkot. I hope the year will be sweet for every one of you. As regards the Abayudaya community, we recently on 8th Oct. 2000 had our Abayudaya Youth Association elec-

tions, presided over by headmaster of S.K.H.S. Gershom Sizomu. I greatly appreciate his work ensuring that our elections were nicely and democratically conducted; as a result, I won the AYA chairmanship.

Former Abayudaya chairman Mr. JJ Keki was one of our invited guests and donated good advice on unity to the youth. I thought he was advising us to be one person, love each other and even forgive each other as we were looking forward to erev Yom Kippur. Furthermore he requested the youth to love the development of the community, encouraged them to read books very hard, requested them to work very hard and ensure the study of Hebrew in the community. I would also like to thank Mr. Irwin Berg for donating 12 Hebrew books (*THE EASY WAY*) and promoting pen pal relationships between us and our new friends abroad. Also I appreciate Mr. Yaacov Gladstone, who sent encyclopedias and two Hebrew cassette albums. I also thank those I have not mentioned for their great contributions towards Abayudaya development.

Enosh Mainah Keki

PO Box 53, Mbale, Uganda

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or copybureau@copybureau.africaonline.com

Help Converts To Help Ourselves

The Conversion to Judaism Web Page (www.convert.org) has seen a steady rise of visitors, now totalling over 250,000. We have seen an increase in the number of rabbis willing to be listed. If these numbers hold, the entire Jewish community will be undergoing an incredible upheaval. More and more people will have chosen Judaism as their religion and fewer and fewer Jews will be unaffiliated and secular. We have an opportunity to increase and invigorate Judaism by opening our doors and letting people who wish to join us feel welcome. But much work still needs to be done. There is little or no organizational funding for conversion. Accepting Jews by Choice as devoted Jews is still not a part of the Jewish mentality, and getting rid of the notion that Jews do not proselytize seems far away. It is important to understand that Jews by Choice add a new vigor to our religion and that they are just like born Jews. They send their children to Jewish camps, read Jewish newspapers, contribute to Jewish organizations and enroll their children in Jewish day schools.

This notion that Jews do not proselytize is an erroneous idea. Jews used conversion to replenish losses because of war and famine. It was the Church which forced Jews to give up this practice and the specter of that edict still haunts Jews today. Huge numbers of non-Jews have a Jewish heritage, large numbers are dissatisfied with their birth religion, others are spiritual seekers who have no religion. And yet the Jewish community refuses to welcome those seeking to join us. Money is spent trying to seduce the Woody Allens of the world into rejoining the Jewish community. We need to wave goodbye to those who do not appreciate a Jewish heritage and welcome those who wish to throw in their lot with the Jewish people.

There are massive numbers of people who want to explore Judaism and the Internet has given us the tool by which to accomplish their goal. What we need is a Jewish community that puts money into programs which yield results, not programs whose results cannot be measured. An informal survey of 36 people who signed our web site's guest book showed that within six months, six people had converted. Four more were still in various stages of study. A full-page ad in *Moment Magazine* pushed our daily numbers from 250 hits a day to 300-400 hits a day. Yet our entire web page is financed by only a handful of people. Population surveys about Jewish demographics could be rendered ridiculous if the Jewish community put a bit of financing into conversion programs. Please help us by directing people who wish to convert to our web page, by telling rabbis about what we are trying to do and by appreciating the great life-change that a convert

LETTERS TO KULANU

experiences when joining us. Make the Jew by Choice feel welcome. We are greatly indebted to these most wonderful souls.

*Barbara Shair
New City, NY*

A Candle Evoked Deep Feelings

It's been a while since I've contributed due to work obligations, but something happened that I thought I'd share with everyone: My new job is being a Youth Adviser with a Youth Empowerment Project, and tonight we had a meeting for a youth group that is run out of the family center where I work. It is a Latino youth group, and I was asked to write out some cards with the names of people I thought were heroes. The people I wrote about were Saul Alinsky, "El Pipila" (from Mexican History), Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (Father of the Mexican Independence and alleged New Christian of Jewish descent, according to the Church), and Luis de Carbajal y de la Cueva, the Younger.

I didn't know what those cards were for, but the organizers intended to light a candle for each of them. When they lit the candle for Luis de Carbajal I felt a surge of emotion that I can't describe. I felt like falling to my knees and reciting a prayer. I really can't describe the feelings but it was overwhelming to see that candle burn for someone whose love for our people burned so strong even unto death -- something all *anousim* should know of.

On the same topic, one of the young women involved in this organization -- a good friend of mine -- recently revealed to me that she had *anousim* heritage, along with Native American. Her family is from New Mexico, if I remember correctly, and I'm planning on sitting down with her and chatting about *anousim* culture. This is what I have been doing.

Just thought I'd share it with you folks, from whom I have learned so much.

*Levi Herrera Lopez
leviherrera@hotmail.com*

CAJE Participants Enthusiastic about Kulanu

On a Shabbat afternoon in August, I did a pre-conference presentation about Kulanu for 60 Jewish educators from all over the U.S. and abroad at CAJE (the Conference on Alternatives in Jewish Education). They were enthusiastic about Kulanu's work and responded with keen interest. I gave out 25 newsletters as well as 25 flyers to a total of 50 educators. I also gave out 25 sheets with Irwin Berg's description of the Abayudaya pen-pal project. Many people told me that they intend to order the book and the CD, and a number told me they intend to participate in the pen-pal program. Many also said that they would subscribe to the newsletter.

The following Wednesday, Lynn Golub-Refrano and I gave a joint presentation about Kulanu's work. CAJE was in full swing (2200 people) and a zillion presentations were all going on simultaneously all over the Hofstra University campus. We got about 20 people for Wednesday, which is a good number for CAJE mid-week.

*Moshe Cotel
New York, NY*

"Happiest Jews in the World"

I just want to thank Karen Primack and everyone else involved with producing the CD "Shalom Everybody Everywhere!" featuring the music of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda. They have got to be the happiest Jews in the world and I find it moving just to listen to them.

*Patrick Killelea
Menlo Park, California*

Kulanu Helped Make Book Possible

I wanted to let you know that my new book, *Fragile Branches: Travels Through the Jewish Diaspora* (Penguin Putnam), is now in bookstores and available online from amazon.com et al. It tells the story of the Abayudaya in Uganda and the B'nai Manasseh in India as well as the B'nai Avraham in Peru, Marranos in Recife, Brazil, descendants of Moroccan Jews in the Amazon and Karaites in Israel. I think it will be of interest to members of Kulanu. My thanks to Kulanu for helping to make this book possible.

Jim Ross, Boston, MA

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I/WE WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A SUPPORTER OF KULANU (MAIL TO KULANU, C/O HANTMAN, 3520 TARKINGTON LANE, SILVER SPRING, MD 20906)

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The KULANU Boutique

Jews in Places You Never Thought Of, a 305-page hardback which includes descriptions of personal interactions with returning and emerging Jewish groups around the world; over 30 photographs. *Proceeds benefit Kulanu.*

Shalom Everybody Everywhere! the acclaimed recording of the unique sounds of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda. Hear traditional Jewish liturgy and new compositions set to African melodies and rhythms, sung in English, Hebrew, Luganda, and Swahili. *Proceeds benefit the Abayudaya.*

Hand-Knit Ugandan Kippot available in small, medium and large, some in dark colors, others in bright colors, some in the traditional skullcap shape, some in the pillbox or Bukhara shape. *Proceeds benefit the Abayudaya.*

Religion and Politics in Uganda: A Study of Islam and Judaism by Arye Oded, an Israeli Ambassador to Africa. *Proceeds benefit the Abayudaya High School.*

Journey to the Vanished City: The Search for a Lost Tribe of Israel (paperback) by Tudor Parfitt. The fascinating story of the Lemba, recently shown genetically to have distinct close ties to the Jews, especially *cohanim*. *Proceeds benefit Kulanu.*

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