



Announcing the 2005 Mitzvah Tour to Uganda — See p. 3

A Purim To Remember

By Rabbi Joseph H. Prouser

When I was first in the Abayudaya community as a member of the Bet Din in 2002, I saw very little of it. My visit then was primarily business: the Bet Din met in official session from morning to night in the main synagogue. We worked until dark and left soon thereafter. I did not even see the high school complex, just a few hundred yards away. When I re-

turned to Uganda this year to officiate at Purim services and to lead the Megillah reading, I enjoyed both a memorable holiday celebration and far greater freedom to tour the community and visit personally with its members.



The joy attending my return to Uganda was multiplied exponentially as I was accompanied by my wife Ora and our three children: Shira, 17; Eitan, 15; and Ayal, 11 – all first time visitors to the community. We each read sections of the Megillah... and the Abayudaya, as is traditional, enthusiastically drowned out the name of Haman, albeit in a distinctively African style. Synagogue benches were beaten with sticks and rocks, accompanied by drums and abundant screaming and shrieking. The commercial groggers we brought along as gifts were deployed for the morning reading and seemed a far less effective means of expression. Artist Gary Rosenthal, who sponsored the Purim trip, sent along beautiful painted glass groggers, which were gratefully received and put to use in the spirit of *hiddur mitzvah*, adding beauty to Jewish observance – a principle to which Rosenthal is famously devoted. Other holiday accoutrements prepared for our Ugandan Purim were Hebrew-Luganda Megillah books, replete with introduction, blessings, and illustrations. Carrying these volumes through Entebbe Airport on our way to the Abayudaya was a moment of historic irony and spiritual uplift.

While both evening and morning Megillah readings were joyful, spirited events – and I experienced considerable paternal pride at my children's skilled reading of the scroll (at night, by flashlight!) in the Ugandan setting – the Abayudaya seemed to focus on one Prouser in particular. Our youngest, Ayal, age 11, chanted the final chapter of the Megillah in a strong voice, with clear Hebrew, and reflecting the special musical traditions associated with those verses. He presented the clown costume he wore for the service to one of his many new friends among the Abayudaya children. Young people and community elders alike marveled at the skill and confidence of so young a Megillah reader... and vowed to train Abayudaya children to take similar roles in next year's Festival celebration.

Ayal's siblings made their own impression on the Abayudaya.

(Continued on page 13)

Seder Under the (Jewish) Stars

By Rabbi David Kuperman

"*Brukhim ha'Ba'im! Brukhot ha'Ba'ot!* Blessings upon you who have come!"

"For me, too, being here is a very powerful blessing, an opportunity to make a bridge with my brothers and sisters from whom I have been estranged by ignorance, by silence, and by the deception, manipulation, and force of those who would wish us to forget who we are. But we will not forget!"

With these words, and others explaining the context and meaning of the evening, I opened this past April the first-ever seder of the expatriate Tutsi community in Belgium and nearby Western Europe. They were translated into French by the seder's organizer, my co-leader. Yochanan Bwejeri, who remembers celebrating Pesakh with his family as a child in Burundi. Professor Bwejeri is the founder and director of the Havila Institute, an organization that, for the past seven years, against extraordinary social and political resistance, has sought to restore, re-invigorate, and re-assert the Jewishness of the Tutsi people. Havila aims to preserve their right to live as Jews, and simply to be alive, in the Great Lakes region of central Africa at the source of the White Nile (the biblical River Pishon), which encompasses Burundi,

(Continued on page 10)

Experiencing Jewish History In Portugal

By Karen Primack

Special opportunities abound on *Saudades* conference-tours in Jewish Portugal. One could try to make such a trip on one's own, and one would probably be able to find *most* of the sites and *some* of the people that make Portugal such a unique place to experience Jewish – and Crypto-Jewish – history. But one would miss a tremendous amount.

Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum, founder of the *Saudades* org web site and *Saudades-Sefarad* forum for descendants of Iberian *Anousim* (forced converts) like herself, organized the first conference-tour two years ago. The second conference-tour was held this April, initiated by Rufina (who accompanied us) and led by Mariana Sande e Castro, a Portuguese descendant of *Anousim*. Each trip was jointly sponsored by *Saudades*, *Kulanu*, and *Root & Branch Association*. Future conference-tours are being planned.

There were 20 of us on the 2004 tour, hailing from Israel, Brazil, South Africa, Cuba, and the US. The Portuguese cities and towns we visited included Lisbon, Sintra, Évora, Castelo de Vide, Ammaia, Marvão, Valencia de Alcántara (in Spain), Fundão, Covilhã, Belmonte, Guarda, Trancoso, Porto, and Tomar. We rode in a large air-conditioned bus and used travel time to hear lectures, watch video documentaries, and hear our fellow travelers' personal stories (some of which were amazing). Appearing on the tour program were local

(Continued on page 9)

Remembering George Lichtblau

By Jack Zeller

To the family and many Kulanu friends of George Lichtblau, the author of the extensive review of "Jewish Roots in Africa" that appeared in the Kulanu's book *Jews in Places You Never Thought Of*, and to all of his many friends in Africa and Israel whom he met as a labor attache, political officer in the Foreign Service for the US Department of State, George's generosity of spirit and encyclopedic memory were a joy that gives consolation to his death in July.

Many dignitaries made George privy to oral traditions of Judaism, including Bubu Hama, a prolific writer on African history, and Shimon Peres, who was told by President Leopold Senghor of Senegal that he too had Jewish ancestors!

George was also very comfortable with meeting artisans and doing his own detective work. In the course of his travels, he came upon glassmakers whose claim of Jewish ancestry and the secrets of the trade were traceable to Israelite skills. I recall the delightful time in his home when he shared generously with me memories of his early adventures with others who later documented and expanded upon his findings.

George was also a careful reader, citing 12th century geographer al-Idrisi, who wrote about "Jewish Negroes" in the western Sudan, and the 13th century Ibn Khaldun, a respected historian of the Berber tribes and Touregs trading routes. One of George's favorite sources was the 16th century historian and traveler Leon Africanus, a Moslem from Spain (who was raised by a Jewish woman working in his father's household) who later reported on the Judaic communities he encountered throughout his travels in West Africa.

There was not a single community in Africa with whom Kulanu has developed a relationship that was not first identified by George. He was not just ahead of his time but a mover of events who gave those in Kulanu the credibility to move forward. Long before there was a Kulanu organization, George was one of moving forces in Washington DC, through his relationship with Eddie and Rachel Eitches, to bring recognition to Ethiopian Jewry.

A wonderful summary of the depth of George's range of investigations collected by his friend and colleague Samuel Kurinsky, director of the Hebrew History Federation in NY, is available on the web site: <<http://www.hebrewhistory.org/factpapers/africa19-II.html>>

George's humanity, curiosity, integrity, gentle manner, enthusiasm for Jewish discovery and humility are blessings to our memories and motivations.

More Favorable Reviews for Kulanu's Newest Book

Two more publications have weighed in with favorable reviews for *UNDER ONE CANOPY: Readings in Jewish Diversity*, edited by Karen Primack (Kulanu, Inc., 2003). This book is available from the Kulanu Boutique (see page 15 of this newsletter or visit www.KulanuBoutique.com).

"Although the experiences recorded in this collection are specifically Jewish, they evoke universal themes: loss and recovery, the search for identity, and the persistence of cultural tradition and memory."

-- Jane Whitehead, *Boston College Law School Magazine* (Spring/Summer 2004)

"The material Primack has drawn in reveals poignant moments in which families are exiled from homelands or children discover the Jewish roots their parents have kept hidden for so many years. These diversity stories give us a rich narrative about the union of culture and religion, illuminating the many underreported ways Jews live around the world.

-- Ilana Kramer, *Lilith* (Summer 2004)

Some English Translations from Oded's Book on Abayudaya

Arye Oded has furnished Kulanu with English translations of some excerpts from his new Hebrew-language book, *Judaism in Africa-The Abayudaya of Uganda and Their Contacts with World Jewry* (see last newsletter).

On Semei Kakungulu, founder of the Abayudaya:

What was once a dreary waste is now flourishing with gardens and teeming with life. Good wide roads have been cut, rivers have been bridged and embankments made through marshy ground all at his own expense and for public use. His past services cannot be overestimated. Since my coming into the country in 1890 I can testify to the good work he has done.

(W. Grant, The British Sub-Commissioner of Uganda Central Province)

How Arye Oded first met the the Abayudaya:

In 1962, when I was in Kampala, the capital of Uganda, as a research fellow at Makerere University, I heard for the first time of the existence of African Jews in Uganda who call themselves "Abayudaya" ("Jews" in Luganda). After extensive inquiries I succeeded in contacting their leader, who was known as Rabbi Samson Mugombe Israeli, and arranged a meeting with him in the town of Mbale, some two hundred and fifty kilometers north-east of Kampala. On arriving at the meeting place, I was surprised to find about ten bearded men, dressed in white robes, wearing blue or red sashes on their shoulders, their faces smeared with oil, and white turbans on their heads. When it was made clear to them that I was a Jew from Israel, their eyes lit up with happiness and they asked me to accompany them to their village, which I did and where I learned the history of the Abayudaya. Thus began the story of my contact with this unique and wonderful community in the heart of Africa-- a contact that continues up to the present day

About Kulanu's activities among the Abayudaya:

A significant change in the community occurred when Kulanu started its activities among the Abayudaya and when young and dynamic leaders took the reins. Thanks to Kulanu's assistance in the educational and economic spheres the position of the community has greatly improved. In February 2002 about 300 out of 600 Bayudaya completed their conversion by "hatafat dam brith". This was carried out by a special Bet-Din who was sent to Uganda. One of the Abayudaya young leaders, Yoav Yonadav, expressed his joy and satisfaction when he declared "Now two-thirds of the Jewish world recognize us."

On Judaism in Black Africa:

In recent years the number of African groups who wish to join Judaism is on the increase. Among the reasons: the traditions existing among many Africans that they are descendants of the "Ten Lost Tribes"; their disappointment with Christianity (for religious and political reasons) and the influence of the Old Testament (as in the case of Semei Kakungulu the founder of the Abayudaya). At the same time there is also a growing interest, especially among American Jews, in converting those who wish to join the Jewish world. Kulanu is a Jewish organization outstanding in its enthusiasm and deep interest in assisting and reaching out to those peoples who genuinely wish to become Jews.

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. This newsletter is published quarterly by Kulanu, 11603 Gilsan St., Silver Spring, MD 20902.



Jewish Life in Uganda Mitzvah Tour & Wildlife Safari

Travel with your friends! Meet the Abayudaya Jewish Community. Visit their two Jewish day schools & rural village synagogues. Experience Shabbat & a safari you will never forget.

Share Ugandan Jewish culture, history and music through talks, celebrations, concerts, and arts and crafts demos. Learn about the ethnic groups, languages, agriculture, economy, as well as unique flora, birds, and amazing wildlife of beautiful Uganda. Custom group tours also arranged.

Book Early

For more details contact:

laura@laurawetzler.com;

(413) 634 5617

www.shoebillsafaris.com

Allyne (011) 256 77 457992

tours@shoebillsafaris.com

**wholesale airfares: Michelle at Travel Loft
(413) 256 6481 or your own travel agent**

YOUR GUIDE FEES HELP SUPPORT THIS JEWISH COMMUNITY. BRING YOUR FAMILY & HAVE A GREAT TIME! JUST JOINING THE TOUR IS A MITZVAH!

Jan. 9-24 2005

15 Days/14 Nights \$2,500.

Includes:



- 14 nights in modest, friendly hotels & safari lodges
- Kosher meals for Shabbat prepared by the Abayudaya
- Fully guided small group tour by van, max. 14 people
- Jewish community visits, concerts, talks
- Free time to volunteer your skills, if you wish
- Thrill to a fantastic Queen Elizabeth National Park Safari adventure from the safety of your van.
- Cruise on lovely Kazinga Boat Channel, featuring elephants, eagles, crocodiles and baby hippos!
- Visit the source of the magnificent Nile River, Bujagali Falls in Jinja town (optional white water rafting trip on the Nile)
- Explore majestic Mt. Elgon Volcano National Park
- Visit beautiful Sipi Falls and Safari Camp and Sabin Cave
- Shop in colorful, bargain-filled African markets in Jewish villages, the bustling capital Kampala & nearby Mbale town.
- Enjoy gorgeous tropical flora and vervet, green and colobus monkeys at the Botanical Garden on lovely Lake Victoria
- Best of all, make a personal connection with our friends in this remarkable African Jewish community!



Airfare, travel insurance, gratuities and drinks not included

Suggested Itinerary Subject to Change

Have more time? Rare Mountain Gorilla trip available!

Visiting the Lemba in Soweto

© 2004 by Judith Fein

Travel journalist / Performer / Filmmaker

I can remember the first time I heard of them, about five years ago. The Lemba. The black Jews of South Africa.

I asked a Jewish friend from South Africa if he knew anything about them.

"Sure," he said. "We had a nanny working in our house. She was from the Lemba tribe."

"They're Jewish," I told him.

"What? That's nuts. No way. Check your sources."

I did check my sources. I read a book about them, saw a documentary, and decided that I really wanted to meet these ancient people, whose oral tradition spoke of an ancestral home in Sena, which is today thought to be in Yemen.

When I was enroute to Johannesburg recently, I connected with Kulanu members Rufina Mausenbaum and Sandy Leeder--both of whom had worked with the Lemba. Thanks to their generosity, I soon had the phone number of a Lemba man in Soweto, the township once known as the hotbed of anti-apartheid revolution. His name was Edwin Mabudafhasi and he invited me to his house.

The following day, I was riding in the back of an SUV and Thuli, the beautiful Zulu tour operator who drove me to Soweto, was scanning the streets, looking for Edwin's address. She stopped in front of a

small house where Edwin, a smiling, kindly, 71-year-old man, was waiting outside for me.

Next to him were half a dozen sofas, which he reupholstered to eke out a living.

"Come in, come in," he said, as he led me into his modest living room. He spoke English in addition to his native Venda and about five other African languages. As I sat down, I noticed a cushion embroidered with the name Jesus Christ.

"Are you...Jewish?" I asked Edwin.

He explained that like many blacks under the apartheid regime, he was forced to attend a Christian missionary school and be baptized if he wanted to be educated.

"But we know who we are," said Edwin. "Like the Ethiopians, we are the lost tribes of Israel."

Edwin went into the back room of his house and emerged wearing a *tallit*. Then he dragged out a huge plastic bag filled with *kippot* and *tallitot*. "These were gifts from Jews in Israel and the USA," he explained.

As he set the bags on the sofa, several *kippot* fell out and the

(Continued on page 5)

KULANU BRIEFS

Yaffah DaCosta Is Making Aliyah

Kulanu regrets to announce that Yaffah Batya DaCosta has resigned from the position of Anousim Coordinator/ Jewish-Christian Affairs Coordinator as she leaves in August for Israel and for new challenges. Although she had hoped to continue with Kulanu, she says, "I can see now that my activities will be severely limited during the first 1-2 years after making aliyah to my focusing solely on the Rabbanut and Orthodox Rabbis." She will be missed at Kulanu, but she will be with us in spirit as she continues her work for Anousim in her new home!

DaCosta's excellent work has resulted in this heartening letter she received from Rabbi Gedalia Dov Schwartz the head of the Beit Din at the CRC:

This note is in support of your efforts in aiding those descended from the "anusim" or conversos to find their way back to the Jewish people. The late Rav Aaron Soloveitchik, O.B.M. and Harav Mordechai Eliyahu, the former Rishon L'tzion of Israel have already endorsed the efforts of those who help the "anusim" return to their Jewish roots. Each case must be investigated on its own merits and not be treated as an ordinary situation of regular conversion. Rather in cases where there is doubt although the giyur procedure must be followed, nevertheless the certificate will state that the applicant has gone through the giyur process in returning to the ways of his Jewish ancestors. I wish you every success in bringing back the conversos to the religion of their forefathers. (emphasis added)

Educating Anousim in Spain and Texas

Amishav held a weekend seminar in June in Murcia, Spain, for Bnai Anousim in the region. The event included Sabbath prayers and meals, as well as lectures by Spanish, Portuguese and Israeli rabbis. Aharon Franco, a Jewish community leader in Murcia, estimates that 20 percent of that city's population of 350,000 has Jewish ancestry. This was Amishav's fifth such seminar in Iberia.

The JCC of Houston, Texas, hosted a gathering and lecture for Anousim in July. Entitled "Saudades" (The Longing), the event featured lectures by Bennet Greenspan and Yaffah DaCosta.

Lessons on Diversity Needed

CAJE (the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education) is planning to publish a Jewish diversity curricular resource for educators that could be utilized across various Jewish disciplines and subjects to explore the topics of Jewish cultural diversity; intra-group relations; and the subject of inclusion and welcome of "difference" in the home, synagogue and community. If you have any lessons that could be incorporated into this publication, please e-mail them to Judi Resnick, Communications Coordinator, at jresnick@caje.org

Website for Bene Israel Jews of India

Check out this interesting web site on the Bene Israel Jews of India, with history, features, and some fascinating old photographs: www.beneisraelheritage.com.

Ethiopian Bnai Mitzvah

During Operation Solomon, the airlift of 15,000 Ethiopian refugees to Israel on May 24-25, 1991, two babies were born on the plane, and four more were born within two days. These six, now 13, celebrated their *bnai mitzvah* in Jerusalem in May!

A Tour to Jewish India

B'nai B'rith International and the B'nai B'rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum are sponsoring a tour to India February 16-28, 2005. Entitled "This Was Also My Home: A Historical Journey to Connect with the Jews of India," the tour will be led by Dr. Kenneth Robbins,

an authority on the history and heritage of India. The mission will visit the people and sites of three Jewish communities in India: Bene Israel, Baghdadi, and Cochin. The group will present a B'nai B'rith award to the royal family of Cochin in a ceremony that will include an elephant procession. For further information, contact Diana Altman at (202) 857-6603 or daltman@bnaibrith.org.

Jewish Stamps in Portugal

The Portuguese Post Office has issued a series of Jewish stamps, one of which depicts the interior of the 100-year-old Shaare Tikvah Synagogue in Lisbon.

A Multicultural Shavuot Celebration

The Institute for Jewish & Community Research in San Francisco gathered 40 co-sponsors for its Shavuot celebration geared to Black, Asian, Latino, and mixed-race Jews and their families and friends. The program featured a multicultural book fair, music, dance, and workshops with Rabbi Capers Funnye, Rabbi Gershom and Tziporah Sizomu, Miri Hunter Haruach, and Scott Rubin.

An Ethiopian CD from the Chief Rabbinate

The Israeli Chief Rabbinate has released a CD entitled *A Collection of Songs for our Brethren, the Immigrants from Ethiopia*. It contains 14 popular songs with traditional Ethiopian melodies, many performed by young Ethiopian-Israeli artists. Its purpose: "Reconnecting Ethiopian immigrants to contemporary Judaism as it is practiced in Israel and preserving the very important traditions they brought from Ethiopia."

Amishav Hebrew Center Opens in India

The organization Amishav opened a new Jewish educational center in Imphal, Manipur, in northeastern India, in April. The center serves the Bnei Menashe, offering daily classes in Hebrew and Jewish history and tradition. A young couple from Israel, Chaim and Zamira Yaish (Zamira is a member of the Bnei Menashe), will teach there. Amishav director Michael Freund notes that the center will "prepare (the Bnei Menashe) for life in Israel, as they all wish to make aliyah."

Sephardic Mini Film Festival in Tucson

The Tucson chapter of Kulanu co-sponsored a free Sephardic Mini Film Festival in April, along with the Ladino Club and the Tucson JCC. Films screened included Rhodes For Ever, Turkey's Sephardim: 500 Years, and Song of the Sephardi.

Moving Heaven and Earth Is Moving Along!

The Diva Communications documentary *Moving Heaven and Earth* (about the Beit Din conversions in Uganda in 2002) has been accepted for Jewish film festivals in Washington, DC, Seattle, San Diego, Northampton, Vancouver, Rochester, San Francisco, and Maine. Film-makers David and Debra Gonsler Vinik say, "So the word about the Abayudaya is definitely getting out!"

Kaifeng Descendant Converts

In June, Jin Wen-Jing, an 18-year-old descendant of the historic Jewish community of Kaifeng, China, converted to Judaism in Israel. She and her parents came to Israel from China four years ago; her parents hope to be converted soon. Wen-Jing (now Shalva) is the first returnee to Judaism from this community, which became assimilated in Kaifeng in the 19th century – after thriving there for seven centuries. According to China scholar Xu Xin, many people in China today are aware of their descent from the Kaifeng Jewish community, and some are interested in exploring their roots.

College Course on Lost Tribes of Israel

Yudit Greenberg has developed a course at Rollins College in Flor-

KULANU BRIEFS

ida on The Lost Tribes of Israel. The description: "This course is an exploration of remote Jewish communities around the world, including Africa, Asia, and South America, who claim to be descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. Students will gain an appreciation for Jewish multiculturalism by understanding the basic beliefs and practices of non-Western Jewish communities as these were shaped in their adopted lands and in isolation from and ignorance of Western Jewish life. In our study of history, ethnographic literature and documentaries, we will examine how these groups incorporated the dominant surrounding cultures into their original biblical/Jewish framework, and assess the challenges in recent interactions between members of these communities and Western Jews, with a focus on those who emigrated from Ethiopia to Israel."

Aristides DeSousa Mendes Anniversary Observed

Saudades-sefarad circulated in June a list of over 50 events around the world commemorating the 50th anniversary of the death of Aristides DeSousa Mendes. As the Portuguese consul in Bordeaux during World War II, he saved over 20,000 Jews and was later persecuted by the Portuguese government for his actions. Celebrations were held in such far-flung countries as Argentina, East Timor, France, Cape Verde, Hungary, Israel, Poland, the US, and Venezuela. Most observances were synagogue services or Catholic masses.

Speakers Spread the Word

Ray Kaplan spoke in April to Kehillat Chaverim in White Plains, NY, and to Parents of North America Israelis in Riverdale. His topics included the Bnei Menashe of India, the Jews of Iquitos, Peru, the Indian Jews of Trujillo, Peru, and *Anousim*.

Karen Primack spoke on the book *Under One Canopy: Readings in Jewish Diversity* at Tifereth Israel's book fair in June in Washington, DC.

Condolences

To the family of **Jeannette Okin**, who died in July. She was a longtime Kulanu supporter and will be remembered as one of our pioneers in collecting and shipping prayerbooks to Africa.

To the family of **George Lichtblau**. See Jack Zeller's remembrance on page 2.

Mazal Tov!

To **David Mausenbaum** and **Nicolene Hanekom** on their engagement, and to **Noam Katz** and **Jaime Walman** on their engagement.

To **Jay and Lauren Sand** on the birth of **Molly**.

To the **Abayudaya Women's Association** for securing a \$700 grant from Aid to Artisans for the second year for their crafts project.

To **Rabbi Barbara Aiello** on her appointment as rabbi of Synagogue Lev Chadash in Milan, Italy, a congregation that openly welcomes *Anousim*.

Todah Rabah!

We reported in the last newsletter that **Joel Levitt** invited his bar mitzvah guests to donate books, Judaica articles, or cash to Jews of Abuja, Nigeria. The total amount donated in his honor by 55 donors is now \$3907! Remy Ilona, on behalf of the Abuja Jews, wrote to Joel: "One of our chazans commented to me, 'That child has only shown a tiny bit of the greatness the Almighty has endowed him with....' God willing, in the future you will be in the team that will come to teach us how to do the Bar Mitzvah, and perhaps you will also participate in the traditional Igbo Bar Mitzvah. The Igbos salute you and your family."

The **Brotherhood Synagogue** of New York City has donated 30 boxes of books that are currently being shipped to Nigeria. This was due to the efforts of **Jack Goldfarb**, who also covered the shipping cost for the books

Kulanu is most grateful to the **Dr. Irving Moskowitz Foundation** for its \$10,000 grant for Havila, to the **Jewish Learning Exchange** for its \$3,600 contribution for Havila, and to **Woodlands Community Temple** for its \$2400 contribution for the Abayudaya.

To the \$1000 Club: **Howard Metzenberg, Judy Robkin, and Drs. Jack and Diane Zeller**.

To donors of \$200-\$500: **Debra Gonsher Vinik and David Vinik, Dr. Peter and Rosemary Warschawski, Congregation Beth Emeth, Temple Sinai, Rabbi Daniel Gropper, Jewish Community Center of Fort Lee, Peter and Debra Friedman, Madelyn Levitt and Karen Petersen, Temple Sinai of Sharon, Massachusetts, Joseph Tiger and Gloria Krulik, and Marvin Wolf**

To donors of \$108-\$180: **Phyllis Budne, Dr. Arnold and Leah Rotter, Tobye and Edward Karl, Bertel Lewis, Joseph and Bea Hantman, Emily Chaya Weinstein, Michael and Deborah Fink, Linda Baron, and Jerry Herman**

To the \$100 Club: **Hope and Matthew Feldman, Robert Fenchel, Jeffrey M. Freedman, Rabbi Scott L. Glass, Kathy Neustadt Hankin, Stanley and Annette Isaacson, Kehillat Chaverim in White Plains, Drs. Edwin & Roz Kolodny, Kay & John Latona, Richard and Ellen Lederman, Jennifer, Jay and Gabrielle Levitt, Elias Misri, Judy Neri, Saul Rogolsky (in memory of George Lichtblau), Barbara Ross-Berlin, Jonathan and Karen King Simon, Robert and Lesley Strauss, Temple Sinai, Jerry Wein, and Janice Zuckert**.

Lemba in Soweto (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

fringes of the *tallitot* trailed on the floor. I gently explained to Edwin that these were sacred objects, and he immediately gathered them up. It occurred to me that Edwin is Jewish, but he was not raised a Jew. And even the Lemba who were raised Jewish did not share customs such as wearing *kippot*, laying *tefillin* and wearing *tallitot*. They had their own traditions, Edwin said, "such as animal sacrifice, ritual slaughter, not eating pork, and the *Ngoma Lungundu*." The latter, he explained, was an ancestral drum, that accompanied the Lemba on their trek from Sena and was said to fortify them and protect them during times of war and turbulence. The drum is now lost, but its importance has been compared to the Ark of the Covenant.

At Edwin's family home in the northern Limpopo region (where most of the Lemba live), there has been much more cultural and religious continuity, but for urban Lemba, who came to Johannesburg to work in horrible conditions in the mines, the customs were broken.

"We know who we are now," said Edwin, "and we want to return to our Jewish roots...but the Orthodox do not accept us. They tell us that we were raised as Christians and we are not considered Jews."

The door of Edwin's house opened, and a handsome, twenty-two-year-old man named Solly entered. He said he was Jewish, but he had no idea of what that meant. Edwin brought out a stack of books that non-Orthodox rabbis and Jews had sent to him, but they were all much too advanced or scholarly for Edwin or Solly. They couldn't relate to the texts.

I picked up a bound volume called "The Torah" and my husband whispered to me that if you ignored all the commentary written below the line, it was a great story. I got an idea. I asked young Solly to close his eyes, and told him I wanted to read him an African story. He sat on Edwin's sofa with his eyes shut, and I began to read the story of Jacob, Rachel and Leah. Solly was mesmerized. When he opened his eyes,

(Continued on page 13)

Tikun Olam in Nigeria

By Remy Ilona

Sule Gise is a well-educated Hausa Fulani man from Jigawa State, northern Nigeria. We have known each other since 2001. Up to 2002, the only connection I had with the Nation of Israel was simply that the Igbos (or Ibos) originated from the 12 sons of Jacob. About the faith of Israel (Judaism) I knew nothing then. I was in the state that I just described when I became close to Gise, and whenever we sat down to discuss, our talks gravitated towards the Middle East conflict. Naturally I always took the side of Israel, and Gise, naturally took the Arab side (Hausa Fulani tend to have deep anti-Israel feelings). Even though a wide gulf separated Gise and me as far as the Arab-Israeli conflict was concerned, we remained casual friends until last month, when we became intimate friends.

Gise is the manager of an exchange bureau located next to a photocopy centre. I went to make copies of some pages of the *Nine Questions People Ask About Judaism* by D. Prager & J. Telushkin and *Jewish Literacy* by J. Telushkin. When I was through, I entered Gise's office to say hello. We greeted very warmly, and he cracked a joke at me, "See this Nigerian Jew!" I used the opportunity to tell him that I have moved from just having a Hebraic origin, that I have rejoined the Nation of Israel in the way that truly matters- by returning to Judaism. Gise thought that I was joking, but after 15 minutes of talk he was convinced that I was serious. He requested information about Judaism. I left all the copies I made with him in addition to a copy of the *Chumash*, which I loaned to him.

[A Hausa Fulani man is more likely than not to be a strict Muslim, who can hardly be impressed by people from crusading religions seeking converts. If Hausa Fulani's have non-Muslims they constitute less than 5% of their population. Likewise most Igbos or Ibos are likely to be non-Muslims with all having a Hebrew background as their culture. Interestingly both peoples are wary of trying to convert each other. It was against such a background that I and Gise started our journey, each party very secure and comfortable, knowing that we seek not to convert each other, as it is improbable if not impossible for Remy to become a Muslim and for Gise to become a Jew.]

I returned after two weeks. Frankly I doubt if anybody can use pen and paper to describe the transformation that took place, and the daily improvement since then. After greetings he sat on his chair, and did not talk for three minutes. When he opened his lips what came out was: "The world does not understand the Jews or Judaism. All the Jews have ever sought is a better world for all. Judaism is very similar to my religion (Islam). No matter how bruised the Jews may be, they will always overcome every travail because ingrained in them is a deep love of God and man. And most importantly the Jews agree, like the Muslims, that the laws of God must never be shoved aside."

I kept my peace; after all, I knew the unspoken rule. After some time it became inevitable for me to talk, to explain the 13 principles of Judaism. As I counted them off my fingers there was none he

faulted. He was especially taken by *Sh'ma Yisrael*. He said that Muslims recite an Arabized version of it. Inevitably we must look at differences. I brought up their belief in predestination. He responded that their religion fully agreed that one has power to choose good or bad.

On the *Chumash*, he opines that every Muslim ought to have a copy. He has ordered a copy of *Nine Questions* and regrets that the dollar prices of Jewish books would make them unaffordable to most Nigerians. He said that the light of Israel has made him a better Muslim, and that he wishes that Igbos would all return to Judaism. The pleasant aspect of the scenario is that right in my presence he invites his friends and gives them pep talks about Israel's gift to the world, Torah. His opinion is that Muslims and Jews need to start discussions, and that once that starts all frictions will disappear.

Surprisingly, my friend no longer brings up the Middle East conflict.

Out of all this I see an opportunity to contribute to *Tikun Olam* (repairing the world). Since Kulanu and its allies have been unrelenting in providing assorted books, other Judaica, and all forms of material support, it is opportune to open a library that would be open to the Nigerian public, so that by God's grace more people will have access to Israel. Anybody who truly seeks to understand Israel and does is hooked forever. When I told Gise that I would be contributing this story to an international Jewish website, and that it may appear in a Jewish newsletter which may be read by his fellow Muslims, he told me to go ahead, quoting a portion of the Koran that instructs Muslims to go to any length to seek the truth and knowledge. In the near future I believe he will write to this forum expressing support for Judaism as a Muslim.

Anybody who has lived in Nigeria can understand why the realization of one Hausa Fulani Muslim that Jews stand for love, peace and progress of humanity is making me intoxicated with joy. As man started from one man, Adam, so can truth also be disseminated from one man, and the repairing of the world, *tikun olam*, can be actualized by each person contributing his/her own quota, a task that Gise has started.

It has become a culture for Kulanu and friends to assist us in all our endeavours, for example making it possible for us to set up a library. As usual I repeat my plea for anybody who can send books of Jewish interest. What really opened my eyes was the Jewish literature that Kulanu started sending, and I began to see and understand what Israel was, is and will be. While other nations built pyramids, and amphitheaters where gladiatorial contests took place, one nation was occupied with receiving laws and ethics from God, and disseminating them, and thinking of how to perfect the world.

Many other souls, it would appear, are waiting for the same enlightenment.

(Books may be sent to Remy Ilona, P.O. Box 11505, Area 10 Post Office, Garki Abuja, Nigeria.)

הנש הבוט

Happy New Year!!

Anyada Buena!! Tizku Leshanim Rabod!!

Feliz año nuevo!!

Bom Ano!!

Bonne Année!!

BOOK REVIEW

Caught in the Crack: Encounters with the Jewish Muslims of Turkey by Reuven Alpert

A review by Irwin M. Berg

This book has its origins in the death of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson, in 1994. Before his death, his followers, the Lubavitcher Hassidim, were convinced that he was the Messiah. But the theologically unthinkable had happened -- the Messiah had died before fulfilling his mission on earth. Very few Lubavitchers were willing to give up deeply held aspirations and accept that perhaps Rabbi Schneerson was not the Messiah.

These followers are now going through the same kind of trauma that the followers of Jesus of Nazareth and the followers of Shabbatai Zevi had undergone. Many Lubavitchers - how many we are not told - still believe the Rebbe is the Messiah.

The author is very much conflicted by the vitality of Lubavitch Messianism. He began his interest in Sabbatian studies as "therapy" -- an effort to understand and interpret his own feelings at Rabbi Schneerson's death.

Alpert has a second purpose in writing this book. He tells us that in 1991 he made two trips to Peru to help a community of Peruvian Indians convert to Judaism. In 1993 he went to New Mexico in search of Anous descendants whom he had heard were turning from Catholicism and returning to their Jewish origins. Consistent with these quests, the second purpose of this book is to report on whether the modern-day descendants of the followers of Shabbatai Zevi who, although nominally Moslem, might be willing to return to the Jewish faith of their ancestors.

Those who followed Shabbatai Zevi into Islam and their descendants referred to themselves as *Ma'aminim* (Hebrew for believers). They are referred to by Jews as *Ma'aminim*. The Turks refer to them as the *Doenme*. Alpert explains that this Turkish word has a connotation of "transvestite." Alpert rarely refers to these descendants as *Doenme*, preferring to use the term *Ma'aminim*.

Alpert's summary of the life of Shabbetai Zevi and of the origins of the *Ma'aminim* is excellent and conveys forcefully the power of belief that can dissolve identity and transcend national, religious and social boundaries.

Shabbetai Zevi was born on the 9th day of Av 1626 in Izmir in Turkey. The date of his birth had mystical significance because, according to Rabbinic legend, the Messiah would be born on this date - the date the Temple was destroyed. He was a precocious student of Jewish law and of Jewish mystical texts. In 1648 he began to show signs of strange behavior and was expelled from Izmir for the sin of pronouncing publicly the ineffable name of God. For the next 18 years he wandered around the Eastern Mediterranean, arriving in 1664 in Jerusalem, where he met Nathan Askenazi or Nathan of Gaza. Nathan was reputed to have prophetic powers and pronounced Shabbetai Zevi as the Messiah.

Immediately, a mass movement spread proclaiming him as the Messiah. Jews everywhere heard of Shabbetai Zevi and were seized with a messianic frenzy. Jews in Holland and Germany as well as those in the Turkish Empire were liquidating their businesses in preparation for "going up" to the Holy Land.

On September 15, 1666, Shabbetai Zevi was brought before the Turkish Sultan Mehmed IV and offered the choice of conversion to Islam or summary execution. Shabbetai Zevi converted and was allowed to live for several years in splendor in a castle in Adrianople (Ederne). Most of the Jewish world did the best that it could to swallow its shame. In 1683, 300 Jewish families in Salonika converted from Judaism to Islam in their desire to remain faithful to their Messiah. Their explanation was that the Messiah must first descend to the depths of Kelipah (impurity) to redeem the holy sparks imprisoned there. Later these believers would cope with Shabbetai Zevi's death in 1671 by developing a theory of *hit'almut* (occultation), whereby the Messiah was not dead but hidden and would reappear. Some *Ma'aminim* even believed that the deity resided in Shabbetai Zevi.

Even though Alpert's history of the *Ma'aminim* was intended to be a summary, these latter beliefs deserved more analysis. Is there something about a dead Messiah -- who in his lifetime has not accomplished the goals expected by his followers -- which leads ultimately to a belief in an incarnate god? Christianity's road to the deification of Jesus from his crucifixion about 30 CE to the Nicene Creed in 325 CE lends support to this speculation. Nor does Alpert compare the theological underpinnings between the Messianic claims of the *Ma'aminim* and those of the followers of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

Jews shunned the *Ma'aminim*. The Turks treated them with suspicion and from time to time sought to root out Jewish practices among them with inquisitorial tactics. For 250 years in Salonika, they separated themselves from both Jews and Moslems, residing in separate Turkish districts and burying their dead in their own cemetery. By 1923 they had become secular Moslems, having lost most of their Jewish roots. In that year, the Lausanne Agreement went into effect whereby Christians in Turkey moved to Greece and Moslems in Greece removed to Turkey. Jews could remain in either area. Since the *Ma'aminim* were not accepted as Jews, they were compelled to leave Salonika and move to Istanbul despite their pleas to the Greek government that they were actually Jews.

An estimated 30,000 *Ma'aminim* are scattered throughout Turkey, with the greatest concentration in Istanbul. Today these 30,000 have lost their separate identity as *Ma'aminim*. They have intermarried with Moslems and live as secular Moslems. Alpert interviewed three of them. One of them, Nicholas Hannan-Stavroulakis, lives in Crete and converted to Judaism. He is the author of a book entitled *Jews and Devishes*, which describes the now-destroyed *Ma'amin* cemetery in Salonika. He is also co-author with Esin Eden of Istanbul of a cookbook of *Ma'amin* recipes entitled *Salonika, a Family Cookbook*. Alpert sets forth this interview virtually verbatim, and it covers a wide range of subjects. Nicholas' *Ma'amin* roots are so distant and faint, however, that most of the discussion is scholarly rather than personal.

Alpert's second interview is with Esin Eden, who was born in Brussels in 1935, the daughter of Turkish Moslems. Esin's mother left Salonika at the age of 29, and her *Ma'amin* experience, whatever it may have been, was never conveyed to her daughter. She, like most other *Ma'aminim*, is a secular Moslem and is married to a non-*Doenme* Moslem.

The last and most interesting interview was of Ilgaz Zorlu. Ilgaz urged Alpert to go back to the United States and tell the Jews of America that the *Ma'aminim* are Jews, not Moslems, and that they desire to be admitted to Israel as Jews without converting. Ilgaz spent a year in an *ulpan* (Hebrew program) for potential converts in the Orthodox Kibbutz Yavneh in Israel. His position was that he and his followers were willing to undertake a nominal *giyyur lehumrah* ("conversion on the safe side") that had been offered to Ethiopian Jews but no more than that, since they are already Jews. He was rejected by the Israeli rabbis and by the Israeli ambassador to Turkey, who wanted nothing to do with "Muslim Jews" seeking to immigrate to Israel. He was asked by the Turkish rabbinate not to attend services in the synagogue in Istanbul. In a country which totters on the precipice of becoming fundamentalist, Alpert does not fault Turkey's *Hahambasi* (Chief Rabbi). Despite Ilgaz's efforts to convince Alpert to become his apostle to world Jewry, Alpert concluded that he would be making a fool of himself since Ilgaz failed to produce any of his supposed followers.

The book does not end with these interviews. Alpert then goes into various esoteric subjects from the point of view of Jewish law: conversion, *mamzerut* (bastardy), a comparison between the *Doenme* and "Marranos," and marriage by Jews with Karaites, Marranos and Ethiopians. His discussion of these subjects is erudite, and he injects many details which offer numerous possibilities for reconciliation.

(Continued on page 12)

LETTERS TO KULANU

HAVILA in Brussels Gets a Boost

Things are getting more and more easy for HAVILA and myself to have access and visibility among the Jewish establishment of Belgium and Europe. I'm really surprised to notice how, in a few days, the Jewish Community of Belgium is taking an unexpected and heavy interest in the Tutsi Jewish identity and heritage. That new trend occurs at a moment of renewal for the traditional Jewish Community itself, with a heavy commitment with Israel and a determination to remain proud to be a Jew.

The Tutsi Pesakh with a rabbi coming from Washington is in the centre of the conversations among the Jewish groups. For example, I was invited to lead a HAVILA delegation to Yom Ha'atzmaut, which was a very big gathering of thousands of Jews. We were the only black Jews to attend the festival, and our presence provoked a great emotion among all the groups of Jews, either Sephardim or Ashkenazim—including the Lubavitch, who welcomed us with intense questions about our history, our present and our concrete objectives on the political ground.

It was something like a miracle of coming home for the Tutsis. I was presented to many Jewish VIPs such as academics, Jewish authors, faithful Zionists. I talked with directors of Jewish institutions such as Ben Gourion Institute, European Sepharade Institute, etc. My explanations provoked a great interest among a diversity of Jews, who asked for a deeper education in the Kushite Jewish tradition and history.

I'm invited to the Michail Wygodzki home and to celebrate the Shabbat at his Lubavitch Synagogue, and to be introduced before the Lubavitch Rabbi of Brussels. I got many personal contacts during the gathering, including information about how the Tutsis have been described as Jews by some Jews that I didn't know till then—Moïse Rahmani of Belgium Sepharade Community and Albert Russo of the Jewish Community of France, for example. It is really miraculous.

In the same time, the HAVILA leadership among the Tutsi Community of Belgium, of Diaspora and of the Homeland is becoming undisputed, especially after the echos of our vibrant seder of Pesakh. Leadership is a crucial issue for any Community that intends to revive from a catastrophe, as it is the case with the Tutsi Jews.

It makes no doubt that Kulanu and HAVILA are now successfully involved in one of the most precious and powerful Jewish programmes of the post-1948 period of the history of Israel. I think that the Kulanu leadership and the HAVILA leadership need to be provided with enough logistical means to create and reinforce the synergy which will generate the Second Israel inside Kush.

*Yochanan Bwejeri
Brussels, Belgium*

Honor Portuguese Anousim by Supporting Yosef

(This period following our Portugal trip) has been a time of great spiritual growth, magic, and wonder ... so much so that I'm finding it difficult to express myself adequately. I can't possibly do justice to the times when heaven touched earth (us) on our journey through Portugal, meeting our brothers and sisters and having them join us along the way.

The two rabbis we met in Belmonte and Lisbon have written beautiful letters of thanks and support. They send blessings and love to all Saudades members and are looking forward to many more of us visiting them again very soon.

They both sent messages saying we brought them and the communities they serve great joy and inspiration but the truth is, we left them far richer in spirit. Having met them, the Belmonte-

Porto Communities as well as the growing number of *Anousim* fighting for recognition....studying and getting ready for their return home to Judaism. We are grateful for rabbis like Boaz Pash and Elisha Salas who are welcoming the Anousim, going out of their way to fight for them as well as teach them. May they be blessed in the work they are doing for our people.

Unfortunately, in spite of the "good stuff," there have been problems too. We [SAUDADE SEFARAD] have run into a financial problem. Those of you who know Yosef (Jose Joao) Mendes Rodrigo or who were with us in Belmonte for Shabbat, who met him, danced and sang with him after Friday evening services or heard him on Shabbat morning taking the lead for part of the service, will understand how important it is for this young man to be able to continue his studies and return to Portugal as a rabbi. A rabbi of our very own—someone exactly like those of us who are [or were] *Anousim*.

We are committed to sponsoring Yosef to attend the Sephardic Yeshiva in Jerusalem for a minimum of three years.... but now that the members who committed to this mitzvah reneged on their promise, we are faced with the problem of having no fundraisers. We need funds to keep our part of our commitment. SAUDADE SEFARAD is an international, non-governmental organization assisting the Belmonte and *Anousim* communities of Portugal. The American Sephardi Federation serves as a non-profit, 501(c)3 umbrella agency for SAUDADE SEFARAD donors and grantors. Those who can and would like to make a tax-deductible donation towards Yosef's tuition and living costs while he is studying in Israel may make checks payable to The American Sephardi Federation, noting "Belmonte Project—for Yosef" on the memo line, and mail to: The American Sephardi Federation, 15 West 16th Street, New York 10011-6301, NY, USA

Your gift will honor the power of the *Anousim* and Belmonte Jewish community's faith over the centuries and our own religious freedom.

*Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum
Johannesburg, South Africa
www.saudades.org*

Donation from Maine School

We are a small Jewish Day School in Maine. We collect Tzedaka every day and every few months we send it out. Our teacher told us about your work in small Jewish communities. We are sending you our pennies added up. Thanks for all the work you do.

*Levey Day School Children
Portland, Maine*

(Editor's note: This note was accompanied by \$39 in donations.)

Kippot in Nigeria

On a recent Sunday I was passing by as two Igbo businessmen were enjoying drinks and one who is acquainted with me invited me to address their group on the moves by some Igbos to get an independent state of Biafra. I am not involved in the efforts to get Biafra, but I have noticed that when the Igbos talk about Biafra, they veer into discussions on Israel and Zionism. Unconsciously, our people have identified return/ Teshuvah to God/ Judaism as the Panacea for what some perceive as injustice from the British/ Nigerians.

To me, the invitation was an opportunity. I returned home, armed myself with the *Nine Questions People Ask about Judaism* by Prager and Telushkin, and photocopies of the interview by Ambassador Noam Katz of Israel. I returned to the venue and, using the barest out-

(Continued on page 9)

Portugal Trip (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

Anous descendants returning to Judaism, archeologists, a singer, philosophers, an artist, two novelists, rabbis, and several scholars.

Some History

Richard Zimler, a novelist who addressed the group, boils down Portuguese-Jewish history to four traumatic events:

- (1) The Spanish expulsion of Jews in 1492, which brought 100,000 Jews to Portugal. They could enter by paying a high entry tax, which allowed them to stay only eight months. Some 2000 children of Jews who could not meet their tax burden were shipped to the African island of Sao Tome in 1493 to colonize and “whiten” this Portuguese possession. Most of the children, aged two to 20, died of disease within a year.
- (2) Portugal’s expulsion of Jews in December 1496, followed by the sudden closing of the border in March 1497 and forced conversions of Jews. In Lisbon, 20,000 Jews were corralled into the northern end of the Rossio, the city’s central plaza, and “converted” by priests. These “New Christians” were given 20 years to adapt to their new religion, but this was not respected.
- (3) The Lisbon Massacre of 1506, in which 2000 Jews (about 20 percent of the Jewish population of Lisbon) were burnt in public squares.
- (4) The Portuguese Inquisition of 1536-1821, in which 4793 converted Jews were arrested and tortured. Inquisition centers were established in Lisbon, Évora, Coimbra, and Goa. Zimler points out that the Inquisition was a significant money-making proposition for the Church, which seized the property of those arrested.

Sites

We saw sites that were reminders of the relatively good time for Jews in Portugal before 1492, including remnants of *Judiarias* (Jewish quarters) in Lisbon, Sintra, Évora, Castelo de Vide, Fundão, Porto, and Tomar. In some cases, these reminders were only street signs or niches at doorposts where *mezuzot* were once affixed. In Tomar, Castelo de Vide, and Valencia de Alcantara, we saw medieval synagogue buildings. In all cases these pre-1492 quarters were picturesque, with narrow, hilly cobbled streets and the 14th-15th century row houses in good condition.

There were, of course, many painful reminders of the expulsion and forced conversions. In Évora we saw Portugal’s first Inquisition building, where trials were conducted; the handsome edifice is now used by the local university. Évora also boasts a cathedral adorned by a statue of a saint whose feet are crushing heads of a Jew (identified by his beard and pointed hat) and a dog (with a similar hat). The plaza in front of the cathedral was the site of *autos-da-fe* (public punishment ceremonies, including burnings) up to the 18th century. Another interesting testament to the times was a private residence in Castelo de Vide that featured a large and elaborately painted Catholic chapel adjoining the main living room. However, behind a large bookcase was a secret room used as a synagogue.

Crosses etched near doorposts were additional painful reminders we observed in Castelo de Vide, Fundão, and Trancoso – signifying the homes of New Christians (Old Christians did not use them). In Trancoso the crosses are the most numerous and are etched in a variety of styles. In Guarda, the symbol of the Inquisition was etched on one former Jew’s house.

An employee of the Torre do Tombo national archives in Lisbon donned white gloves and showed us several actual 14th, 15th, and 16th century manuscripts that changed the course of Jewish history. One was a 14th century parchment, part of the king’s daily register of documents, in which Don Pedro I proclaimed that no one should be lodged in the Jewish section against the will of the Jews. We also saw the actual 1496 Edict of Expulsion, as well as the 1497 document of

forced baptism (printed in 1514). He also showed us the 1531 Papal Edict of Clement VII establishing the Inquisition in Portugal and appointing the first Inquisitor (it was denied one year later but was re-established in 1536). One fascinating document contained a 1609 drawing of an amulet used as evidence in an Inquisition trial.

More heartening, of course, were the functioning synagogues in Porto, Lisbon, and Belmonte -- symbols of hope and the future.

The stunning Kadoorie Synagogue (Mekor Haim) in Porto was built in 1929 by Ellie Kadoorie, a wealthy Sephardic Jew with business interests in China, to serve the newly-returning *Anousim* inspired by Arthur Carlos de Barros Basto. It fell into disuse after Barros Basto’s ignominy following a false accusation by the government. However, it was re-opened in 1984 by two Israelis and it is now run by 35 member families. Returning *Anousim* who have not yet had an Orthodox conversion are not counted in *minyanim*, but Rabbi Elisha Salas, who is now the resident rabbi in Porto, is teaching them. There are three old Jewish quarters in Porto, and estimates of the area’s Jewish population range from 200 to 400, depending on whether participating descendants of *Anousim* are counted.

The king of Portugal named a chief rabbi in Lisbon in 1143, following a successful Christian siege against the Muslims. As Lisbon became an important cultural center, Jews assumed important roles in the society, and the Jewish quarter was located near the castle because of this role. (Christians were inside the castle walls, Jews were immediately outside, and Moors were further outside.) Today Lisbon boasts two functioning congregations.

The Shaare Tikva synagogue was built in 1902-04 by Jews from Morocco and Gibraltar. It is undergoing a centenary renovation, but we were still able to see its ornate interior. The synagogue follows a Sephardi service, but has a new Ashkenazic rabbi, Boaz Pash. Two or three *Anousim* are among the 300-500 members (there are 60 children). The congregation sometimes struggles to get a minyan for services and operates no school at present.

The modest Ashkenazic shul, Ohel Yakob, which has attracted

(Continued on page 11)

LETTERS TO KULANU

(Continued from page 8)

line, traced the history of Israel, narrating to them that the Igbo are part of the Dispersed of Israel. I explained to them why the dispersion took place, what it achieved. (Israel’s entrenchment of Monotheism and the rule of law under one God). I taught them about the expected redemption of Israel and the world. Every body was spell-bound. At the end they requested more of such lectures and kippot.

Accordingly, I humbly request kippot from anybody who has any to spare. Igbo can make kippot but they wouldn’t have the significance as the ones made by Jews who were never out of Judaism. That’s our people’s mindset. Please sent to Remy Ilona, P.O.Box 11505, Area 10 Post office, Garki Abuja, Nigeria.

Likewise, anybody who can, should please send a few kippot to Ken Ilona, C.P 212a, Fazenda, Praia, Cape Verde Islands. He and I talked about Judaism when we met three weeks ago and he asked for kippot. According to him the CNN pictures of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Shaul Mofaz in kippot were star attractions for the Igbo of Cape Verde. If any of you should pass by Cape Verde, please look in on the Igbo there and teach. From experience the Igbo are ready for mass teshuvah, but we/they have to be taught what is what and which is which. And for some, ostensibly simple instruments like the Jewish skull cap can trigger a longing for more truths.

Remy Ilona
Abuja, Nigeria.

A Seder Under the (Jewish) Stars (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

Rwanda, and parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda and Tanzania. This is their historic Homeland, that part of the Kush Empire extending from Ethiopia and identified as Havila in Genesis 2:11 and as the area beyond the rivers of Kush in Zephania 3:10.

The Batutsi are our Hebraic brothers and sisters, and have been since the time of Moses. Under culturally genocidal pressures from the colonial powers and the Church, many Batutsi found it necessary to embrace Christianity, so that Burundi and Rwanda are the most Catholic countries in Africa. Of course, that did not save the upwards of a million Tutsis who, in 1994, perished through physical genocide at the hands of their neighbors in Rwanda, nor the hundreds of thousands who perished in Burundi in 1993, nor is it likely to save others who continue to die or live under the threat of death in Burundi, Rwanda, and eastern Congo.

So my visit to Brussels should be seen not only in the context of the support that Kulanu has provided over the past couple of years to the expatriate Tutsi community in Belgium, and to the Havila Institute in particular, but as an opportunity to create a watershed event that might stimulate a powerful movement toward *t'shuvah* (return) and effect the *geulah* (redemption) of Kush as an Israeli heritage.

Not even the warmth of my correspondence with Yochanan, to whom I was introduced by Kulanu's president, Dr. Jack Zeller, and not even the embrace of his family when my wife Linda, my daughter Hannah, and I came to stay in their home, prepared me for the intensity of the seder, and the days before and after. Although the word "seder" means "order," perhaps the most authentic way in which I can describe it is by recounting some of what impressed me most vividly:

- To a heart-pounding recording of the Drums of Solomon, all the adults—a number of the men in white robes, carrying ceremonial staffs, and the dress of many of the women bright, multi-colored, and flowing—marched in to sit beneath the flags of Burundi and the State of Israel, each prominently displaying the Star of David. The seder was held in the cafeteria of a school run by the Catholic Church; when the school authorities learned the purpose for which the cafeteria would be used, they doubled the normal rental fee and, for the first time, demanded a formal contract. That venue was chosen both for its size and its convenience to a railroad. Unfortunately, an incident that morning shut down the trains for the rest of the day, and many who wanted to participate in the seder were unable to reach it.
- We used a French/Hebrew Haggadah supplied by Beth Hillel, a Liberal synagogue in Brussels, supplemented by an eclectic assortment of excerpts from such other sources as the Aquarian Minyan. Beneath the flow established by the text ran an amiable chaos with which everyone, so far as I could tell, seemed quite at ease. Children ran in and out of the room, and I soon abandoned any real thoughts of schedule. Downtimes were filled with the most extraordinary central African dancing—dancing sinuous on the part of the women, infants bound on their backs, and syncopated on the part of the men, some of whom danced among the women and some of whom, perhaps more shy, strutted their stuff toward the back of the room. Other men strutted in a more ritualistic way, taking turns being the center of the crowd's attention and, holding a raffia-topped staff, declaiming their prowess in stylized but extemporaneous poetry that won them both applause and laughter.
- The men wore their *kippot* proudly, though half of them, Yochanan estimated, probably still considered themselves Catholics, knowing also that they were Jews but not yet knowing what that meant. One young man had a father who hadn't known about his Isra-

elite heritage when he rejected the Church and became a Buddhist monk. Another young man, our volunteer videographer, was a Rasta in a huge red tam.

- The people we met were, with hardly an exception, genuine and delightful: Rose, educated as a gynecologist in Burundi but forced to start over again in Belgium, her eyes brimming with tears when she spoke of the danger to her family still in the Homeland; George, of the glowing face and shining smile, an ardent supporter of Havila who had lived 15 years of his life as a high-ranking Catholic priest; Serge, attentive and self-assured, the nephew of the King of Rwanda, who lives in exile in Northern Virginia; Jacqueline, whose flashing eyes expressed fun and delight that transcended tragedy; Rachel, the best friend of Yochanan's wife Godeberthe, strong, gentle, quiet, and hard-

working; the Colonel, who had endured four years in a Burundian prison at great psychic cost; Balthazar, who recounted with such pleasure how he had cared for his family's cows in the traditional Tutsi manner, calling them by name when they came in from pasture, grooming them and inquiring about their health; Chrysologue, who made his car available the entire time of our visit, modest and good, the kind of person of whom you might say "what you see is what you get."

- When the kids re-enacted the ten plagues, using as props the "Box of Plagues" I had purchased from a Jewish bookstore in my neighborhood, what they lacked in focus they made up for in enthusiasm. The only time I saw them all together, calm and attentive, was when Yochanan sat them down to sample the traditional Tutsi matzah: *uburo* (a grain grown only in the Homeland, a bag of which he had had expressed from Burundi) mixed with water and cooked immediately, served piecemeal directly from the pan on a wooden spatula.

Traditionally, the Batutsi were primarily vegetarians, and the food at the seder, which came, unaccountably, more than an hour after we were ready to eat it, was vegetarian and extraordinary. There were sweet, fried Caribbean-style bananas; African bananas stewed with manioc leaves; dark beans; a well-seasoned potato salad; and a huge tropical fruit salad, cut up that morning by women crowded into Godeberthe's small kitchen.

- My six-year-old daughter had expressed reservations about traveling so far from home. But when I mentioned that Yochanan carries the title of prince of the Bene-Zagwe clan, she figured that that made his seven-year-old daughter Sylvia a princess, and her hesitation turned to enthusiasm. Imagine the scene the morning after the seder, when the African princess in a Belgian kitchen helped my Atlanta-born wife make *matzoh brei*.

The seder did indeed prove to be a galvanizing event for the Tutsi community. It enhanced the community's self-image, strengthened its resolve, empowered its leadership, and gave impetus to a powerful movement toward *t'shuvah*. It stimulated numerous connections between Havila and the Belgian Jewish community, including various synagogues, the Ben Gurion Institute, the European Sepharade Institute, Radio Judaica, and the family of the late Chief Rabbi of the Congo, and strengthened the relationship between Havila and Keren Kayemet and the Embassy of Israel. Even individual government officials from Burundi, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, responding to Havila's enhanced authority, have approached Professor Bwejeri to offer their private encouragement.

Now there is increased interest among the Batutsi, both in exile and in the Homeland, in returning to their roots and taking their place within the larger Jewish world, along with increased visibility for Havila's religious and national agenda. With this, however, has come increased scrutiny and the possibility of push-back from the governments of central and southern Africa, the governments of former colonial powers, and the Church.



Bwejeri distributes Tutsi matzoh

PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE

Las Preguntas de Abarbanel: Selecccion de Comentarios sobre la Tora (Questions of the Abarbanel: A Selection of Commentaries on the Torah), was released recently by Amishav. The book was written by **Abraham Renner**, a Torah scholar from Mexico City. Amishav director Michael Freund explains, "There is a growing thirst for Jewish texts throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Since the Abarbanel was a towering figure among medieval Spanish Jewry, it only seemed fitting to make his work available to a Spanish-speaking audience."

"L'Chaim Cuba!" by **Steve Lipman** appeared in the *NY Jewish Week* on April 16. The article tells of community seders attended by a large number of recent converts in eight Cuban cities, a sign of the vibrancy of the Cuban Jewish community.

"Salvaging Jewish Heritage in China, Block by Block," by **Sheridan Prasso**, appeared in the *New York Times* on May 31. The article describes Christopher Choa's attempt to preserve the old Jewish ghetto in Shanghai. The New York architect, who is Roman Catholic and lives in Shanghai, has drawn up a plan to save some of the old neighborhood in the face of redevelopment.

In "Reform Rabbi from Kansas City on Mission for Conversion in Spain," a JTA article of May 31 by **Jerome Socolovsky**, Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn's recent conversions of several Spanish Jews are reported. These individuals studied with the rabbi through correspondence courses for a year, and the rabbi came to Madrid to perform the conversions since there is no Reform congregation there. Brazil-born Cukierkorn has converted a total of 20 Spaniards to Judaism. He also has performed dozens of conversions in Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Venezuela, Ecuador and the United States, and has written a guide to Judaism to help potential Spanish-speaking converts.

José Geraldo Rodrigues de Alckmin Filho's research has recently been published in both Portuguese and English. *A Origem Judaica dos Brasileiros* (*The Jewish Ancestry of the Brazilian People*) is about 570 pages long and costs about \$20.

In a May 20 article in *J, the Jewish News Weekly of Northern California*, **Joe Eskenazi** writes about the eclectic background of Rabbi Moshe Cotel. The article, "Outreach to African, Asian Jews is Music to Rabbi's Ears," reports on Cotel's San Francisco area performances of his "Chronicles" — a unique blend of rabbinical wisdom and piano pieces by Bach, Mozart, Gershwin and others. Cotel is described as a Juilliard-trained pianist, a composer, a former professor of composition at Peabody, a pulpit rabbi (at Temple Beth El in Brooklyn, NY), and a Kulanu activist who foresees a multitude of Asian and African converts to Judaism.

In the May 28 *Jerusalem Post* article "Bene Israel Rabbi Returns to Indian Community," **Michael Freund** describes Rabbi Yehoshua Kolet, a Bombay-born Bene Israel rabbi who studied for several years in Israel and is now back in Bombay teaching traditional Jewish subjects to a group of 15 boys. He hopes to open a Jewish supplementary school in the area and to stay in India for 10 years before returning to Israel.

In June, the Vatican released *The Inquisition*, edited by **Agostino Borromeo**. This is a historical study based on a 1998 scholarly conference initiated by Pope John Paul so that he could know the extent of the sins of the Inquisition before asking pardon.

Portugal Trip (cont.)

(Continued from page 9)

more interest from *Anousim*, is located in a small three-story apartment; Rabbi Boaz can also be found here occasionally, and he "welcomes Anousim with open arms and open windows and open doors." Since we were observing Holocaust Day (Yom HaShoah), the rabbi led a ceremony in which candles were lit by individuals important to the *Anousim* community, including some members of our tour group. A reception followed, during which we travelers had an opportunity to meet some local *Anousim*.

Portugal's newest synagogue is the now-famous Bet Eliahu of Belmonte. This isolated mountain town was an important center of refuge for Jews fleeing the forced conversions in the 15th century. Today's synagogue members studied with and were converted by an Israeli rabbi in the mid-1990s, and the synagogue was dedicated in 1996, on the 500th anniversary of King Manuel's expulsion of the Jews. At the time of our visit, the rabbi was Elisha Salas, a Chilean-born, Israel-trained Jew funded by Amishav. Saudades is funding the training of a young Belmonte Jew, Yosef Mendes Rodrigo in Israel. He was back in Belmonte on vacation while we were there, so we had the opportunity to speak with him and hear him *daven*.

Shabbat in Belmonte

Shabbat in Belmonte is a very special treat for a Jewish tourist visiting as part of one of Rufina's groups. The congregation has had its fill of Jews wandering in to gawk at them, but they know that the Saudades leader's groups are interested in helping, and we were warmly welcomed.

I was struck by the visibility of the prominent white building on a hilltop, with the light, airy interior. And the young Cantor Miguel Vaz's voice was very loud and beautiful! A far cry from the whispered prayers in dark, secret places centuries ago! The service was in Hebrew except for an occasional Portuguese rendition of a prayer such as *Ain Kelohenu*. Melodies were not familiar to my Ashkenazic ears, except for certain passages that were sung to the tunes of "*Hatikvah*," "*Od Tir'eh*," and "*Yerushalayim Shel Zachav*." Both the evening and morning services were well attended by women as well as men. The community held a delicious Shabbat dinner (funded by Saudades) downstairs in the social hall — chalah, *bacalhau* (cod) with potatoes, tuna with onions, marinated carrots, green salad, marinated eggplant, apples and oranges.

Two special guests enhanced Shabbat. Emily Taitz, a scholar on women's Jewish history who was traveling with us, gave the women an inspiring talk encouraging learning and empowerment. After *maariv* and *havdalah* (whole cloves were passed hand-to-hand), Judith Cohen gave a recital of medieval Sephardic music, using several different musical instruments. Cohen, a Canadian ethnomusicologist, came down from her fieldwork in Spain to meet our group.

People

The people we met were the highlight of the trip. In addition to Taitz and Cohen, we learned from, Jose Domingo, a Crypto-Jew who brought the Judiaria in Guarda to life, and from Luis Vasco, who told us about the venerable 1438 synagogue in his home town of Tomar. We received an emotional talk from Rui Moreira, the director of the Adega grape cooperative of Covilhã, which started producing a delicious kosher wine, Terras de Belmonte, in 2003. Some 1000 people produce grapes for the cooperative, and "a little of it" is used to make the kosher wine. Although it will produce jobs for some Jews of nearby Belmonte, its bigger claim might be that it is seen as a "wine of reconciliation between the Portuguese people and Jewish people."

We also benefited from tours and lectures in Castelo da Vide by former mayor Carolino Tapadejo. We were instructed by Carmen

(Continued on page 12)

BOOK REVIEW

***Caught in the Cracks* (cont.)**

(Continued from page 7)

There are appendices on *Doenme* prayer and on the *Doenme* calendar of religious festivals tied to the life and teachings of Shabbetai Zevi. Alpert grants that knowledge about these matters is not complete. The reason for this paucity of information, he explains, is not that the extinction of the *Doenme* is fast approaching, but rather that we are dealing with a secret society which for three centuries did its best to elude prying eyes and kept no internal written records.

One of Alpert's chapters alerts us to the dangers that lurk for Turkey's Jews with the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. But that rise places the *Ma'aminim* in an even a more precarious situation than Jews, especially if they "come out of the crack" and proclaim their Jewish roots. In his chapter on Islamic fundamentalism, Alpert also reviews the situation of Jews in Iran and Azerbaijan.

I recommend the book to all members of Kulanu for its discussion of subjects which are so essential to Kulanu's mission. The publisher is Wandering Soul Press, a Division of Orot, Inc., P.O. Box 155, Spring Valley, NY 10977.

Editor's note: Since this book reports on only three Sabbatian families, we asked our resident expert, Geoff Melnick, for additional information on this elusive group. Here are his comments:

One of the problems with anyone dealing with the Sabbatian issue is that they are very secretive, and however lucky you may be in finding contacts, you are at best dealing with the opinions of a small number of people, and there is just no way of knowing how representative these are.

My understanding is that there are three sects within the Sabbatians, Yakubi, Kapanci, and Karakash, and that the state of steady secularization that the review (and presumably the book) describes, applies mainly to two of these sects. The third sect (the Karakash) is having somewhat more success in retaining its integrity. This was the view of Gershon Sholem who investigated the issue in the 1960s and is broadly confirmed by my contact today.

I believe that had the author, being a Habad Hassid, met a practicing Karakash he would have been amazed by the many customs they have that are similar to Hassidic customs, and indeed there is historical evidence of a connection between Jacob Frank, the false Messiah of Poland, and the Baal Shem Tov, who founded the Hassidic movement.

Furthermore my understanding from my contacts is that, contrary to what the book reports, the Sabbatians did in fact keep extensive records of their history. Many of the records were destroyed in a fire in Salonica; others were deliberately destroyed during a panic when one of their number decided to publicize the sect's existence. Others of these records still exist, either in Turkey or in Israel. Also Shabatai Zvi himself actually wrote a book, a Kabbalistic guide to his followers. It exists only in manuscript. I have been sent sections translated from a manuscript in Ottoman Turkish and I am currently trying to trace a Hebrew manuscript.

Also contrary to what the book says, many descendents of Sabbatians do have a strong cultural background. The Sabbatian culture is particularly strong in a unique tradition of children's' stories, and these stories have persisted where practices have stopped. On a number of occasions, people suspecting they have Jewish roots have contacted Kulanu. If I suspected they were Sabbatians, I sent them some Sabbatian children's' stories and asked if they recognized them. They invariably did, even though they were only vaguely aware of having seen any other Jewish practices.

Portugal Trip (cont.)

Balesteros (in Évora) and Graça Cravinho (in several cities), archeologists with a special interest in Jewish sites. Balesteros was responsible for the 1996 digging in Évora that revealed the synagogue; Cravinho interpreted artifacts for us amid the Roman ruins at Ammaia, where we saw carved tombstones, Roman glass, and carved gems that suggest the presence of Jews.

We toured a Medieval synagogue in nearby Valencia de Alcántara, Spain, with Antonio Jose de Sousa Caria Mendes, the archeologist who discovered it seven years ago (it had been converted to a pig butcher shop and then used as a garage). In an emotional moment in this four-pillared space, Antonio, a descendant of *Anousim* who has returned to Judaism, became Yonatan bar Cecile and Jose in a naming ceremony with Moshe Ortasse officiating (Moshe is an Israeli descendant of Portuguese Jews who was one of the tour participants). It was heartening to witness – and join in – the “*mazal tov*” wishes and dancing taking place in this long-neglected holy space.

More personalities we met were two grandsons of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese consul in France who disobeyed Salazar in 1940 by giving Jews visas during the German occupation of Bordeaux. The grandsons of this famous Righteous Gentile run a foundation and museum in the family house in Lisbon, where we heard them speak – appropriately, on Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Day).

In Lisbon, we had the opportunity to meet Laura Cesana at the National Library, which was showing her exhibit of paintings, “Jewish Vestiges in Portugal.” Another memorable artist was Richard Zimler, author of the novels *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon* and *Hunting Midnight*. In his home city of Porto, Zimler gave a slide-talk on Portuguese Jewish history and spoke about his books. A former student of Comparative Religion at Duke University and Journalism at Stanford, he teaches Journalism at a college in Porto. He did research on the Portuguese Inquisition for two years and took another two years to write *Last Kabbalist*. It took another two years to find a publisher (it was turned down by 24 publishers!) and it finally came out in Portuguese in 1996 and was a best-seller. It was then translated and published in France, Germany, England and the US.

Perhaps our best glimpse into the future of Portuguese Jewry was given by Sergio Pinheiro and his fellow activists in the seven-member Hebrew Culture Association of Porto. After a loud and festive dinner with them at a downtown restaurant (the Porto team had just won the national soccer championship), we heard an important lecture by Sergio in a room HCAP rents in an office building. The group meets most Saturdays and for special events; its members have ties to other Marrano (their word) groups in Lisbon, Covilhã, and Belmonte. Their plan is to create a network of the seven most ancient Jewish communities in Portugal that were allowed by the king in 1419 (they were mostly Jews who had fled the 1391 pogroms in Spain); the sites of these communities are Lisbon, Porto, Torre de Moncorvo, Viseu, Évora, Faro, Santarém, and Covilhã. They hope to create a summer retreat camp for adults. Sergio describes their aim as one “to revive the past” with study groups, lectures and workshops. He says that they will frequent synagogues “when they are ready,” noting that “it is a slow process – we will go step by step.” Rabbi Salas is their teacher. At this point, Sergio describes the members of his movement as “Judaizers rather than Jews, but on their way to being Jews.” In three generations, he predicts, they will be the leaders of the Jews in Portugal.

Our Trip-Mates

These speakers and leaders were fascinating and informative, but we also enjoyed the continuous presence and perspective of fellow travelers.

We received a fascinating lecture from Alfredo Srour, a wine merchant who is also a scholar on Inquisition history. He reminded us that the first expulsion of Jews from Spain was in 613 CE under the Visigoths. Those who refused the baptism in 613 went to Africa and

(Continued on page 14)

Purim To Remember (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

Shira, as is her wont, quickly attracted a following of young children, many from among the student body of the Hadassah Infant School. Eitan made many close friends among the Abayudaya youth and teenage crowd, including Yitzchak, the community's 15-year-old Shochet (ritual slaughterer), who prepared a goat and chicken for our consumption – a true Purim feast, marking the significance of our visit and the holiday we had come to celebrate. Ora, an accomplished Professor of Bible and Dean of the Academy for Jewish Religion, impressed villagers when she delivered a Dvar Torah and taught the weekly women's Torah study group.

The Purim afternoon talent contest and "shpiel" were a highlight of our stay. Abayudaya youth presented a recreation of the story of Purim from the Book of Esther – absolutely remarkable for its richness and accuracy of detail, and spectacular in the distinctively African portrayal of Biblical characters, heroes and villains.

An unexpected moment of inspiration came as we traveled to visit the village of Namatumba, an outlying Abayudaya enclave. Our driver and cherished friend, J.J. Keki, was unsure of the route. When we reached a very isolated, rural expanse, to our dismay, he simply rolled down the car window and asked repeatedly for directions: "Do you know where the local Jewish community is? Do you know where the synagogue is?" We were a bit intimidated, so freely indentifying ourselves as Jews in a Third World, heavily Muslim area, but the questions were always politely answered. Finally, we asked the assistance of a couple who provided accurate directions – a happy surprise!! Much more surprising was the question they asked us: "The Abayudaya – we know them. How can we join that community? We want to become Jews!" J.J. wisely advised them to anticipate a long and demanding conversion process that would have to be discussed with the local religious leader.

It was a great joy and privilege to celebrate Purim with the Abayudaya community. Like the Jews in the days of Esther and Mordecai, the Abayudaya have endured the attacks of tyrants and the attempts of dictators to destroy Jews and Judaism. Like the Jews in the days of Esther and Mordecai, the Abayudaya have been blessed with courageous leaders of true vision, who guided their community through the most difficult and trying times to safeguard the Jewish future. Like the Jews in the days of Esther and Mordecai, the Abayudaya represent a truly miraculous event in the history of the Jewish People, deserving of celebration and thanksgiving by fellow Jews around the world.

The Book of Esther records that many individuals among the nations in the vast empire ruled by Ahasuerus and Esther chose to become Jews as they witnessed the miraculous history of the Jewish People unfold. As a community of very special spiritual gifts and principle, the Abayudaya chose Judaism generations ago, and reaffirmed that loving loyalty in more recent days. Purim, the most joyful of Jewish holidays, thus has a special resonance in the Abayudaya community.

Throughout our memorable stay, Abayudaya leaders repeatedly thanked us and paid tribute to us for coming to visit them as a family. "Rabbi Prouser," they said time and again, "you are not the first member of the Bet Din to return to us... but you are the first rabbi ever to visit the Abayudaya community together with his whole family. This shows how much you love us and it teaches us to love our families, to love ourselves, and to love our friends." The Abayudaya have a clear understanding that the Jewish home and the Jewish family constitute a sacred sanctuary. Visiting them as a family was naturally understood as an indication of our esteem for the holiness they have achieved: a sign of our love for their Jewish community and its individual members and families. The tears we all shed at our departure were sufficient evidence of the sincerity of these sentiments.

During our Purim visit, my family struggled to learn a few phrases in Luganda; my struggle continues. Among the verses of the Megillah I mastered was Esther 8:16 – "Awo Abayudaaya ne baba n'omusana n'essanyu, n'okujaguza n'ekitiibwa" – Like the Jews in the

days of Esther and Mordecai, may the Abayudaya – and their fellow Jews inspired by their example – continue to enjoy "light and joy, happiness and honor."

Lemba in Soweto (cont)

(Continued from page 5)

he said he was going to start reading the stories of his Jewish people-- they weren't that complex or hard to understand. "I want to know what it means to be Jewish," he said, with great sincerity.

Because of a paucity of identifiable Jewish practices, books and historical documents (their tradition is oral), many white, mainstream Jews refused to accept that the 12 clans of the Lemba are Jews. But recent DNA testing has confirmed not only Semitic and Middle Eastern heritage in the general Lemba population, but the presence of the Cohen or priestly gene in more than 50 per cent of the men of the Buba clan. This still isn't acceptable to most rabbis. Some reject the DNA tests and say they don't prove conclusively that the Lemba are Jews. They argue that if the Lemba were raised as Christians and they aren't actively practicing the Jewish religion, they aren't Jews and they have to convert to be accepted.

A few days later, at the Holiday Inn hotel in Sandton where I was staying, I nursed a pot of tea and spoke with Rudo Mathivha, the 43-year-old daughter of the recently-deceased and much-venerated Lemba leader Professor Matshaya Mathivha. Rudo had the benefit of a lot of instruction and education from her father and relatives in Limpopo. Not only is she the head of pediatric intensive care at one of Johannesburg's biggest hospitals, but she is also an avid student of Judaism.

Rudo said that the Lemba elders used to speak of a book of laws that was lost a long time ago, so the laws and traditions were passed on orally. "I always knew I was Jewish," said Rudo. "We had special dietary laws--our meat had to be slaughtered in a particular way and the blood was drained, circumcision was a very important occasion, we had a Sabbath that began on Friday evening with prayers. After the prayers, someone walked around with a clay pitcher and a bowl and we washed with clean water that was poured over our hands. Then we used a clean towel to dry our hands."

She said the Lemba Jewish religion was "very patriarchal, also patrilineal, and men could not convert in." Women who converted and married Lemba had to be instructed in dietary laws and they had to learn Lemba ways.

Rudo began to reminisce about her childhood. "On Pesach," she began, "we slaughtered a lamb, ate a flat, dry bread and greens that were slightly bitter. We told the story of the slavery in Egypt very quickly, and then we told our oral history, from Sena on down. My father could recite the generations back to Seremane, which probably means Solomon."

When I asked Rudo how she felt about the rejection of the Lemba as Jews, she knit her brows and her jaw tightened. "When we went to the Board of Deputies in Johannesburg, they said our story is all fabrication. The men agreed to be tested [DNA], but then the Board said we're not *halacha* enough and have to convert back to Judaism. They resent that we had to be baptized to go to school, and we learned about Christ, who I still consider to be a great teacher. There has been no acceptance by the Orthodox, until now. But it's their problem. It doesn't change who I am and who I know I am."

"Rudo," I asked her, "what is the Lemba name for God?"

"Mwari," she answered.

I went to an Internet cafe and wrote an e-mail to Benyamim Tse-daka, a Samaritan scholar who speaks ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, modern Hebrew and English. I asked him if the word "mwari" meant anything to him. His answer was startling.

(Continued on page 16)



Clockwise from upper left: Mariana, Naomi, and Silvia at an information session; Belmonte Synagogue menorah overlooking the countryside; Rufina with Yosef, the rabbinic student; street sign in Castelo de Vide; the Ark of the Kadoorie Synagogue in Porto; arches of the medieval synagogue of Valencia de Alcantara, Spain

Portugal Trip (cont.)

(Continued from page 12)

Southern France. They came back to Spain as Jews during the reign of King Swintila (621-631 CE). During the reign of this king, many Jews who were baptized in 613 returned to Judaism. Srouer noted that in 1492 Ferdinand and Isabella adopted the Visigoth expulsion law. He also reminded us that the Medieval Inquisition was only against heretics who were Christians and did not accept many of the Catholic dogmas, not Jews or Moors. However, it was true that many conversions were forced, and that the Inquisition gave instructions (requirements) on how to interrogate and torture witnesses. A man of wide interests, Srouer also gave us a well-received lecture on Mel Gibson's film *The Passion of the Christ*.

Cuba-born Achy Obejas, another fellow traveler, read to us from her highly acclaimed 2001 novel *Days of Awe*, about a female Cuban exile in America who discovers her secret Jewish heritage.

Another participant was Naomi Leite-Goldberg, an anthropologist of Portuguese-Jewish descent who is conducting research for her Ph.D. thesis on the revival of Jewish identity and heritage in Portugal.

There was Angelita Galvan-Freeman, a Texan whose parents were from Nuevo Leon (Mexico), whose family surnames on both sides are Jewish. Her grandfather was a Methodist minister. She converted to Judaism in 2002, taking the Hebrew name Yehudit. And then there was Cuba-born Silvia Borges Lopez-Ona, who announced, "Last October I was a non-practicing Catholic." Since then she has learned of her Jewish family roots. Her father died in 1996 and left her with family names dating back to the 1500s. She learned that all her relatives had left Portugal and Spain around 1500 and then found out about the Inquisition. A product of Catholic schools, she says, "I had no clue about the Inquisition!" She is "furious" that the Catholic schools never mentioned this chapter of Catholic-Jewish history.

After a search for her Jewish heritage (her family had tried to hide it), Rufina converted to Judaism 39 years ago. She says it was "cathartic" when the Kulanu newsletter published her story of return a few years ago. She went on to start the Saudades web site, and now has a forum of 800 people like herself who were once locked in secrecy, but are now telling their stories to one another. The forum is raising the funds necessary to send Yosef Mendes Rodrigo from Belmonte to Israel to study for the rabbinate. (To contribute, see Rufina's Letter on page 8.)

Our charming, knowledgeable Portuguese tour guide, Mariana Sande e Castro, was raised Catholic until the age of 6, when her parents shocked her by abandoning the Church. She had always had Jewish friends, and her mother had mentioned that the family had Jewish blood, but suddenly it was acceptable not to go to church. She describes a 1992 trip to Israel as "a deep spiritual awakening" that transformed her whole life. She attended conferences of Jews in Lisbon and Porto, became inspired by visiting Jews, met Jews "hiding" in Porto, joined Ohel Yacob in Lisbon, and thought of organizing tours.

Fittingly, Mariana's tour engendered "a deep spiritual awakening" for many of us traveling with her. To find out about future Saudades Seфарad/Kulanu conference-tours to Jewish Portugal, contact rufina@netactive.co.za.

The Kulanu Boutique

Also accessible online — with photos — at www.KulanuBoutique.com

Under One Canopy: Readings in Jewish Diversity, a 162-page book of poems, essays, stories, and songs by Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, African, and Asian Jews. *Proceeds benefit Kulanu.*

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! 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, in English, Hebrew, Luganda, and Swahili. *Proceeds benefit Abayudaya.*

Hand-crocheted Ugandan Kippot, dual-colored, pill-box shaped. *Proceeds benefit the Abayudaya.*

Hand-Woven Ugandan Tallitot, white with colored stripes, bag included. *Proceeds benefit the Abayudaya.*

Challah Covers from Ghana, very colorful with fine machine embroidery. *Proceeds benefit the Sefwi Wiawso Jewish community.*

Hand-woven Bnei Menashe Tallitot, white with black or blue stripes. *Proceeds benefit the Bnei Menashe.*

Hand-crocheted Bnei Menashe Kippot (skullcap shape only), muted colors. *Proceeds benefit the Bnei Menashe.*

Abayudaya: The Jews of Uganda. 160 pages of beautiful photographs with text by Richard Sobol, complete with a CD of Abayudaya music, with notes, compiled by Rabbi Jeffrey Summit, an ethnomusicologist. *Proceeds benefit Kulanu and the Abayudaya.*

Make Joy Not War, Alula Tzadik's CD of Ethiopian and traditional Jewish songs with a World Beat. *Proceeds benefit Kulanu.*

NAME _____ Tel # _____

ADDRESS _____

Email address, PLEASE _____

	Number	Cost Each	Shipping/handling	Total
<i>Under One Canopy: Readings in Jewish Diversity</i>	_____	\$15.00	\$4 in US & Can. (\$2 each additional)	_____
<i>Jews in Places You Never Thought Of</i>	_____	29.50	\$5 in US & Can. (\$2 each additional)	_____
<i>Shalom Everybody, Everywhere!</i> CD	_____	15.00	\$3 in US, \$4 in Can. (\$2 each additional)	_____
Cassette SPECIAL SALE!!	_____	7.00		
<i>Hand-crocheted Kippot of the Abayudaya:</i> pillbox-shape various colors (sorry, no returns!)	_____	15.00	\$4 (ea. addl. \$1)	_____
<i>Challah Covers from Ghana.</i> (for 12, \$20 each and \$10 shipping)	_____	25.00	\$4 (ea. addl. \$2)	_____
<i>Multi-colored tallit of the Abayudaya</i>	_____	100.00	\$6 in US and Canada	_____
<i>Tallit of the Bnei Menashe</i>	_____	100.00	\$6 in US, \$8 elsewhere	_____
<i>Kippah of the Bnei Menashe</i>	_____	15.00	\$4 (ea. addl. \$1)	_____
<i>Abayudaya: The Jews of Uganda</i> (List price \$75)	_____	52.50	\$7 in US and Canada (\$3 each additional)	_____
<i>Make Joy Not War</i> CD	_____	\$15.00	\$3 in US, \$4 in CA \$2 each additional	_____

Please add an additional \$15.00 shipping charge per order for international orders. _____

GRAND TOTAL _____

Make checks payable to "KULANU" — mail to Kulanu Boutique, 1834 Whitehall St., Allentown, PA 18104.
Please allow four weeks for delivery.

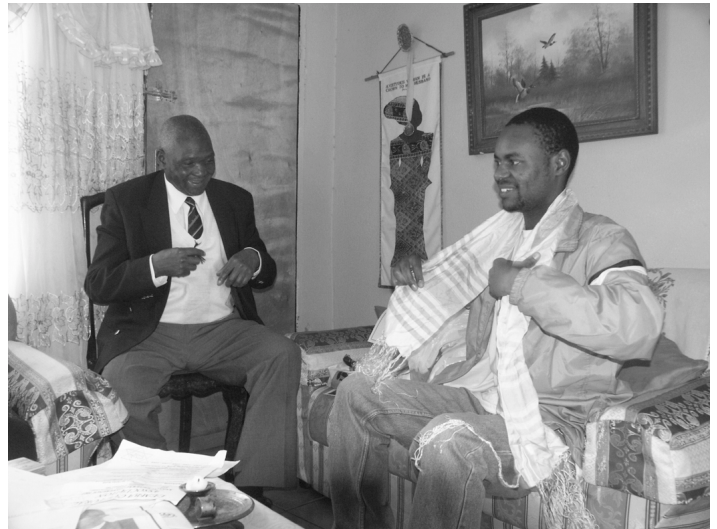
Visiting the Lemba in Soweto (cont.)

(Continued from page 13)

"Maybe the bell is starting to ring," he wrote back. "As for 'mwari,' the nearest I can think of is in Samaritan Aramaic. 'Mari' means 'My God.'"

I saw Rudo again while I was in Johannesburg, and I spoke to Edwin on the phone. None of the South African Jews I met (besides the woman who connected me to Edwin) had ever encountered a Lemba. Several of them were really curious to do so, but they were skittish about going to Soweto alone. There is no synagogue in Soweto, no Jewish cultural center, and no ongoing instruction. There is no place for South African Jews to meet the Lemba, who are dispersed throughout South Africa and Zimbabwe. Several rabbis and concerned Jews have gone to South Africa to give workshops for the Lemba, but the few-day workshops don't solve the problem. There needs to be continuity in teaching, so the Lemba who wish to can really learn about Judaism.

If you travel to South Africa, Thuli can take you to meet Edwin or other Lemba. It's a chance for you to open your heart to our long-lost brothers and sisters. You'll love Soweto--which is dynamic, fascinating, and now courting tourists. I hope that, over time, the Lemba who want to practice Judaism and belong to the mainstream will have the education and the opportunity to do so.



Solly tried on a tallit for the first time before his host, Edwin Mabudafhasi. Photo by Paul Ross

SUPPORTER APPLICATION

I/WE WOULD LIKE TO BECOME A SUPPORTER OF KULANU (MAIL TO KULANU, C/O BOGRAD, 165 WEST END AVE., 3R, NEW YORK, NY 10023)

NAME _____ DATE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE(S): () _____ EMAIL _____

INTERESTS AND AFFILIATIONS USEFUL TO KULANU'S WORK _____

___ \$25 SUPPORTER ___ \$36 SPONSOR ___ \$100 PATRON ___ \$200 BENEFACTOR ___ \$1000 LIFETIME SUPPORTER

Deadline for next issue: October 1, 2004

Recycled Paper

Edited by Karen Primack

Kulanu

Helping Lost Jewish Communities

**C/o Harriet Bograd
165 West End Ave, 3R
New York, NY 10023**

**Address Service
Requested**

Nonprofit Org.
US Postage Paid
Suburban MD
Permit No. 05107