

KULANU

“all of us”



Helping Lost Jewish Communities
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Unique Diversity Event Planned in Israel

At press time a unique literary event was being planned for February 29 in Jerusalem. T'mol Shilshom Bookstore Café was to host a reading by 10 writers who are among the 50 co-authors of Kulanu's newest book, *Under One Canopy: Readings in Jewish Diversity*.

The ten, all of whom live in Israel, include Schulamith C. HaLevy, Hadassah W. Harr-El, Gloria Mound, Michael Freund, Yitzchak Kerem, Emma Kimor, Sue Tourkin-Komet, Gila Green, Loolwa Khazzoom, and Ruth Fogelman.

The book, which was published in November, introduces the reader to an array of Jews of varied backgrounds. Sephardi, Ashkenazi, and Mizrahi Jews are represented. The continents of Africa and Asia are singled out, and special sections highlight Jews by Choice and Jews of Modern Israel. The book was edited by Karen Primack, Kulanu's newsletter editor, and is available through www.kulanuboutique.com.

Kulanu published this volume as a source for synagogue services, home ceremonies, communal gatherings, and quiet contemplation of the rich diversity to be found within Judaism. The canopy was adopted as a symbol of inclusiveness—a metaphorical covering over all of the Jewish people, open enough to let in all who wish to come and cozy enough to unite us.

Schulamith Halevy's essay and poem are dedicated to a martyr of the Spanish Inquisition in Mexico, Luis de Carvajal el Mozo. She writes, “When Luis learned from his family that he was a Jew, the impact was tremendous. A man of culture, letters and verse, who sang and played the harp, spoke several languages and possessed a grand spirit, Luis was unable or unwilling to conceal his faith. Instead, he went about trying to convince anyone he could to observe the Law of Moses.”

In her poem “A Jew Approved by HaShem, **Hadassah Harr-El** pleads,

*May all of us Jews without pretension
accept each other regardless of difference
Let's take down all those fences!*

From **Gloria Mound's** essay on Spanish *Anousim*: “We are free to observe our festivals, but if our forefathers in times of danger had not somehow remembered and tried to practice, would there still be Jews and a State of Israel? I admit I stand in Awe of their tenacity and faith.”

In his essay “Manasseh's Children,” **Michael Freund** writes of a moving visit by four Israeli rabbis to northeastern India, home of 4500 descendants of the Tribe of Menashe.

And in the essay “The Sephardic Experience in the Holocaust,” **Yitzchak Kerem** writes about the often-neglected World War II story of the Jews of Yugoslavia, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Rumania.

Emma Kimor writes about a visit to the Jews on the Malabar Coast of India in “A Visit to the Cochin Synagogue.”

And **Sue Tourkin-Komet** describes her celebration of her Ashkenazi roots by learning Russian in Israel.

Gila Green's Intifada poem about 170 deaths in Jerusalem reads in part:

*The sound must be like.
And the scene must look like.
And the ground must smell like.
The past.
Jews still tend to die en masse.*

Loolwa Khazzoom, of Iraqi descent, writes on her move to Israel: “Where else can I live in an apartment building in which Jewish immi-

grants from Morocco, Iraq, Tunisia, and Iran are all together—and with a Tunisian synagogue directly across the street? With Mizrahi identity reflected in my surroundings, I am free to focus on finding a place within my community, rather than educating strangers over and over about my community's existence.”

“If It's Dark Out,” by **Ruth Fogelman**, is the final poem in the book. A fit conclusion, it observes of the 70 nations of the world (derived from the descendants of Noah):

*Seventy rhythms beating simultaneously -
Each allowing the other space for its own interpretation.
Seventy instruments of the orchestra
Playing in harmony
The Divine Melody.*

Gala Purim Celebration For Uganda

Washington sculptor Gary Rosenthal recently approached Kulanu with an idea to use his Hiddur Mitzvah Program to benefit the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda.

His program ties the creation of beautiful ritual objects with service and education. One of his current projects is providing candlestick-making kits for workshops to benefit the Jews of Argentina. The completed candlesticks are given to needy congregations in Argentina or sold in the US to pay for monthly Shabbat dinners in Argentina.

Working with Laura Wetzler and Karen Primack of Kulanu, Rosenthal is providing a \$4000 grant to bring a special Purim celebration to Uganda. The funds cover food, transportation for all Abayudaya to come to the simcha, materials for adults and children to design costumes and masks for a contest, prize money for a Purim song contest, and transportation for a Megillah reader to travel to Uganda from the US.

The Megillah reader will be Rabbi Joseph H. Prouser of Little Neck, NY, who served on the Beit Din that converted over 300 Abayudaya in Uganda in February 2002. He will be traveling with his wife, Dr. Ora Horn, a Bible Professor and Dean at the Academy for Jewish Religion, with whom he traditionally shares the full, traditional congregational Megillah reading. Horn is a specialist on the Book of Esther, and the couple have both published scholarly articles on the Megillah reading. The couple's three children, aged 17, 15, and 11, will also be making the trip, and will be compiling a photo and video record of the event.

Rosenthal hopes to receive the best Abayudaya costumes and masks for traveling exhibits in the US, where he will publicize the remarkable Ugandan community. He also hopes to use the new Abayudaya Purim songs in his educational work.

Rosenthal is inviting social, synagogue, and school groups to hold Grogger-making workshops to support the Uganda program. Those interested can phone 301-496-5577 for information. Please turn your browser to <www.collectgaryrosenthal.com> to learn more about the hiddur mitzvah project where art is used as a catalyst for community building and service.

Lost and Found: Ecuadorian Conversos (Part II)

By Ed Samiljan

(continued from the last newsletter)

A half-dozen children were crowded onto a second-floor porch of the house, looking down on the festivities. An announcer began to speak in Spanish about the *Landa* and the proceedings.

Six boys, ranging in age from 3 to 7, with white smocks over their clothes, were seated on a table in front of the house. They were the center of attention of the crowd that sat or stood around them as if attending a theatrical performance. A group of six older men were selected, including me, and our names were announced over the loud-speaker. We were the first group of *padrinos* or godfathers who were given the honor of the first cutting of the children's hair. The boys' hair was tied in tight braids with bright purple ribbon. Some of the braids extended down below their waists. I watched as the first "elder" picked up a pair of scissors and snipped at the tail end of the braid of one boy. Then, he put a dollar bill into a plate that was hidden behind the backs of the boys and was unseen by the spectators. I followed and snipped the braid of the youngest boy, who sat at the end of the table very quiet with eyes like black olives. This youngster was perfectly still while some of the six- and seven-year old boys were very animated and talkative. When finished, I placed my dollar into the plate. Rae was called to participate later.

The *Landa* lasted for several hours, with the announcer exhorting the audience to volunteer to be a *padrino* and join the spectacle. When the haircutting was complete and the plate with dollar bills was overflowing, the children left the table. For the participating boys, this was their first haircut. Loud music began and many of the parents and families of the children danced in the same area where the haircutting had occurred. Still later, the audience would share the food that had been prepared. I was told this community *Landa* was the first in 65 years. The church looks upon the *Landa* as a secular or even pagan ritual.

The following day we set out to visit other families in a small city called Huaquillas in the province of El Oro. Each time we drove to a new city or village we were challenged with crossing sections of the Cordillera mountain range. The roads had been upgraded to asphalt in recent years but they are narrow and twisting in continuous tight turns. Because of our proximity to the Peruvian border, we were stopped at several military guard posts, but they waved us on. Late in the afternoon we reached Huaquillas, a seaport with many open-market merchants who sell to Peruvian tourists. Because of taxes and duties, Peruvians find it less expensive to purchase products in Ecuador. Unlike the previous towns we visited, Huaquillas was at sea level, and it felt like a beach community. We were able to get situated in a large hotel room with an air conditioner and hot water. Our guide felt that it was too expensive at \$25 per night, but we felt entitled.

That evening, we walked from our hotel a few blocks to the La Habana Restaurant, where we were to meet three new families with whom I had corresponded. Brothers Gerardo and Henry Ramirez, each with his wife and a single child, headed two of the families. Their friend Francisco Moncada headed the third family with his wife and three children. Unlike Zapotillo, where only the husbands spoke of their genealogical descent from the *Conversos*, in Huaquillas both the husband and wife referred to their descent. Henry is 29 years old and carried his new infant child. I estimate that Gerardo and Francisco are in their mid to late 30s. Gerardo's son appeared about three or four years old, while Francisco's children ranged from about three to 12 years old. There was loud music playing in the background, standard fare in many restaurants. We had to shout our conversation back and forth. The families were friendly and outgoing and we made plans to have breakfast at Henry's home the next morning.

(Continued on page 10)

Reaching the South Florida *Bnai Anousim*

By Yaffah Batya DaCosta

Kulanu Anousim Coordinator for the US

Many descendants of the *Anousim* from Orlando, Florida, with whom I worked had ties to those in South Florida, and as a result of many requests to visit, I decided it was time to go. I had a wonderful time! Over the High Holidays (September through early November) so many people showed me warm hospitality and genuine interest in the *Anousim* work that I could not begin to name them all. I don't think I have ever been treated so well by so many people! The results of our many interviews, meetings and discussions are as follows:

- 1) An assessment of the Crypto-Jewish (Hispanic) community in South Florida (Hispanics in Florida are over a million) clearly demonstrates that there are large numbers of people searching their roots and wanting a "path of return" to warrant the establishment of working groups led by descendants of *Anousim*. Working groups, established during my visit, wish to continue their approaches to Jewish institutions and other *Anousim* within a mindset that only other *Anousim* might utilize.
- 2) The incipient local *Anousim* Support Working Group of 10-12 people will be a direct result of warm encouragement from the established English-speaking Jewish leadership. Group members are eager to continue to network with one another and to form subgroups. The goal is the total integration of *Anousim* descendants into the Jewish community of South Florida. The working group, with rabbinic support, has developed some strategies for better communication such as outreach on radio, cable TV, public lectures at local hotels, university lectures, synagogue social events, and synagogue educational activities. Some of these activities are already ongoing but more funding is needed to fully use some of these options. Please remember "*Anousim*" when you designate your contribution to Kulanu. It is important to note that the Florida rabbis and their congregations are the major funders of current activities and without them none of this would be possible.
- 3) I delivered several synagogue and small group lectures (also at Florida International University) and many more of these educational events are being planned. People not only want to hear about the programs we have for helping the *Bnai Anousim*, but also have a lot of interest in hearing about an individual's personal journey of return, such as my own (which began in Massachusetts as a Catholic born descendant of *Anousim* from the Azores, where many Portuguese Jews took refuge). Personal narrative makes re-emerging *Anousim* much less hypothetical and something to which people can more readily relate. So many people have asked me to return to Florida and I already have events scheduled for my Spring 2004 visit, one of which will be a regional conference for Hadassah on May 2-3 to share with attendees the plight of the returning *Anousim*. Both the Kulanu board and I believe that the ultimate success of outreach depends upon how Jewish community institutions will respond to a very rich source of renewal: adding the descendants of *Anousim* to their ranks. I am humbled but honored to speak to these institutions as an illustrative example.
- 4) As I have indicated above, the rabbis have been the central figures in all efforts so far. It is not easy for them. In every synagogue there is some level of opposition. Also, rabbis have to deal with issues of unfettered return, return with doubt, or conversion without return. Many large rabbinic institutions and individual rabbis have taken these issues intensely to heart, always seeking a way to make the return sweet, joyful, and empowering for all the Jewish community.
- 5) Crypto-Jews in the Hispanic community overwhelmed me everywhere. I was invited to be on local radio and cable TV and to lecture (translated into Spanish) in a program hosted by Moshe Otero, "Ways of Israel" (<http://www.waysofisrael.com>), for their video archives. Otero discovered his Jewish identity in adulthood and has been reaching out to the Hispanic community of South Florida in the past year.

(Continued on page 5)

Abayudaya Recording Soars

Abayudaya: Music from the Jewish People of Uganda is the third and newest CD of Ugandan Jewish music. As was noted in the last newsletter, this compilation by Rabbi Jeffrey Summit was recently produced by Smithsonian Folkways. It has received many favorable responses.

On the November 30 broadcast of Weekend Edition Sunday on National Public Radio, music director Ned Wharton recommended the new Abayudaya CD as one of his picks for holiday gift-giving.

Reviewing for Amazon.com, Tad Hendrickson wrote, "One of the most interesting international and religious albums of the year, this music transcends its ambition of being Jewish music by and for Jews."

Music reviewer Dmitri Ehrlich, in the December 12 *Forward*, wrote of the new recording: "Listening to 'Abayudaya,' one is struck by the contradictory strains of ebullience, optimism and celebration in the voices, alongside a tenderness, fragility and pain that needs no translation. How did this small band of African Jews survive the murderous reign of Idi Amin, and how did they ever come to exist in the first place?"

Although the Kulanu Boutique does not carry this new CD, it is available through many online vendors and through Smithsonian Folkways by phone (800-410-9815 in US or 202-275-1143 abroad), or online <www.folkways.si.edu/orders.htm>.

What Better Passover Gift?

Passover begins on the evening of April 5

Among the 50 poems, essays, stories and songs in Kulanu's new book are:

- **The Four Questions translated into Luganda by Gershom Sizomu**
- **"Kimchee on the Seder Plate" by Rabbi Angela Warnick Buchdahl, a reminiscence of her Korean mother using the pickled cabbage delicacy in place of horseradish during Passover.**
- **"The Escape," Rose Bromberg's story about Ethiopian Jews making their way to Israel.**

UNDER ONE CANOPY: Readings in Jewish Diversity, edited by Karen Primack and published by Kulanu, contains many other gems by Sephardi, Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, Asian, and African Jewish writers. The proceeds of its sale support Kulanu's programs. Also, it's easy to order – either online at <www.kulanuboutique.com> or by mail using the order form on page 11 of this newsletter.

What Better Passover Gift?

Exploring the Future In Veracruz, Mexico

By Amichai Heppner

Regional Coordinator for Mexico

Last December, my wife Shana and I traveled to Veracruz, Mexico, as part of Kulanu's outreach to the emerging Anousim communities. We focused on Veracruz because, despite a half millennium of persecution by the Spanish Inquisition, people of Jewish descent in Veracruz are solidly committed to pursuing contact with the outside world. The Veracruz congregation is named Kehilat Beth Shmuel, after Rabbi Samuel (Shmuel) Lerer, instrumental in its formation in the early 1980s. Today the Kehilah has between 80 and 100 members, with about 20 to 25 people in 14 families representing the core group.

After Shana and I arrived at the Mexico City airport, we were met by Sandro Halphen, a Kulanu's contacts in Mexico who drove for five hours through the volcanic mountain range through the night.

We didn't have long to wait long to start meeting members of the Kehila. Even though we arrived at our hotel about 11:30 on a Thursday night, a welcoming committee was waiting for us at the front door. We timed our arrival to have maximum weekend time with the Kehila. They regularly do two weekly services, a Kabbalat Shabbat and a standard evening service with Havdalah on Saturday night.



At a service in the kindergarten building in Veracruz

Religious services are conducted by Joaquin Fentanes, the group's current leader, chazan, and teacher. The services are in standard Conservative format, with participation from the worshippers.

The current worship space is in a kindergarten, whose owners rent it out during off-hours. The meeting room has grand chandeliers and a lovely staircase leading to a wrap-around balcony. We didn't realize we were in a kindergarten once the door was closed on the play equipment.

The Kehila has been moving from place to place to hold their services and it obviously needs more space. At the first Friday night service we attended, a crowd of about 55 adults and children packed every seat in the house. Latecomers sat in the aisle, on the steps, and even on the terrace outside. A long-fostered dream is for the congregation to acquire its own building. Some years ago, a sizable building fund had been saved up, but then the community voted to support a number of families who wanted to move to Israel. Financing this move emptied their entire building fund.

This loss has by no means dampened the enthusiasm of the current membership, and they gave us a reception that was warm, generous, open, and loving. Someone was at our side every day, even when

(Continued on page 7)

KULANU BRIEFS

Kulanu Updates

Ahab Elijah is Kulanu's new coordinator for Nigeria.

The Kulanu board unanimously voted to present an award of a sterling silver Chanukah necklace to **Emily Chaya Weinstein** in recognition of her extraordinary service to Kulanu and its communities. Her many accomplishments include working as a volunteer with the Abayudaya in Uganda for seven months and as Volunteer Coordinator for Kulanu in the US (including development of a comprehensive volunteer manual). The necklace, fashioned by artist **Clara Castelar**, was donated to Kulanu by its creator.

Webmaster **Stevy Epstein** has given Kulanu website a new design, including a Search feature. Take a look at <www.kulanu.org>.

The Kulanu Boutique's mailing address has changed to: KULANU BOUTIQUE, 1834 Whitehall St., Allentown, PA 18104. A reminder: the Boutique continues to sell gift certificates. Check the link at <<http://kulanuboutique.com/giftcertificate.htm>>.

Speakers Spread the Word

Rabbi Darren Levine's talks in January included "Journey to the Abayudaya" at Woodlands Community Temple in White Plains, NY, and "The Lost Jews of Africa" at the Jewish Center of the Hamptons, East Hampton, NY.

Prof. Xu Xin of Nanjing University, an expert on Chinese Jewry, was on a North American lecture tour in January and February that brought him to Toronto, Miami, Houston, and Chicago. He lectured at Century Village, Deerfield Beach on Jan. 29 as a guest of Kulanu's South Florida chapter.

Romiel Daniel, Kulanu's Regional Coordinator for India, spoke on Chanukah and the Jews of India and conducted prayers at the residence of the Indian Ambassador in Washington. The audience of 200 included the Israeli Ambassador, some senators, and representatives from Bnai B'rith and AJC.

Judith Cohen and **Tamar Cohen Adams** performed at Toronto's Gelber Conference Centre on January 24. The program included Judeo-Spanish songs, songs from Crypto-Jewish regions of Portugal, medieval songs, and songs of the Sephardic diaspora.

Rick Gold spoke on the Jewish history of Timbuktu on January 11 on the South African religion radio program "Believe It or Not."

Portugal Trip Reminder

There may still be time to register for the April 18-28 Conference Tour to Jewish and Crypto-Jewish Portugal co-sponsored by Saudade Sefarad together with Kulanu and Root & Branch. Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum will lead this celebration of Portuguese-Jewish heritage "with the tenacious and brave souls of Belmonte and Portugal who retained their Jewish consciousness through 500 years of persecution." The tour includes a Shabbat reunion in Belmonte, visits with the *Bnai Anousim* groups throughout Portugal, tours to museums, a cruise, lectures, and cultural activities. For more details and booking, please contact rufina@netactive.co.za.

Rededication in India

The Magen Aboth Synagogue in Alibag, India, originally started in 1848 and rebuilt in 1910, was rededicated on December 28 after undergoing extensive repairs and renovations. Donors from India, Israel and the United States made this possible. It is the only synagogue in the Konkan district (comprising the villages where the Bene Israel first made their appearance in India more than 200 years ago) still in use by the Bene Israel. Kulanu's India coordinator, Romiel Daniel, called the rededication "a historic moment, as with the dwin-

dling Jewish population in India, every opportunity to preserve the legacy left by our forefathers is of vital importance. The synagogue was founded by my wife Noreen's great-grandfather, Moses Wakrulkar!"

Museum Exhibit on Cochin

Cochin Diary: Jewish Life in Southern India is the subject of the latest exhibition of the B'nai B'rith Klutznick National Jewish Museum in Washington, DC. Running from February 9 through March 31, the exhibit features photographs of the centuries-old Jewish community of Cochin, India, by photographer-anthropologist Joshua Eli Cogan.

The Museum has also organized a study tour of Jewish India for early 2005. Participants in *This Was Also My Home: A Historical Journey to Connect with the Jews of India* will visit many of the sites associated with India's three primary Jewish communities—Cochin, the Baghdadi community, and the Bene Israel.

The exhibition itself is described as a swirl of everyday, spiritual, historical, and anthropological imagery of an extraordinary hometown where Jews, Hindus, Christians and Muslims lived in harmony. Archival images accompanying the exhibition bring to life a thriving Cochin Jewish community in 1965 celebrating the Jewish holiday of Simchat Torah. Film clips reveal the thoughts and feelings of some Cochin Jews who stayed, and others who left for Israel.

This will be the inaugural exhibit in the newly-restored historic synagogue at 600 I Street, NW in downtown Washington. Exhibition hours are 11 am-3 pm; visitors must call in advance (202-857-6583). Information about the museum is available at www.bnaibrith.org. For more details contact museum@bnaibrith.org or call 202-857-6583.

Racially Diverse Chanukah Celebrations

The Institute for Jewish & Community Research held its 4th Annual Chanukah Celebration for racially diverse Jews in San Francisco's Bay Area. African American, Asian, Native American, Latino, and mixed-race Jews met for candle lighting, music and conversation. Rabbi Capers Funnye presided as spiritual leader, Miri Hunter Haruach led dancing, and Ethiopian musician Alula Tzadik played the Kirrar, a harp-like instrument dating back to the time of King David! Adult discussion groups included Gershom and Tziporah Sizomu sharing their experience of Jewish life in Uganda.

At the same time in New York City, the Manhattan JCC hosted a Chanukah party for racially diverse Jews, co-sponsored by Avecha Resource Organization, Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, Kulanu, NACOEJ, and the American Sephardic Federation.

Jewish Multiracial Family Retreat

The popular annual Jewish Multiracial Family Retreat will be held May 21-23 at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in Falls Village, CT. For information, see www.isabellafreedman.org or call Sharon Goldman at (212) 242-5586.

Film Notes

New York's Center for Jewish History hosted a Sephardic Film Festival in December that featured 11 films from Israel as well as communities in France, Turkey, Egypt, the United States, Morocco, Greece, Tunisia, Algeria and Azerbaijan. It was sponsored by Sephardic House and the Yeshiva University Museum.

Moving Heaven and Earth, the documentary about the Abayudaya (including the arrival of the Beit Din in February 2002) aired to a sold-out crowd at the DC Jewish Film Festival on December 10. Directors Debra Gonsker Vinik and David Vinik appeared as special guests.

BRIEFS

The latest documentary from David Vinick and Debra Gonsler Vinick is *Legacy of Our Ancestors*. In honor of the 350th anniversary of Jews in America, it explores the presence of Jews in six of the earliest colonies (NY, Newport, Charleston, Savannah, Philadelphia, and Richmond). The film recently began airing throughout the US.

Todah Rabah!

For donations to Kulanu —

\$1000 and above: **Drs. Jack & Diane Zeller, Lois Levy, Harriet Bograd & Kenneth Klein, Dr. Jules Harris, Lionel Okun, and Paul Freudenthal.**

\$200 - \$500: **Rabbi Ben Kreitman** (in honor of Karen Primack's work on the book *Under One Canopy*). **Gloria and Sidney Danziger Foundation, Larry Paul, Morris Feder, Peter Galgut, Marcia Kaplan, Mel & Margery Elfin, Jan Katz, Congregation Bnai Israel, Hillel House at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst, Joan Downing, Emanuel Yarmish, Temple Emeth, Ben & Esther Rosenbloom Foundation, Daniel and Cindy Kassman Paisner, Ira & Marilyn Polon, and Marvin and Alice Marguiles.**

\$100+: **Little Neck Jewish Center, Sherman & Rita Shapiro, Tifereth Israel Congregation, Kenneth P. Kahn, Martha Kahn, Steve, Aviva, and Shoshan Waldstein, Brian & Jen Primack, Barbara & Joseph Psotka, Daniel Y. Sachs, Dr. & Mrs. Kenneth Robbins, Dr. & Mrs. Yehuda & Catherine Sherman, Dr. Bernard & Debra Shleien, Dr. Byron & Joyce Hurwitz, Dr. Stanley Azen, I. Michael Goodman, James Feldman and Natalie Wexler, Joanne Kalnitz, Jordan & Sarah Hymowitz, Judith Lee, Libby Lovett, Lionel Okun, Marvin Wolf, Miriam Rosenthal, Mr. & Mrs. Frank Bachrach, New Atlanta Jewish Community High School, Norman & Elissa Chansky, Peggy G. Gillespie, Raymond Kaplan, Rebecca Cook, Rhoda Posner, Rochelle Larkin, Ron Guritzky, Sharie A. Chickering, and Stanley & Judy Tannenbaum.**

Rabbi Shoshana Hantman of Katonah, NY, sent chumashim to Nigeria, as did **Shaare Tefilah Congregation** of Silver Spring, Maryland.

Mazal Tov!

To **Aaron Kintu Moses**, who became a university graduate on November 21. He is a spiritual leader of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda as well as founder of the community's Hadassah Infant School.

To **Emily Chaya Weinstein**, who won first prize for photography in the Jewish Coalition for Service Web Contest. Her winning entry was a color photograph entitled "Hanukkah in the Abayudaya Community." It can be viewed at www.jewishservice.org.

To **Jen and Brian Primack** on the birth of their son **Micah Lev Primack** in January. **Karen and Aron Primack** are proud grandparents.

HAPPY PESACH!

Israelite Identity in Papua New Guinea

By Tudor Parfitt

(Editor's note: Some months ago, Kulanu received a message from Kathy Rowlands about the Gogodala people in northwestern Papua New Guinea, who believe they are descended from the Tribe of Benjamin. We asked anthropologist Tudor Parfitt about this.)

Is there anything to their claim? Probably not in strict historical terms, but what I did discover in Papua New Guinea was that there is a remarkable and widespread sympathy for and identification with Israel. In addition, there are a number of tribes which have created for themselves an Israelite identity; in the case of the Gogodala this is quite amazingly strong and they would, I know, love to have contacts with Jewish people.

A sign of the general identification with Israel is that on Israeli Independence Day the streets of Port Moresby were filled with supporters carrying Israeli flags and demonstrating in favour of Israel.

The Gogodala have a number of traditions and customs which they believe link them with ancient Israel. They got in touch with me and implored me to take DNA samples, which has now been done, and we await the results....

I think I have a more mystical approach to the question of their claims: that is, they have chosen to interpret data in a certain way and that fact of interpretation is a significant factor in their lives and also in the life of Papua New Guinea as a whole.



Florida Anousim (cont.)

(Continued from page 2)

6) Because privacy is often an issue, I spent time in small family consultations with many families of Crypto-Jewish ancestry. Although historically reticent, I was quite often pleasantly surprised to discover that they welcome recognition within the institutional Jewish framework.

7) On a very personal note, I have to tell you about my Davidic Harp (kinor Daviyd), from the House of Harrari in Jerusalem. In the course of my interactions with some rabbis, and individual Jews, they asked me to visit sick congregants (*bikur cholim*) to play for them. After these visits I could not but think that this is a wonderful time, even in the presence of illness, to be alive in the long and too often sorrowful course of Jewish history. I view myself as one of the !captive set free in accord with the prophets, now able to receive and give comfort within an expanding Jewish presence. I pray for every opportunity to do so again in 2004 in South Florida.

PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE

In order to reach Jews of Spanish ancestry, **Rabbi Emmanuel Vinas** has started a Jewish/Spanish newspaper called *Tora Tropical*. For information, contact Ernie Garcia at 914-966-4005 or email egarcia@thejournalnews.com.

According to a November 25 report by *The Daily Publico*, Portugal's 3000 Jews will form a new association next May, when Lisbon celebrates the 100th anniversary of Sha'are Tikva synagogue. The association will unite the Jewish communities of Lisbon, Oporto, Belmonte, and Faro.

The 528-page *Dictionary of Sephardic Surnames (Dicionário Sefaradi de Sobrenomes)* has been released by Fraiha Publishing House in Sao Paulo, Brazil. Edited by **Guilherme Faiguenboim**, **Paulo Valadares**, and **Anna Rosa Campagnano**, the dictionary is subtitled *Including New Christians, Conversos, Marranos, Italians, Berbers and their history in Spain, Portugal and Italy*. It lists 17,000 Sephardi and Mizrahi surnames, as well as all places where Sephardic communities lived in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, Asia, the Caribbean Region, and the Americas. For further information in Portuguese, see www.livrariacultura.com.br or www.sefer.com.br

The Gerard Ederly Sephardic Song Book for Voice and Guitar has just been released. The book contains 40 "musical gems" from Sephardi oral tradition, as well as a 17-track CD. To learn more, call Thia Knowlton at Sefarad Publishing (212-662-9712) or visit www.gerardedery.com.

"For First Time in Five Centuries, Portugal Readies a Kosher Vintage," by **Jerome Socolovsky**, was reported on the JTA wire on November 13.

Abigail Radoszkowicz, in her article "Nine Brides for Nine Bnei Menashe Grooms" in the *Jerusalem Post* of December 4, reported on simultaneous *huppa* ceremonies at Jerusalem's Great Synagogue for newly-converted *olim* from Mizoram, India.

In an emotional article entitled "We Were Robbed!" in the *Jerusalem Post* of November 12, **Michael Freund** recounts his visit to Palma de Majorca's medieval "Monti-Sion church, which was built over the ruins of a synagogue destroyed during the Spanish Inquisition centuries ago.

Freund argues: "Centuries may have passed, but that in no way dilutes Europe's moral obligation to correct what can still be corrected. There is simply no reason why buildings such as Monti-Sion, or Jewish religious objects which sit gathering dust in convents and monasteries across the Continent, should not be

restored to their rightful owners, the Jewish people.

"Europe does not hesitate to preach to Israel about morality in international affairs, even as they continue to enjoy the fruits of hundreds of years of pilfering and theft of Jewish property.

"The countless Jews who died on European soil over the past two millennia as a result of pogroms, persecutions, massacres, and expulsions cannot be brought back. But at least some of the communal belongings they left behind most certainly can...."

In the *Jerusalem Post* of November 7, **Michael Freund** interviewed Dr. Jorge Sampaio in an article entitled "Portugal's President: 'I am proud of my Jewish ancestry.'"

A January 8 item on *VOANews.com*, "Israel To Begin Moving Ethiopian Jews," reports on Israeli Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom's announcement that the Israeli government would begin moving 20,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel the following week.

A December 22 *New York Times* article by **Greg Myre**, "'Lost Tribe' Finds Itself on Front Lines of Mideast Conflict," reports on the newest group of Bnei Menashe *olim* settling in the 600-member West Bank settlement of Shavei Shomron while they learn Hebrew. According to Michael Freund, director of Amishav, the organization assisting these immigrants, the settlers gravitate to settlements because housing is cheaper and these close-knit communities are willing to absorb them.

A December 24 AP article by **Gavin Rabinowitz**, "Israeli 'Lost Tribes' Living in West Bank," follows up on the earlier story.

According to a December 10 JTA article by **Moiria Schneider**, Botswana has the only growing Jewish community in sub-Saharan Africa. The 70-member community consists chiefly of former South Africans attracted to Botswana by financial incentives. According to the article, "In Botswana, African Jews Ask Leader To Be Vigilant Against Terror," Botswana president Festus Mogae greeted the African Jewish Congress there in December.

Buzzy Gordon's JTA article of October 3, "Jewish Life Flourishes in China amid Spirit of Cooperation," reviews the synagogue options for Jews living and traveling in China and Hong Kong. In Shanghai, a new Torah recently arrived, and Beijing's first Jewish preschool opened.

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.

Exploring the Future in Veracruz, Mexico (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

we left for our return trip at 5 a.m. on Dec. 15.

Our main hosts were the Jimenez-Munoz family because Daniel, the son of that family, is in charge of outreach for the Kehila. Despite his youth (just 20 years old), the Board of Directors in our presence gave Danny wide latitude to work with Kulanu (which he officially joined after our return home). Danny's mwntor, Ari Herrera, is his uncle. Ari's time for liaison work is limited because he travels widely for his job and he has a new baby. He took every available free moment to be with us and share his thoughts and dreams about the Kehila.

The current leader in Veracruz, Joaquin Fentanes Nayen, and his wife Shulamit, spent many hours with us as well, freely letting us in on the history and the current challenges of the congregation. Another couple, Shlomo and Elda Valdez, also were much involved in guiding us. Founding members of the Kehila, they are now retired. Their two grown daughters, who live in the United States, might be quite useful in extending the ties between Kulanu and the Kehila.

My Spanish held up well at the four services and one board meeting we attended. I spoke about current Conservative practice in America, new ideas spread by Jewish Renewal, and the great breadth of Jewish culture worldwide. They were open to the talks I presented, and they participated with enthusiasm when I led services the second Friday night we were there.

We also helped arrange a teleconference with Rabbi Candy Lobb, with whom I've been studying Torah for the past year, to discuss the *parsha* of the week [Ex. 37]. This conference was a real trip, not only because of Rabbi Lobb's unique way of bringing Torah characters to life, but also because talking with a woman rabbi was a novel experience for the group. We discussed the enmity of Joseph's 10 older brothers and speculated what these brothers might have been up to when they took the family sheep to Dothan instead of Shechem. Obviously, it would be great if Rabbi Lobb or another volunteer rabbi would continue these teleconferences with the Kehila.

The Kehila is firm in maintaining the Conservative practices taught by Rabbi Lerer, but the lack of his guiding hand is obvious. He now is nearly 90 years old and retired to San Antonio, Texas. Therefore, we explored ideas for maintaining outside contacts, such as setting up pen pals and inviting visitors from the outside. The Kehila would appreciate visiting teachers who can do short courses in Jewish studies. Two Kulanu volunteers already have indicated an interest in visiting at Veracruz. I hope to arrange the first of these visits by next summer. Student exchanges also would be welcome and appear practicable. The best outcome of all would be if we could arrange at least quarterly visits from a caring rabbi, rabbinical student, or professional Jewish educator.

The Kehila hopes to grow along with the city that is its home. Obviously, Veracruz is expanding, and the Kehila is taking part in the planning for the expected commercial expansion to provide a spiritual home for Jewish families that might be among the newcomers. Even without this influx, the congregations leaders think there's enough interest from people of Jewish background for the congregation to increase by 30 families or more. They saw evidence of this potential when they rented a hotel room for a Passover seder last spring, and some 180 people showed up.

Shana and I hope that the contacts we established will lead the Kehila to taking a greater part in Jewish activities worldwide. *Ocho Candelas*, the video film Sandro Halphen made of life in the Kehilla a couple of years ago, will be a good vehicle for this. Sandro will be presenting his film to various Jewish communities in the United States, and Kulanu members already have started the process in Tucson, Arizona, and Denver, Colorado.

Those interested in helping or contacting the Kehila can reach me at Heppnershanamax@aol.com; phone: (954) 596-0484; or cell phone: (410) 491-2108.

Jewish, Iranian, and American: The Novels of Gina B. Nahai

By Mollie L. Berch

I became interested in the novels of Gina Nahai when I learned she was selected as one of the Outstanding Jewish Women Writers Around the World 2002-2003 by Hadassah International Research Institute on Jewish Women at Brandeis University.

Nahai was born in Iran. About 22 years ago, at age 16, she moved with her family to Los Angeles. A powerful storyteller, she is a professor of creative writing at the University of California.

Nahai's *Cry of the Peacock* (1991) tells the graphic story of the Jews of Iran – a desolate, persecuted people. The story is set against a background of various Muslim rulers. The novel begins with Esther the Soothsayer in 1796, continues through the years, and ends in 1982. Esther names her great-granddaughter Peacock and watches over the family until Peacock is 116 years old.

The book is filled with details of harems, ghettos, wealth, poverty, massacres, shocking cruelty, pogroms that go on for days, the plague, and conversion of Jews. I was amazed at the ignorance and superstitions of the rich and poor about the Jews and the lack of rights accorded to the Jews as human beings.

The story could be one of Nahai's family. Her grandfather was among the first Jews liberated from the ghetto and he prospered under Reza Shah. He insisted his three granddaughters get an excellent education. (Gina met her Iranian husband at UCLA.) The history recorded in *Peacock* is based on eight years of research. She studied an important book on Iran's Jewish history by Dr. Habib Levy. She collected tales and interviewed hundreds of Iranians – Jews and Muslims.

This novel is not easy to read. The misfortunes of the Jews over the centuries are shocking, and the many characters have names unusual for American readers. (Use the genealogy chart in the front of the book.) The book received excellent world-wide reviews and is certainly worth reading to understand Islamic society.

Nahai's second novel, *Moonlight on the Avenue of Faith* (1999), is set in Iran and America and has already been translated into at least 16 languages. There are three generations of women who deal with issues of identity as women, Jews, Iranians. Tehran's Jewish ghetto life is interesting because the Jewish life interacts with the Muslim life. This novel, a real "page turner," might change some of your ideas about identity, exile, and diaspora.

Her latest book, *Sunday's Silence* (2001), takes place mostly in Appalachia, with the main character a "picture bride" from Europe who becomes part of the fundamentalist snake handlers. She is an exotic stranger in a strange land.

Nahai's style of writing is unique, and this book, already translated into many languages, became a best-seller in Israel and is in paperback in Europe. The faith-healing movement in Appalachia and what it does to the children and their families is a gripping story.

I am sure we will be reading more about Gina Nahai. I hope so.

Fan Mail

I admire the work done so lovingly by Kulanu. I wish I could contribute more.

Helen Draher
Miami Beach

Thank you so much for my copy of *Under One Canopy*. I am already more than halfway through it and I have already learned so much about my fellow Jews everywhere! There is some wonderful imagery and writing here. What an honor to be part of this collection!

Paul Wieder
Chicago

LETTERS TO KULANU

After the October Synagogue Fire In Zimbabwe

We had a moving, meaningful Inter-faith Memorial Service in the cordoned-off street outside the burnt-out Bulawayo Shul. Chief Rabbi and Mrs. Harris were our guests and the Chief Rabbi gave an excellent keynote address. Representatives of the various faiths participated by saying a prayer or lighting a candle. Our new, young rabbi brought the meeting to a fitting end. The theme of all the participants was the brotherhood of man. The final message that was conveyed in the vote of thanks made by Rodney Lepar, who was one of the men who had miraculously saved the Torahs, was that though the building was destroyed, the spirit of the community was not extinguished. The program and all the arrangements for the occasion were very ably arranged by Shelly Lasker, one of the relatively younger members of our community. The controversy over which option to pursue continues. It wouldn't be a Jewish community if there were consensus.

*Ruth Feigenbaum
Bulawayo, Zimbabwe*

Ambassador's Ugandan Rosh Hashanah

I spent a fascinating weekend in eastern Uganda with the Abayudaya, the Ugandan Jews descended from a group which embraced Judaism in 1919 but had little contact with Jews in the rest of the world until the 1990s. The service in their modest synagogue was in Hebrew and Luganda, although the prayer books and Torahs were recently donated from US synagogues. (The siddur I got was published in 1951 and came from a congregation in Lawrence, Kansas!)

Three other American Jews and I drove the three hours to the town of Mbale and then another half hour over bad roads to the beautiful hillside that was given to the Jews in 1920 by the founder of the community, Semei Kakungulu, an administrator of the region under the British. Apparently having a lot of time on his hands, Kakungulu read the Old and New Testaments and decided that only the Old Testament made sense and decided to follow it. He circumcised himself and his followers and lived according to the commandments, which included Old Testament virtues of polygamy and animal sacrifice. Jewish merchants in the 1920s ended those customs, but then the Abayudaya had almost no contact with other Jews, and developed their service in Luganda or singing the Hebrew prayers to African melodies.

We arrived shortly before sundown, which allowed taking a few photos, since they are very strict Sabbath-observers. Also present were an Israeli woman and her American Catholic traveling companion, the only other foreigners among the 100 or so crammed in. Since there is no electricity in the area, turning on lights was not really an issue. There were candles and one kerosene lamp. The men sat on narrow school benches. The women were mostly on benches but some had plastic chairs. The singing in Luganda was inspiring.

They were excited to have an Ambassador at their services, and I got called to the Torah on Saturday morning and was asked to give a sermon. But the charm of the group is they do their own service their way. They followed the prayer book, but the tunes were original.

A kiddush followed each service. Friday night the wine was local banana wine mixed with orange concentrate. They made what they called "cholla" over a charcoal fire. The whole scene was much more authentic of biblical times, I expect, than the apples and honey brought by the Israeli. But they all thought it was interesting to learn about Jewish customs in the rest of the world. On Saturday, they added the local staple to the kiddush -- boiled plantains. Many of the Rosh Hashanah psalms and Torah portions (both the Torah and haftarah were read in Luganda) concerned things like rain, livestock, barrenness and childbirth -- much more relevant to their lives than most of ours.

It was an inspiring and fascinating Rosh Hashanah.
*U.S. Ambassador Jimmy J. Kolker
Kampala, Uganda*

JOURNEY TO THE ABUYADAYA: DAY ONE AND THEN SOME

By Rabbi Darren S. Levine

Up at 4:30 today to catch my five-hour flight on Kenya Airways from Johannesburg to Entebbe. The same airport in Uganda where, in the 1970s, armed terrorists hijacked a plane leaving Tel Aviv and grounded on the tarmac there. The Raid on Entebbe ensued, and Yoni Netanyahu, a sayeret officer in the Israeli Army, died.

No drama on this flight though; that came later. When the plane landed, I paid my \$20 arrival tax and exited Customs. Samson, Moses, and Aaron were easy to spot. Their kippot gave them away.

I had seen their pictures. I knew their story. Their cousin Gershom is like a brother to me. But as I crossed the terminal this morning, I realized that I only had the outside story. How can one really know a place without being there, and I mean being there in every way. And this was the precipice moment. I was about to go inside.

They reached out to me with welcoming smiles and strong embraces. They held me like family, which to them, I was. Aaron took my hand and we walked outside the terminal building. Samson and Moses had already scouted a taxi and the motor was running.

We crammed ourselves into a station wagon for the four-hour ride to Mbale. I squeezed behind the driver with Aaron to my left and Samson beyond him. We drove along a two-way highway through Kampala that we shared with motorbikes, bicycle taxis, and pedestrians.

Exiting the metropolitan area, we took to the countryside. Lush, green, and tropical. We passed Lake Victoria, the source of the Nile and of human civilization. Mt. Elgon in the distance cast a shadow on the forest ahead as we passed through villages, fruit stands, and broken-down cars on the roadside.

Then the sign, Mbale 60 KM. I recognized the name of this town. It's where the internet café is, the place where Gershom used to write me letters. Our first stop in Mbale was the Mt. Elgon Hotel inside the city center. JJ Keki met us for dinner. I ordered a local dish and we shared a large bottle of Sprite. We spoke about God, about prayer, about the Jewish community. They wanted to know who these people at Woodlands Community Temple are. Do I know this person and that person? The Israeli and American visitors that preceded me? I sat there thinking, these are definitely Jews. The first thing they do when they meet a fellow Yid is play Jewish Geography.

It was dark by the time we exited the restaurant. The five of us piled into JJ's small car for the 3-mile ride to Nangolo and Nabugoya Hill. My backpack sat over our laps in the backseat of his Datsun, bouncing around every time we hit one of the countless potholes or ditches in the road. We eventually arrived at the Hadassah Infant School - my home for the next month. The kids came running out of the building when they heard the car approach, an exciting event in and of itself in Nangolo.

"Mizungu, Mizungu, Mizungu," they shouted and laughed from a distance. Aaron said, "Rabbi, you are the tallest person they have ever seen." Some of the kids came up to touch my white skin to and to see what my arm hair felt like. One little boy, Ezra, just kept rubbing my arm and giggling.

After the warm welcome, most went off to bed. I was too excited to sleep. Aaron stayed up with me and we talked under a full moon for another few hours until it was obviously time to call it quits. Nineteen hours and over 2,000 miles of plane, car, and foot travel later, I crawled underneath my mosquito net and said the *Shema*. And there was evening and there was morning, Day One.

One Mizungu's Brief Report at the End of a Blessed Journey

I stayed at the Hadassah Infant School with Aaron Kintu Moses. We hired a painter and contractor to finish one side of the classroom block and to paint it with Primary School colors. We also painted a tree, a menorah, a *Magen David*, and the English and Hebrew alpha-

(Continued on page 9)

Update from Nigeria

By Remy C. Ilona

(Excerpts from Ilona's frequent email messages from Abuja, Nigeria, where fledgling Jewish congregations are forming among the Ibo.)

I waited for Saturday with bated breath. Would Israel Beth Knesset continue? At exactly 8 a.m. the original six arrived, plus two more. A staff member of a bank, and an employee at an international NGO. I am still too far from being competent enough to hold a service, but as we lack rabbis and as Gihon is too far (30 km) and with these gentlemen interested in Judaism, what do we do?

Last Shabbat I was totally unprepared, but in this one I was better prepared. I took out time to read Dr Gigi's prayer book, and from it we prayed as best as we could in Hebrew and English. For Torah studies, we studied Genesis 1, and all recognized that only HaShem the Creator, created the world...

At last one member called on me to explain what Israel gained by looking up to God since its birth over 4500 years ago. This question stirs the emotions. Do I start from Abraham and stop at the miraculous reclaiming of property (rebirth of Israel) in 1948? I brought out a copy of *Modern Jewish Life in Literature, Book 1*, and opened up to page 214: "We Alone Survived," by Solomon Goldman. Taking the excerpted story paragraph by paragraph, I answered his question. What greater gain is there than to be the only survivor among all the ancient peoples that first trod this earth, still using the same traditions, language, from Abraham to 2003? The story explains how and why Israel achieved this feat. Israel strove and strives to live by the will of the Almighty and to keep His laws. We ended by praying....

Hear O Israel. The Lord our God, the Lord is One. This everlastingly true statement is B. H. resounding among the Ibos again, the way I am sure it must have in the dim past, before evil and colonialism crept in. The following story is part of a series, and as the story unfolds you will see why I captioned it so.

Last Shabbat we expected a full house, because the information is spreading that the True Way (Judaism) is in Abuja.... A congregation that seven of us formed has 21 members as of today, and has even given birth to another one. As we were observing the first recess last Shabbat, (we normally use the recess period to go over the history of modern Israel), a founding member of Israel Beth Knesseth excused himself and went outside to stretch his legs. Barely five minutes later he returned, beaming with smiles, with two men following him. He introduced them as our brothers. All Ibos by tradition regard each other as brothers and sisters.... I gave them sitting positions and rushed outside for more colas and biscuits for them. When I got back the founding member told us that the two had been looking for us since 8 a.m. You may recall that I mentioned that presently we use my room; that's why we have not made a signboard. So it was tough for them to locate us. When I handed over the cokes to them, they put on their *kipot*, and said the prayers, but silently. When they had finished eating, and praying, they told us their story.

The older man, a native of Ebonyi State, Iboland, and his son were just taking their first step into rabbinical Judaism. The father was born 50-something years ago into a Christian home, but in a society dominated by Hebrewisms. He went to the usual Christian schools and ultimately learnt a trade, started earning a living, and married. His marriage is blessed with five children. He said that 10 years ago, he took a decision to leave Christianity, but to leave it and go where? He went to a Christian Sabbath Church. This institution is syncretistic; they observe all Jewish observances, and acknowledge Elohim as the only God, but they also read the New Testament. Also an observer can notice some Hebrewisms in it, in their propensity for prophesy. And when the Christian New and Old Testament clash in theological position they give the Old Testament precedence. (A Canadian Jewish visitor looking for Nigerian Jews was led by some Ibos to one of such churches, but he insisted being shown a synagogue of pure Judaism.) Some 98 percent of Sabbatherians are Ibos.

The man said that he found Sabbatherianism not entirely satisfactory, because he found the New Testament an oddity.... He said he saw the whole enterprise as confusing and left again -- for Messianism. He said in Messianism he had the opportunity to study and know the truth and finally decided to go for it: JUDAISM. But he couldn't immigrate to Israel. So he prayed to God to show him the way, and he started searching. He said that when he heard that there are congregations of Jews in Abuja, he couldn't hold himself in joy. The previous Shabbat he went with his son to Gihon, where he met Jews and confirmed that there are Jews in Nigeria. But they couldn't continue at Gihon, because they live 50 kilometers away, and transportation is quite costly. So they came to our service, which is quite far too, 38 kilometers away. The economy is bad, so I encouraged him to think about starting a congregation in his home. We all agreed to meet at Gihon next Shabbat. We also made a commitment to be sending a man to them every Shabbat till they come up to scratch. His congregation will also be a base for other 'returnees' who lack a place to congregate.

Before they left we gave them three Passover Haggadahs, courtesy of Mrs. Rachael Segal of Kulanu.

JOURNEY TO THE ABUYADAYA (CONT.)

(Continued from page 8)

bet. I taught the children *Modeh Ani Lefanecha* and reviewed some of the songs they knew from the past.

I spent two afternoons at the Semei Kakungulu High School. One day I taught a Hebrew lesson and the other was spent in a meeting with the staff and teachers.

My teaching at the women's group on Shabbat afternoons consisted of the Jewish wedding and the Jewish funeral according to Western Jewish customs. I conducted a mock wedding and funeral to show Aaron what it might be like to include such customs in his own life-cycle liturgy if he chose to. I emphasized that I was teaching Western customs, not so that they will mimic them, but so that they can use these as a framework to incorporate into their own customs if they wish.

One Sunday morning I taught the Yeshivah students how to chant three of the major trupp blocks from the Torah. I gave them the *Tikkun* that Rabbi Howard Gorin sponsored and showed them how to use it while reading Torah.

The last Sunday morning I was there, I taught about Yom Kippur and Purim and did some Torah study.

I conducted an unveiling for a member's wife who died last year, did a baby naming on Shabbat morning for a new infant, and gave Aaron a public blessing to celebrate his university graduation.

Regarding a water project, I brought back the plans, prospective budget, and letter from a local contractor. I also returned with about 50-70 hand-made *kipot* for selling.

I ate dinners at the homes of Israel Siriri, JJ Keki, Seth Jonadav, and with Aaron and Naomi. And I took Aaron's family out to dinner one Wednesday night to the Mbale Resort Hotel. His kids got a big kick out of the pool and the property there.

I hope the Abayudaya will be encouraged to continue to create their own music. The sense I had was that their desire to learn "our" melodies from our volunteers and teachers is a mixed blessing. They may be learning our liturgical melodies, but I fear that it is at the cost of creating their own vibrant African tunes that are germane to their environment. I did not get the sense that they have created anything new since the first Western visitor came to "teach them Judaism" a decade ago.

Lost and Found: Ecuadorean Conversos (cont.)

(Continued from page 2)

My principal contact in Huaquillas is Gerardo Ramirez. While Eloy Torres is president of the *Ben Levi-Loja* organization, Gerardo had been the group's vice-president. The physical distances between the cities of Loja, Zapotillo, and Huaquillas appear to be a barrier to developing a strong organization. Both brothers had attended the seder in Quito at the Jewish Community Center. Gerardo is a little shorter, a little darker than the others with chiseled features and a more classical Latin look. He manages a business that distributes supplies to the farm-fishery industry. Gerardo writes to me in both English and Spanish; he is married to Miryan Enith Correa.

In his email, Gerardo had emphasized several times his strong belief in his Jewish descent. In one letter he questioned why the Jewish Agency is committed to assisting Jews of Europe rather than Jews of South America. He is knowledgeable and well-read, and I am sure he is aware of efforts to aid the Jewish community in Argentina. Gerardo is proof of the success of the Internet in providing information to the far corners of the earth. He told me that he received religious literature from Cantor Andres Bonse of the synagogue in Quito and the weekly *Parshas* from the Internet. However, he lacks a *Tanach* and other important books.

Francisco Moncada is Gerardo's friend. He is European in appearance, about 40 years old, and travels throughout Ecuador as a salesman in the optical goods industry. He is married to Rosa Robles and they have three children. Whenever we met with families, parents brought their children with them. The following morning the children were kept out of school so that they might not miss any part of our meetings. I gave the children key chains with a Star of David and the children were delighted. Francisco's wife Rosa was animated and highly involved in all the discussions.

Henry Ramirez is the younger brother and is married to Sylvana del Rocio Ojeda. When I neglected to give a key chain to their infant son, Sylvana reminded me of my error and I dug into my backpack for another. Henry picked us up at our hotel the next morning to lead us to his home for breakfast. We walked for about 10 minutes to a commercial area where his wife operates a ribbon store for the retail and wholesale trades. Henry also operates a men's clothing business. To maximize a full life, Henry is also a student at the local university.

Henry is aggressively Jewish. His home is above the ribbon shop, but the door is next to the shop. On the front door is a Star of David about 18-20 inches from point to point and painted in gold. He told me that when they call to him at the university they yell, "Hey, Jew!" When I gave him a large mezuzah that I had purchased in Israel years before, we spent time discussing the proper way to mount it on the doorknob.

After breakfast, the mother of Gerardo and Henry joined us. She appears very Caucasian, very modern in dress and manner. When I broached the subject of religion she said that she was too old and too set in her ways. My conclusion was that Gerardo and Henry were making religious decisions for themselves and their own families, independent of their parents.

I asked the families what I might be able to do to assist them with their quest for Jewish connection. They asked for more cultural items such as books with Spanish explanations. They told me of a rabbi in Peru who had converted a number of Peruvians of similar background. I promised to follow through by seeking materials and individuals who might assist them in their dream of official recognition throughout the world as Jews. They recognize the challenge this might represent. In Huaquillas, my impression was these families have acquired a reasonable standard of living and are not seeking financial rescue, but a spiritual rescue. It is important for them to determine how they can enter the mainstream of Jewish life. How is their Jewishness to be validated?

From Huaquillas, at sea level, we traveled to Zaruma, a gold mining town in the mountains. There is a historical record of Jewish miners from Seville coming to Zaruma to work in the mines. There is also a record of four Inquisitions that followed them, up until the middle of the 18th century. I met a well-known historical writer in Zaruma, Dr. German Gallardo Cabrera, and I asked him how I could distinguish those persons of Jewish descent in Zaruma. He burst out laughing and replied, "We're all Jews in Zaruma. Everyone here has Jewish blood." He graciously invited us to his home for coffee and snacks. He asked if I wished to make a prayer over the food. I made a *motzi* in Hebrew and translated it into Spanish for his benefit and the benefit of his grand daughter. He followed with a prayer in German from Isaiah.

From Zaruma we drove to the village of Colay, a community of 70 farmhouses in which all of the inhabitants are cousins. The buildings have mud walls over a wooden substructure, with corrugated metal roofs. It was a rainy day and we traveled from the main road downhill for several miles over a bumpy dirt and gravel one-lane road to reach the center of the tiny village. The village center is U-shaped, with the school house on one side, a community center building on another, and several homes on a third side. In a damp community building we sat with two men who are brothers-in-law. They had been to the seder in Quito with the others from *Ben Levi-Loja*. I suspect that these farmers may not be literate. There is a Catholic Chapel in the community in which a visiting priest comes on a schedule and I believe everyone in the community is baptized and attends church services. Life here is dirt poor. The visit to Colay remains a sharp contrast to the visits in the other cities. Our previous interviews were with town dwellers of moderate means. Now we were interviewing members of a tiny, rural village with only the most basic of services.

The few families mentioned in this article are a tiny part of the Jewish story in Ecuador. In Quito, there is a magnificent Jewish Community Center and synagogue that is supported by 300 families. The new synagogue is stone in the colors of Jerusalem, with comfortable theater-style seating. Across a courtyard from the synagogue is a second building with a huge social hall on the first level. Down a flight of stairs there is a kosher cafeteria that overlooks an adjoining indoor swimming pool. Upstairs are rooms for teens, a health club and offices. On the other side of the cafeteria are meeting rooms. There is a nursery day school and a separate building used as a mortuary. The community is composed of mostly Ashkenazi Jews who came to Ecuador after World War II. There is little question of their financial success and no doubt of their Jewish identity. When I mentioned to their cantor, Andres Bonse—who hosted the seder for members of *Ben Levi-Loja*, that I am aware that in some Latin American countries there is tension between conventional Ashkenazi synagogue members and native-born descendants of *Conversos*, he told me that all Jews are welcome at their synagogue in Quito.

What comes next?

The literature describing the customs and history of the *Conversos* in Latin America and elsewhere is substantial. Sometimes the subject becomes almost a mythology that we have wished into being. Other times, I feel fortunate that, for whatever reason, during our lifetimes descendants of *Conversos* are emerging to express desire to reconnect with their ancient heritage. It is a phenomenon that challenges the imagination.

I started looking for these "lost" persons six years ago and I believe that this year I found my Ecuadorean Jews—more misplaced than lost. I plan to follow through by spreading awareness of the existence and activities of *Ben Levi-Loja*. Among the readership of this article are people who can relate to the yearning of these people. I invite your suggestions and advice on an appropriate way to satisfy their needs. I can be reached at esamiljan@cox.net.

The Kulanu Boutique

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

Under One Canopy: Readings in Jewish Diversity, a 162-page paperback 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 in two shapes, skullcap and pill-box. *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.*

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International Symposium on Judaism To Be Held in China

An International Symposium -- "Judaism and Society" -- in Nanjing, China, will offer an interdisciplinary forum uniting scholars, research fellows and teachers in exploring the latest discoveries, achievements, and developments in the study of Judaism. Not only will Chinese scholars in the field of Jewish studies have an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the core of Jewish culture, but foreign scholars will learn the latest developments in the study of Judaism in China. Organized by the Center for Jewish Studies and Department of Religious Studies at Nanjing University, with the approval of the Chinese authorities, the Symposium will be held in Nanjing, October 10-15, 2004.

The Center for Jewish Studies has organized two international conferences previously: "The International Conference on Jewish Studies" in 1996 and "The International Symposium on the History of Jewish Diaspora in China" in 2002, which were attended by over 100 scholars.

This Symposium will emphasize the intensification of Jewish studies in China during the last 15 years when Judaism became a formal subject of academic study. The theme of the symposium is "Judaism and Society." Organizers welcome papers dealing with the following topics:

- Judaism in formative period
- Social Functions of Judaism
- Judaism and Modernity
- Judaism and Its Relation with Society and Modern Jews
- Study and Teaching of Judaism at colleges and universities

Those interested in attending should contact Xu Xin at the address below. To submit a paper, please send an abstract of not more than 400 words to the symposium secretary at the address below. **The deadline is March 31, 2004.** The program committee will then send each applicant a conference program and visa invitation no later than April 30.

Optional activities before and after the conference include trips to visit Jewish-related sites in Shanghai, Kaifeng, and other cities.

Email: Xuxin49@jlonline.com

Mail: Prof. Xu Xin, Center for Jewish Studies

Department of Religious Studies, Nanjing University

Nanjing, 210093, China

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