

# KULANU

“all of us”



Helping Lost Jewish Communities  
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Volume 13 Number 1

Spring 2006

## “Anousim Corner” Forms In South Florida

By Jonatas Dias DaSilva

South Florida, with its many immigrants of Latin American background, is going through an interesting phenomenon. As many Latin families arrive in the Sunshine State, they are exposed to an incredible diversity of cultures and religious beliefs, making many of them realize the uniqueness of their own heritage. As in any community of Spanish or Portuguese ancestry, there is always a percentage of individuals who are of Crypto-Jewish background, whether they are aware of it or not. These descendants of the forcibly converted Jews (known as *Anousim*, or by the derogatory term of *Marranos*) of 15th century Spain and Portugal who know of their heritage are suddenly showing a strong need to reclaim their ancestry, their faith, and their right to be seen as lost sons who wish to return home.

A group of *Anousim* descendants started when individual Hispanics and Brazilians met during Shabbat at a synagogue in South Miami. These descendants come from places like Brazil, Cuba, Spain, Peru, and Colombia, and they all have amazing stories of self-discovery, hidden practices, and a deep longing to fully return to the faith of their ancestors.

These individuals have known of their ancestry for a long time. Each member had already been openly practicing Judaism for quite some time and most of them already read and write in Hebrew. Their diet is completely Kosher, and they all follow *Halakhah*. These descendants follow everything Jewish, never having anything to do with “Messianic-Judaism,” “Jews-for-Jesus,” or anything Christian (many of these groups prey on the *Anousim*). They practice with passion the true Judaism that was taken away from their ancestors centuries ago. They are enthusiastic about the fact that they never again have to be Crypto-Jews, but may openly be observant Sephardim.

As they met each other at the same synagogue, the decision to form a group was just natural. At their meetings and ceremonies they share a common history, learn more of their Sephardic heritage, keep the holidays together, and observe Judaism, each helping one another. When stories are shared, one can hear incredible testimonies, such as:

“My mother’s grandmother would always fast on Yom Kippur, all the girls in the family had to wash themselves in the river after their menstrual period, and the young ones could only marry a cousin in order to keep the family’s tradition. All of the blood in the meat was

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## 2006 Mitzvah Tour to Uganda

### It Is a Joy To Do This Work

By Laura Wetzler

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I am back from five weeks in Uganda, and I wanted to update readers on some of my recent volunteer activities as Kulanu’s Coordinator for Uganda.

During my recent visit, I was very happy to work with the community on over 20 projects. Abayudaya community leaders are an inspiration and it is a joy to do this work. **Rabbi Gershom Sizomu, Chairman Israel Siriri, Aaron Kintu Moses, Seth Jonadav, JJ Keki, Naume Sabano, Sam Wamani and Samson Shadrack** are doing such an incredible job as leaders of this growing Jewish community. The primary focus is community empowerment through education. Abayudaya leaders are hard-working visionaries who are doing remarkable things, with your support. Here is a sample of Abayudaya-Kulanu administered projects:

We cut the ribbon on **two beautiful new classrooms at Hadassah Primary School**, built with Kulanu grants from the Weinberg Foundation, Temple Beth El in Fairfield, Connecticut, and others. Lynne Elson helped purchase desks and chairs for these classrooms. Temple Beth El and Elizabeth Lewis helped sponsor **vocational education** this term.

There are **five new latrines and a new generator at Semei Kukungulu High School**, funded by Seattle Rotary through the efforts of Peter and Hinda Schnurman, administered by Kulanu. Hadassah Primary School is in need of similar latrines. We would love to do more with Rotary International, a great organization — are any of you are members?

**We opened the new chemistry lab classroom at SKHS, thanks to help from young Kulanu fundraiser Navit Robkin. Science, math and computer teacher-volunteers are greatly appreciated in the community. David Wise recently helped enormously volunteering this past summer teaching math at SK High, and is currently trying to raise money for Ugandan curriculum-based math textbooks for a return visit in 2006.**

We also said a *Shehechianu* at a **beautiful new synagogue building and large new water catchment tank at Namatumba**, built with Kulanu donations from Woodlands Temple in White Plains, NY, through the efforts of Roberta Roos and Jeanne Bodin. Roberta and Jeanne are also very active with Abayudaya Women’s Association projects.

Kids from poor families are able take their **Ugandan national school exams at SKHS** this year thanks to the Jack and Pauline Free-

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### FIRST ABAYUDAYA SABRA

*Tziporah Naisi and Gershom Sizomu announce the birth of daughter Naavah Sizomu in Jerusalem in February — the first Abayudaya Sabra (Israeli-born Jew)*

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.

## From the President

# Tutsi in Burundi Are Scheduled for Genocide

By Jack Zeller

All Tutsi in Burundi are essentially scheduled for genocide. Do everything you can to help get anyone out of Burundi. It is not the cows, it is the Tutsi who have to go in the view of the Hutu. Under a democratic system with no human rights, death is inevitable. I wish that would not be. But to wish and pray alone is not enough. My family in Europe prayed much more than I ever have and they died. From a religious view, I refer you to the biblical scene when Moses comes to the edge of the water pursued by the Egyptians. Moses prays and God says this is not a time to pray.

The Tutsi are culturally very different from the Hutu. It is true that the Tutsi are the descendants of the ancient Kush of the Bible and like Jacob in the Bible are brilliant in the mastery of animal husbandry. They have hundreds of cows that produce massive volumes of milk and dung for fuel and fertilizer. Under the previous Zagwe dynasties there was no genocide.

But the Belgian colonialists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century did not want to compete with the Tutsi monarchy and deposed them all. While monarchy may sound old fashioned, it worked. For example, slavery was prohibited and human rights were protected. The Arab slave traders hated the Zagwe dynasties since they protected run-away slaves and gave them land. But it was the Europeans who destroyed the ancient peaceful life, not the coastal Arab slave traders.

As a Jew, I understand genocide. I have been to the US Congress many times warning of the genocidal plans against the Tutsi. But it will take more than a few people. We need a large advocacy. More people are killed in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa than anywhere else in Africa. The Sudan gets all the publicity but that is because the press finds a favored topic and just milks it forever. Still, the US just talks and talks about the Sudan. Why? First off, because there is a view that poor people are not worth much more than nice words. There is also Saudi Arabian Islamic presence in Sudan, and no one wants to fight all that power. Third, oil money speaks for everyone, even you and me. Lastly the problem is us. When I go to Congress I am told that no one cares about the Tutsi and those few people who do say anything often say unkind things. They say the Tutsi are arrogant, greedy, ugly, and domineering. But I know many Tutsi and I have never met anyone who meets that profile.

There are enormous problems, but I beg for you not to shun the fight for the lives of the Tutsi or any people who are hated irrationally. The irrational hate, condoned by silence or meaningless interventions that paper over hateful words and behavior, is a disease that spreads. Those who believe in their immunity will find, too late, there is none!



# Synagogue-Searching in Kerala, India

By Ann R. Haendel

After reading Karen Primack's article in a Kulanu newsletter last year, I knew I *had* to seek out synagogues in and around Cochin in southwest India. So in January 2006, after completing an American Jewish World Service assignment on the southeast coast of India, I headed by overnight train to the state of Kerala, in which Cochin is located.

Karen had described not only the well-known Pardesi synagogue in Mattancherry but also her discovery of the Kadavumbagam Synagogue in Ernakulam. Ernakulam, like Mattancherry, is one of several districts comprising the city of Cochin (Kochi). Another of Cochin's districts is Fort Cochin where I was planning to stay.

Accompanied by a Christian Scientist colleague whose enthusiasm for finding the Kadavumbagam Synagogue nearly matched my own, we set off in early morning by ferry from Fort Cochin to Ernakulam. Upon arrival we hailed an auto-rickshaw and after many inquiries and much circling around, finally located Ernakulam's Jew Street and the flower and fish shop called Cochin Blossoms. The present entrance to the Kadavumbagam (Bay of the River) Synagogue is through the shop.

Our persistence paid off. We found the proprietor of Cochin Blossoms, Elias (Babu) Josephai, waiting on customers. As for the synagogue which Karen had found replete with ark and chandeliers in "clean and excellent condition," we viewed it piled high with furnishings still in paper wrappings and sealed boxes toppling and spilling onto available floor space.

Mr. Josephai took time out to explain the synagogue's history, including the laying of the stone foundation in 1200 CE and the rebuilding in 1700 CE. The synagogue design, he said, is a replica of the First Temple in Jerusalem; its ten windows symbolize the Ten Commandments. He left me to research the rest by giving me his e-mail address as well as that of Dr. Kenneth Robbins who had recently visited with him.

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## Introducing Tebeka

Tebeka is the name of the Center for Legal Aid and Advocacy for Ethiopian Israelis. It is critically important in a country where common law, Israeli law, Turkish law, and Israeli military law seem to apply mysteriously.

Most of the 85,000 Ethiopian Jews in Israel live in poor neighborhoods in a few localities, and their transition from rural Ethiopia to the industrialized Israeli society has been problematic. Prejudice and racism seem widespread. According to statistics from the Adva Institute, 47% of members of the community aged 25–54 are not part of the labor force; some 72% of children of Ethiopian origin live in households in which the income is below the poverty line; and 6.2% of schoolchildren aged 14–17 drop out of the education system (compared with 3.5% of the population as a whole).

The Ethiopian Immigrant Center for Legal Community Advocacy was established in Tel Aviv by educated members of the Ethiopian community. Its director is Itzhak Dessie, the first Ethiopian-Israeli lawyer.

Guidance and legal aid are provided every month to some 50 people who contact the organization's office in Tel Aviv

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# In Search of Zimbabwe's Jewish Architecture

By Jay A. Waronker

As part of my Fulbright grant under their African Regional Research Program to document Western Jewish architecture in five southern African nations, I arrived in Zimbabwe in early May 2005. This was my first visit to the country, formerly known as Rhodesia, so troubled in recent years by the autocratic policies of President Robert Mugabe.

Once an African economic powerhouse, hyperinflation, chronic unemployment, a persistent fuel shortage, unjust elections, the questionable seizure of private property, an erosion of staple crops, food shortages, restricted personal freedoms, the departure of the white community, a decline of foreign trade, and a bizarre government initiative to 'clean up' residential and business districts by demolishing them overnight and leaving people homeless have now created a truly depressing and destructive environment. As a result, most Zimbabweans of all races and backgrounds have suffered immensely.

Yielding to the advice of the US Embassy in Harare, I postponed my planned date of entry into Zimbabwe until after a national election in February 2005. The previous one had resulted in demonstrations and civil unrest. With all calm, I began my documentation of the country's synagogues and other Jewish architecture in the spring of that year. Despite Zimbabwe's hard times, I found aspects of the country pleasing and admirable: a perfect climate, genial people, a respectable educational system, the spectacular Victoria Falls, and remnants of a good infrastructure along with impressive urban planning. What will linger most in my mind, however, was the remarkably hospitable and helpful Jewish community. At one time the country was home to some 9,000 Western Jews, but in recent years the number has steadily declined. They have emigrated mostly to South Africa, Australia, England, Canada, or the United States. Today there are fewer than 400 remaining, with nearly all in the capital city of Harare (200) and the second largest city, Bulawayo (120). With so few in numbers, they are a close-knit group who are determined to maintain a strong Jewish identity within a beleaguered homeland.

Travel in Zimbabwe has been made difficult by an ongoing fuel crisis. Many oil producing countries are unwilling to sell 'petrol' to the government-controlled energy industry due to the dire economic situation. After several weeks in Harare, where I methodically documented the Sephardic synagogue and community hall of 1958, the Ashkenazi synagogue and social hall of the early 1970s, an earlier synagogue and hall from the 1920s sold in the early 1970s when the congregation outgrew it, a cemetery chapel from the 1970s (with monkeys scampering about the grounds), and two earlier houses once used by the now-defunct Progressive Jewish community, I set out to visit the other Jewish buildings throughout the country. Part of this journey was made possible when I was offered a comfortable ride to Bulawayo by Irene and John Fox, a local Jewish woman and her husband. The way back to Harare, however, would be on my own.

Jews have lived in Bulawayo, today a mid-size modern city with the feel of the American mid-west, since the ox and wagon days of 1880s, before the railway line reached it. The Jewish contribution to early Bulawayo came in many forms – from trade and commerce to culture and local politics. In fact, Bulawayo was the first city in the country to have Jews and where the earliest synagogue was founded in 1894. During the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, due in part to the boom in gold mines and agriculture, the city's Jewish population grew rapidly and a religious school was founded. From WWI through the 1930s, the community stagnated, only to grow once again in the late 1930s. Jews remained as shopkeepers but there was a new tendency for the younger generations to enter various professional careers.

The WWII years saw limited anti-Semitism and a lull in the Jewish community, although several Jews served in the colonial army. The 1950s were a very good time for the Jews of Bulawayo during its booming economy, and they became active politically, economically, and socially.

Bulawayo remains a decent city that has kept far more of its architectural heritage intact than Harare. Dozens of colonial era late 19th and early 20th century structures remain in good condition throughout the downtown core, and residential districts featuring appealing bungalows and cottages can be admired. A few Jewish-owned businesses remain in or near the downtown core.

Set on the edge of the downtown area, on the corner of Third Avenue and J. Moyo Street, is the former Bulawayo Hebrew Congregation, a building dating from 1911. Across the street, and now a part of a local college, are two well-maintained buildings that once served as a Jewish school and social hall. Although religious services were held previously in several other places, including the Charter Hotel in the 1890s, Meikles Store, Stock Exchange Hall, and the Williams' Building, this was Bulawayo's (and Zimbabwe's) first synagogue. A building had been designed in the mid-1890s, although it was never realized. The second attempt proved successful, with MacGillivray and Grant as its architects and Sellick and Company serving as the contractors of the built neoclassical design. While a stately building, it has odd proportions – its width being too great in relation to its height. By 1939, the synagogue was already too small, but deliberation on how to extend the structure went on for years, and it was not until 1962 that a sizeable addition was completed. This expansion seemed to collide with the old in a less than sympathetic fashion – the two parts never coming to terms with one another or establishing a dialogue.

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## NEWS FROM CHINA

### An Invitation from Xu Xin

Nanjing University Prof. Xu Xin writes, "A great deal was accomplished this winter during my 10th enjoyable and fruitful visit across the U.S. In addition to visiting colleges, universities, and numerous organizations, my main mission was to plan the dedication of the new Glazer Center for Judaic Studies at Nanjing University, and I am delighted to announce that on November 21, 2006, dedication ceremonies will be conducted at Nanjing University. You are invited to join us for the dedication!"

The keynote speaker at the dedication will be Dr. Alfred Gottschalk, Chancellor Emeritus of Hebrew Union College. The center, which originated in 1992, desperately needed new space, and in 2001 Xu launched the expansion program. The new building will house classrooms and a library, and will serve as the core of research opportunities on Judaic topics for Chinese students and scholars.

The new center needs new or used books on Jewish history and culture. These can be sent most reasonably by US post office "M Bags" and should be sent to Prof. Xu Xin, Center for Jewish Studies, Department of Religious Studies, Nanjing University Nanjing, China 210093. For further information contact [xuxin49@jlonline.com](mailto:xuxin49@jlonline.com).

Funds are also being solicited. A donation of \$250 will cover a scholarship for one student for a year of work in MA or Ph.D. programs in Judaic Studies. Tax-deductible contributions may be made to the Sino-Judaic Institute, 232 Lexington Drive, Menlo Park, CA 94025 (note on the check that your gift is for Nanjing programs).

In other news, a new series of children's books and accompanying dolls about Jewish girls -- similar to the American Girl series -- plans a summer release of "Reyna and the Jade Star," by Robin K. Levinson. It tells the story of a young girl from Kaifeng in the 12th Century. For more information, see <http://www.galigirls.com>, or contact the founder of Gali Girls, Aliza Stein, at [support@galigirls.com](mailto:support@galigirls.com)

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## Making Kulanu Donations Online

Kulanu will soon be accepting donations online! You'll be able to pay securely with Visa or Master Card. Around June 1, watch for the "Donate Now" link both on Kulanu's home page, [www.kulanu.org](http://www.kulanu.org), and on our "getting involved" page, [www.kulanu.org/getinvolved/get-involved.html](http://www.kulanu.org/getinvolved/get-involved.html). Contributors will be able to add a note in the comments line to honor or remember someone with their donation, or to designate a gift for one of Kulanu's special funds. Of course, donors will always have the option of mailing in donations (see the Supporter Application form on the back page of this newsletter). For further information, contact Harriet Bograd, Kulanu's treasurer, at [hbograd@gmail.com](mailto:hbograd@gmail.com) or 212-877-8082.

## A New Kehila in Spain?

Pedro Escobar (Saul Eitan), a convert descended from *Anousim*, wants to start a Jewish *kehila* (community) in Almeria, Spain, his family's home town since 1573. He notes that the last families of Jewish Almeria's *kehila* left on June 29, 1492. He is hoping the idea will attract the interest of Almeria's resident British, French, Dutch, and Argentinian Jews. Those interested are invited to check his web blog at <http://kehiladealmeria.blogspot.com/>. He can be reached at [pedro.escobar@telefonica.net](mailto:pedro.escobar@telefonica.net).

## Speakers Spread the Word

**Jonina Duker** will be leading a workshop at the CAJE annual conference on August 6-10 at Duke University. Titled "Genealogy of the Jewish People: Lost and Dispersed Jewish Communities," it will focus on how and when segments of the Jewish people were cut off from the mainstream.

**Jonina Duker** will again be speaking on Jewish descent, this time at the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies on August 17 in NYC. This workshop will focus on methods for identifying Jewish descent, including linguistics and naming patterns; oral traditions; geographic migration and dispersion patterns; and DNA studies.

**Ehav Eliyahu** was scheduled to present a talk on "Jewish Migrations into West Africa" on May 17 at Shearith Israel in NYC.

On May 3, artist **Riki Mullu**, president of Chasida Shmella (the Ethiopian-Israeli Jewish community of North America and Israel) and **Prof. Stephen Spector**, author of *Operation Solomon: The Daring Rescue of Ethiopian Jews*, spoke at the Manhattan JCC in a program entitled "Yom Ha'atzmaut and the Ethiopian Zionist Experience."

The Center for Jewish Studies and the Institute for Sephardic Studies at the Graduate Center of City University of NY sponsored three free lectures in cooperation with the American Sephardi Federation with Sephardic House. On March 8 **Prof. Renee Melammed** of Yale University spoke on "An Unknown Ladino Poetess on the Holocaust in Salonica." On April 5 **Prof. Miriam Bodian** of Touro College discussed "Jewish Martyrs of the Inquisitions of Spain and Portugal." On May 3 **Prof. Yael Feldman** of NYU spoke on "The Land of Isaac: A Zionist Image Then and Now."

On April 4 **Shlomo Berihun** was the speaker at the Squirrel Hill JCC in Pittsburgh. An Ethiopian-born immigrant to the State of Israel, he helped develop the first program for advancing Ethiopian soldiers to become officers in the Israel Defense Forces.

On April 3 **Rabbi Howard Gorin** spoke in NYC on "Jews of Nigeria: An Eyewitness Account." The talk discussed his travels to Nigeria at the invitation of the elders of the Union of Conservative Judaism of Nigeria Hebrew Communities. For further information see [www.rabbihowardgorin.org](http://www.rabbihowardgorin.org).

April 3 was also the date of a program opening an exhibition titled "Cochin Diary: Jewish Life in Southern India," sponsored by the American Sephardi Federation with Sephardic House. Speakers were **Ambassador Neelam Deo**, **Dr. Kenneth Robbins**, and **Joshua Eli Cogan**. The exhibit, which features the photographs of Joshua Eli Cogan and items from the collection of Dr. Kenneth Robbins, runs through June 30 at Sephardic House, 15 West 16th Street, NYC.

Magen David Sephardic Congregation in Rockville, Maryland, presented a "Sephardic Spotlight on the Jews of India" on March 26, with a film, panel discussion, and array of Indian desserts.

Ugandans **JJ Keki** and **Seth Jonadav** joined Thanksgiving Coffee staffers **Ben Corey-Moran** and **Holly Moskowitz** on a US speaking tour in March to introduce Mirembe Kawomera Coffee. Their stops included synagogues, churches, and colleges. For more information, see [www.mirembekawomera.com](http://www.mirembekawomera.com).

Georgetown University's Program for Jewish Civilization, the African Studies Program, and the National Resource Center on the Middle East presented on February 22 "Ingathering of the Exiles: The Story of the Ethiopian Jews" with **Rabbi Sharon Shalom**, the first Ethiopian-Israeli to teach at Bar Ilan University. On the same day he also spoke at the University of Maryland Hillel about "Halakha, Custom, and Tradition in the Ethiopian Community." And on February 28 he spoke on "Ethiopian Traditions and Israeli Judaism" at the Bronfman Center in NYC.

## Jerusalem Prize Awarded to Shavei Israel

The Jerusalem Prize has been granted to Shavei Israel; the award plaque was presented to Michael Freund, the founder-director, by Gonen Ginat, editor of *HaTzofeh*. Shavei Israel was cited for assisting Jews and their descendants all over the world in returning to Judaism: "Whether assisting crypto-Jews in Spain, Subbotnik Jews in Russia, B'nei Menashe in India, the Moroccan Jews living in Peru or those elsewhere, Shavei Israel - acting through determination and sensitivity, as well as with an overarching sense of humanity - welcomes these souls back to our people."

## Historic Seders in Italy

For the second time in 500 years, rabbi-conducted community Passover seders were held in Sicily and southern Italy for descendants of *Anousim*. Conducted by Rabbi Barbara Aiello, the seders this year were held in Palermo (Sicily) and Lamezia Terme (Calabria). For further information contact [rabbi@rabbibarbara.com](mailto:rabbi@rabbibarbara.com) and see <http://www.jewishroots.it/>.

## Haggadah in Mizo and Thadou-Kuki

It may not be a best-seller worldwide, but the Bnei Menashe of northeastern India surely appreciate the new Haggadah published by the Shavei Israel organization. It contains a transliteration of the traditional text of the Passover seder along with explanatory notes in the Mizo and Thadou-Kuki languages, two of the main dialects spoken by many Bnei Menashe.

## Bnai Anousim Gather in Barcelona

Close to 100 Bnai Anousim from across Spain and Portugal recently gathered in Barcelona for an annual seminar and communal Sabbath organized by the Shavei Israel organization. The seminar, entitled "The Relevance and Significance of Judaism and its Precepts in Our Times," brought together rabbis, historians and academics from Israel, Spain and Portugal. In addition to traditional Sabbath prayers and festive meals at Barcelona's main synagogue, the program included a day-trip to Gerona, where the great Biblical commentator Rabbi Moses ben Nachman, known as the Ramban or Nachmanides, was born in 1194. Participants also held a special memorial service to

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commemorate the 500th anniversary of the Lisbon Massacre.

## Film News

>*Jews of Iran*, a 2005 Dutch documentary directed by Ramin Farahani, was scheduled to air at the Washington Jewish Film Festival on May 8.

>Brooklyn Academy of Music's Israel film series included, on April 1, *Black Israel*, a 2003 film directed by Maurice Dorés. The film tells the stories of Caribbean, African, and African-American Jews who call either Israel or the US their home. From Lagos, Nigeria, young men travel to study with the dream of returning home to start a synagogue. Others have moved to start a new Jewish community and a soy-food business in Israel. In Harlem a congregation of Ethiopian Jews thrives. Film maker Maurice Dorés lived several years in Senegal, West Africa, and worked in the departments of Ethnology and Psychology at Paris University. He has produced documentary films on Africa and published two books, *La Femme Village, Maladies Mentales et Guérisseurs en Afrique Noire*, (*The Village Woman, Mental Diseases and the Healers in Black Africa*), and *La Beauté de Cham, Mondes Juifs, Mondes Noirs*, (*The Beauty of Ham, Jewish Worlds, Black Worlds*).

>The film *Live and Become* was shown on April 10 at the Manhattan JCC. Directed by Radu Mihaileanu, it deals with an Ethiopian Christian child who assumes a Jewish identity and is adopted by an Israeli family.

>The documentary *The Star Hidden in the Backlands*, by Elaine Eiger and Luize Valente, about crypto-Judaism in Brazil, was scheduled to come out on DVD in March. The DVD is in Portuguese and includes options for subtitles in English, French, and Spanish. In addition, the DVD provides extra footage (with exclusive interviews with Rabbi Weitman, professors Nathan Wachtel and Anita Novinsky) and sound bites with photos of the movie tour around several major cities where the documentary was screened.

## Demolition of Tajik Synagogue

Demolition of Tajikistan's only synagogue began in February, when demolition crews destroyed part of the synagogue's property, including the ritual bath and classroom space. According to local residents, the road to the synagogue was damaged and people now have to walk over demolition waste to get to the synagogue. The remaining part of the old one-story building is slated for demolition later to clear the site for a Palace of Nations and an adjacent National Park. The World Jewish Congress has asked UNESCO to fight to save the building.

## A Rich Website from Steven Spielberg

A reader alerted us to a truly wonderful site which contains many films of the Israel Music Heritage Project, from the Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive. Among the many offerings is *Toward Jerusalem: Music of 7 Communities*, a film that shows Jews of India, both Kochin and Bene Israel, and their music. Select the "Jewish Communities" tab and scroll through the offerings for this film. The site is located at <http://www.spielbergfilmarchive.org.il/kv/index.html>.

## Columbia University Café Serves Ugandan Coffee

Café Nana caters to customers regardless of their religious affiliation, and serves coffee that supports an interfaith Ugandan farmers' collective. The Middle Eastern and Israeli-themed café in the Kraft Center for Jewish Life at Columbia University recently celebrated its grand opening. Columbia's belly-dancing group entertained a relatively diverse crowd, many of whom had never set foot in Hillel, as customers reclined in "Moroccan-style" tents. The café's stated mission involves raising awareness of Jewish diversity, and one of its

mottos is "not just a cup, but a just cup."

## New Jewish Hotel in India

In January, the Consul General of Israel in Mumbai, Daniel Zonshine, inaugurated Sassoon House, a hotel with reasonable accommodations located in the compound of the Magen David Synagogue in the Byculla area of Mumbai. Kosher food can be ordered locally. For further information, tel. 22-300-6675.

## A Novel Vacation Idea

Sarah Gold served as a Kulanu volunteer in Uganda last year. This year she gives us all a novel idea for a vacation. Here is an excerpt from her colorful journal:

*I got back to Hadassah School and it was late, but the children were waiting up for me. I got off my boda-boda (motorcycle) and they came rushing towards me. We had tea and shared a cake that I brought from home. We said Shma, sang Hamalach Hagoel (which I taught them, which they still say every night), sang the Mosquito song (pronounced mo-skwee-to--but then again, shouldn't it be that way since there's a Q?) Since Purim just passed, they kept getting Mosquito mixed up with Haman (same tune, so cute). And then, as though not a day had passed, when we were done singing, they all yelled out, "Kiss! Kiss!" (the boys and girls separately), and I went around and gave each of them a kiss on the cheek, or leg, or arm, or whatever I could reach before they pretended to be squeamish and shy away.*

*And today Abraham and I began rekindling our friendship (I slipped him a lollipop). His older sister, Esther, says that he talks about me often.*

*So, what am I doing here, you ask? Well, I decided last Thursday that I really just wanted to see all my friends in Uganda and realign myself back with the basics. To do a bit of good (I brought matza) and to get a bit of perspective. So I'm hanging out here on the equator, right in the middle of this crazy world, in this very beautiful place, for 2 weeks of vacation.*

## Condolences

To **Moses Sebagabo** on the death of his mother, **Norah Jabingo**, in Uganda.

To **Remy Ilona** on the death of his mother, **Ukamaka Ilona, nee Nwosu**, on March 13 in Nigeria.

To the Gihon Synagogue community in Abuja, Nigeria, on the passing of **Okwudiri Jacinta 'Rackmin Yeshayahu' Maduakor Pago**, their leading female singer.

## Todah Rabah!

To the BEIs (Beth-El interns), high school students and members of Beth El in Ithaca, NY, who organized a concert to benefit the Abayudaya health fund and raised \$1410.

\$1,000 - \$2,500 -- **Laura Wetzler and Madelaine Zadik, Harriet Bograd & Kenneth Klein, Roslyn K. Elson Trust, Hope and Matthew Feldman, Abe & Irene Pollin, Rabbi Scott L. Glass.**

\$500 -- **Anonymous, Congregation Kol Ami, Adult Ed. Committee, Eunice & Milton Forman, Debbie & Mark Glotter, Ziv Tzedakah Fund.**

\$150 - \$499 -- **Harold Grinspoon Charitable Foundation, Elizabeth B. Lewis, Gilbert and Rosalinda Strange, Temple Aliyah, Steve, Aviva, and Shoshan Waldstein, Leigh Weissman.**

To our \$100 club -- **Highland Park Hadassah, Leslie & Gary Null, Eric Peterman & Ellen Resnick, Riverdale Bnai Brith Unit 1505, Leslie & Renee Rosenthal, Rebecca Saliman, Ruth Shapiro.**

# A Ugandan's Experience of Volunteering in India

By Michael Kaidhiwa

It all started like a joke. It ended up being a big achievement, not only to me but to all the Jewish community in Uganda. As I said to my sponsors at the American Jewish World Service, "Having spent my childhood and youth in Uganda, prospects of rendering a service as a volunteer in another developing country is one thing that I had never dreamt of in life." Not that I did not have the desire, but I simply thought it was beyond my means to afford, let alone being without a first degree, which I thought was the basis for one being a professional.

At the onset I wrote to someone called Andrea whom I have still never met, who shouldered all the arrangements and later introduced me to Ms Lani Santo, whom I admire for her organizational skills and being near to every AJWS Volunteer, no matter how far away. As a member of the Abayudaya, the opportunity extended to me through the AJWS was a very rare one and surely the first of its kind to be given to a Ugandan.

I lived in Andhra Pradesh, India for three months and one day. It was not my first time to be out of Uganda (I have been to Kenya and Tanzania), but it was my first time to travel by plane.

The AJWS Volunteer Corps places Jewish professionals with grass-roots organizations in Africa, the Americas and Asia (including Russia and Ukraine) to provide skills training to NGOs (non-governmental organizations). Volunteers are placed with NGOs as consultants to train specific staff members in their personal area(s) of expertise. By providing technical assistance through skills training, volunteers help NGOs build their capacity and achieve their overall mission.

I was selected to volunteer with the Association for Rural Development and Action Research (ARDAR) in India. My assignment was to work with ARDAR field officers to develop appropriate tools and collect data on fisheries and their socio-economic impact as part of ARDAR's post-Tsunami rehabilitation efforts. I participated in developing tools to gather data on the occupational hazards affecting livelihoods of fishing communities in Thammayyapalem fishing village, designed instruments to collect information to produce a micro-level plan for women in Sardukodapa fishing village in West Godavali District, and supported a PRA (participatory rural appraisal) exercise to carry out an Impact Study in Kothamukkam fishing villages in Sirikokulum district which was a follow-up of some financial support given to 18 women by ARDAR. Much of my time was spent in developing appropriate tools with my colleagues in English, who would later change them to Telugu, the local language.

I was also integrated in ARDAR projects to share knowledge about HIV/AIDS in Vizianagram slums.

Working with people who have heard little or nothing about Judaism was a very awe-inspiring factor in itself. Judaism in Andhra Pradesh state is not known to almost 90 percent of the population. This provided an opportunity to explain Judaism whenever prompted. It is a challenge when people of different religious backgrounds meet together over a common problem. (I only managed my weekends alone to observe Sabbath in my hotel room since there were no synagogues or trees of Judaism in the areas where I worked. I attended Rosh Hashanah at the Gate of Mercy synagogue in Mumbai, where I was filled with joy; I met and greeted most of the members of the synagogue and introductions were made.)

People of India are very pleasant. They treated me with compassion. I was quickly assimilated and did not feel home sick for long. Of course the language was limiting, but you could see people who were very much interested in knowing about other cultures. The diet obviously is a bit problematic. My menu would have plain rice, egg omelet,

potato curry, and wine.

Being part of AJWS's efforts to reach out to the needy communities through local NGOs was a big achievement to me personally. My work with ARDAR was everything I hoped it would be. AJWS provided me with the opportunity to get to know a grass-roots organization that touched the hearts of many needy people in the world. Through AJWS one is able to be part of a solution to problems that affect humanity, no matter differences in nationality, culture or religion.

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## Lemba Conference In Zimbabwe

By Modreck Maeresera

"*Gore rinovuya kuMapakomhere!*" [Next year in Mapakomhere] chanted vice-president Mushavi Jameson Rufu Museva at the end of the 2004 conference of the Lemba Cultural Association's Zimbabwe Chapter, reminiscent of the final line of the Passover seder ceremony, "Next year in Jerusalem!" The return to Mapakomhere happened on December 29 – 31, 2005. Over 600 Lemba people from various parts of Zimbabwe attended the conference, setting aside their daily commitments to come to this important occasion for the Lemba people.

Since 1948, when the Lemba Cultural Association was established in South Africa, Lemba people have continued to meet annually for celebrations. Political borders that divided southern Africa caused the Lemba people in South Africa to yearn to return to Zimbabwe for family reunion and encouraged them to reorganize. Attempts were made to do so, but the political developments in the then South African northern neighbour, Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, made it impossible. It was only in 2003 that the Lemba people in Zimbabwe got together and established a Lemba Cultural Association chapter – a replica of the one in South Africa. An agreement was reached that end-of-year conferences shall take place at Mapakomhere each year, and so it has been happening.

As from 2003, the Lemba people in Zimbabwe, like their brothers and sisters in South Africa, have been gathering each end of year for cultural celebrations and thanksgiving. The 2005 conference, which took place at Mapakomhere Secondary School, proved to be unique. Elders and young ones were able to sit down together and share ideas as to how we should proceed as a community. Conference participants took the meaning of this gathering very seriously, taking the time to look at the situation facing their communities. This was a great moment of rigorous introspection for the Lemba people as to who they are and what makes them who they are. Participants also focused on the future of the Lemba culture and traditions. Elders are worried that their young ones might lose everything they have known to be Lemba. There was some consensus that something was supposed to be done for the future of the community. There was an expression of appreciation for the American Jewry and South African Lemba community for supporting the cause of the Lemba people – to recapture the religion of the forefathers.

Then the participants broke into cultural song and dancing. This was an important moment for the participants. After a big feast and speeches, the conference ended with vice-president Museva chanting: "Next year in Mapakomhere!"



# A Film Maker Visits Jews of Nigeria

Film maker Jeff Lieberman traveled in Nigeria (with Rabbi Howard Gorin) for a few weeks in February in preparation for a documentary, *Re-Emerging: The Jews of Nigeria*. Below are some excerpts from his travel journal. For more information about this upcoming film, see <http://www.re-emergingfilm.com>.

The day continued with a meeting with a Tribal Chief, a Christian minister and more get-to-know-ya meetings with our Interfaith allies. There is always a degree of formality with each visit, and the introductions, responses, greetings, and gift exchanges get a little tedious. But there were some interesting moments along the way. One in particular was a conversation with the Christian minister who joined us for the day and did much of the driving. He was unclear on certain aspects of Judaism, and had many questions. Luckily Shmuel from Port Harcourt was in the car, and made up for my ignorance. His knowledge on the entire history of Judaism is astounding for someone who just started studying a few years ago. I was a bit surprised that morning when I learned that Judaism was his third religion, something that seems to be common here. I think North American Jews might be uncomfortable with the amount of picking and choosing. I challenged him on what his next religion would be, and without a beat he said that this is the last bus stop. With Colonialism came a large amount of Christian proselytizing, and there are those still looking for their religious and cultural roots that existed before. Many of these guys went looking for Judaism and ended up with more religious brainwashing through the Messianists, or Jews for Jesus. Many feel fortunate that they escaped that trap, and have finally returned to Judaism. For Shmuel, a guy who used to spend many of his evenings street fighting, his Judaism seems to have inspired him to do great things. His dream is to become a rabbi, and despite the cost and problems for Nigerians to get foreign visas, I have a good feeling it's going to happen.

\* \* \*

Cohen is highly respected in the community for several reasons. He was the first to learn Hebrew, can chant almost all of the synagogue services, has a great singing voice and has been made the Cantor or Hazzan of the synagogue. He is also a teacher at the local school, has a wonderful wife, Che Che, and is believed to be a descendant of the Cohens – the ancient priests of Judaism. He is a charismatic guy with big dreams and a big heart. I followed Cohen to school that morning as he taught Simple Interest to his students in a tiny, dirty room, with no decoration on the concrete walls. The kids seem to love him, understand the lesson, and when I ask them about their teacher afterward, each has sweet things to say about him. The principal of the school had never met a Jew before Cohen, and went out and did some research on Judaism when he joined the school. I found Habbakkuk's kids at the school, so there are at least six Jewish students, and I was pleased to hear that the principal has encouraged Cohen to teach Judaism since Christianity and Islam are taught there too.

\* \* \*

Demolishment of neighborhoods is not uncommon in Nigeria, especially in its capital, Abuja. There is construction everywhere and if there's one thing the government is doing right, it's building new roads, buildings, and other infrastructure. Unfortunately it's not with a lot of compassion. It was sad to hear that one of the synagogues had recently fallen to this fate, and displaced its community. It's a feat to build a synagogue here, and I'm sure heartbreaking to watch it collapse after many years of hard work and fighting against the odds. But the Nigerian Jews are a resilient group and most of the members have found other communities. Most have joined the Gihon synagogue, which is where we visited today.

\* \* \*

At the end of a long dirt road and situated upon a hill, the congregation is still under construction but something tells me that the build-

ing's current state has been like this for a while and won't change too fast. There are no doors, nor windows, and the floor is made of mother earth, but it's constant dry heat in this area, so there's little concern for the elements. There are no books, nor many objects. The point is that none of this really matters because the people inside are beaming with joy, and gather here weekly for Shabbat prayers and songs. We were greeted, introductions were made, snacks were shared, and then we were treated to a rousing array of melodies of Hebrew songs. That certain feeling of overwhelming why-are-my-eyes-tearing-up overcame me when the group started dancing in step to a familiar song. The sound was amazing and you were almost glad that there were no windows, so nothing could be contained. A quick interview with the Elder of the community, a geologist by profession, capped the visit.

## Noam Katz CD a Winner

By Karen Primack

Kulanuites all over the world will relish Noam Katz's new CD. *Mirembe, Salaam, v'Shalom* is a compilation of 12 songs from many sources, including Jewish liturgy and the Bible. Katz, now a rabbinic student at Hebrew Union College, spent the winter of 2004 as a volunteer teacher among the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda. He dedicates this album to them, and their influence is potent here.

Katz wrote virtually all of the music and some of the words on this recording, which he sings with guest artists, a choir, and a variety of "instruments," including African drums and shakers, a balalaika, a cell phone, and a coffee cup. The sound ranges from folk and jazz to hymn-like and pop. All of it is agreeable, a worthy antidote to the daily newspaper.

A welcome surprise was Katz's African-influenced rendition of "Tumbalalaika," a traditional Yiddish song.

The words to Katz's original "We Are One" are poignant. This folk-genre song includes this final verse:

*All the world's a stage in which the curtains of color divide  
We are mere players who must rewrite the parts  
Tear down the scenic walls of bias, fear, and pride  
And let loose the song that's in our hearts*

The real show-stopper is "Mirembe," which Kulanu regulars will recognize as the Luganda word for Peace. Katz wrote the Hebrew and English text, which incorporates Luganda and Arabic translations by Aaron Kintu Moses and Ibrahim Batasi, respectively. The listener is apt to sing along, at least in English: "*Mirembe, mirembe, salaam v'shalom, Make peace in the village, make peace in the home....*"

Guest vocalists on the album include two Abayudaya musicians, JJ Keki and Jon Nkola. Katz acknowledges his debt to these remarkable Ugandan Jews on the cover:

*My time with the Abayudaya opened my eyes to a new world, one rich with lush green banana leaves, a deep yearning for Jewish knowledge, and unparalleled harmony. These songs are a tribute to you, my friends, for the warmth with which you welcomed me into your homes, for the spirit with which you nurtured my Jewish soul...*

The recording is available at [www.noamkatz.com](http://www.noamkatz.com).

# “Anousim Corner” Forms In South Florida (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

removed, and no one could eat fish without scales. There was the legend that you if you pointed to the stars on Friday night moles would grow on your fingers -- that was said just to stop the children from showing any sign of Jewishness to the outside world,” says Jonatas Dias DaSilva, 24, a Brazilian-American.

“Both of my parents were of the Perez family, I was circumcised on the eighth day after my birth, and my mother always cleaned the house on Fridays before sunset; no one worked on Saturdays,” says Jorge Perez, a Cuban-American.

“My father knew it all along, I found books of Jewish genealogy in my house, and there was a list of Jewish individuals of the last name ‘Gascon’ in one of his notes,” says Rene Gascon, Cuban-American.

These are portraits of a hidden Jewish past that is now causing all of these descendants, and many more around the world, to finally return to their True Faith.



*A few Anousim Corner members*

Unfortunately, as time passed, these *Anousim* felt that the rabbi of the synagogue lacked much information on the subject of the Crypto-Jewish phenomenon, making them feel awkward and without support, and causing them to leave and seek help elsewhere. Indeed the situation of the Crypto-Jews of nowadays is very delicate, and not many rabbinical figures are aware of their presence in the New World, as well as in isolated areas of Spain and Portugal. Feelings of betrayal constantly keep these descendants marginalized in their own original societies, and when they finally have contact with the mainstream Jewish communities, they are often treated with disbelief and insensitivity.

Although the path back to mainstream Judaism is often very arduous to these descendants of the forcibly converted Jews of Sepharad, the overall situation is positive and very hopeful. The *Anousim* Group in South Florida is putting down strong roots: the families are completely open about their heritage, and the young ones are being brought up completely Jewish. The greatest victory has been accomplished, since these families overcame a Spiritual Exodus of over 500 years. Now they simply need a rabbi who will perform their *Teshuva*, their official return to the Faith of their Ancestors.

The group has a website called Anousim Corner, at <[www.anousimcorner.zoomshare.com](http://www.anousimcorner.zoomshare.com)>, with information about the group, *Anousim* worldwide, the Torah portion of the week, prayers,

and useful research material. Anyone who wishes to contact the group may do so at [jonataschimen@aol.com](mailto:jonataschimen@aol.com).

*“And the exiles of this host of the sons of Israel... and the exiles of Jerusalem who are in Sepharad (Spain) will possess the cities of the Negev. The deliverers will ascend Mount Zion to judge the mountain of Esau, and the kingdom will be the Lord’s.”* (Obadiah 1:19-21)

## LETTERS TO KULANU

### Kudos to Michael Freund

Michael Freund and Shavei Israel, his organization, have won the Jerusalem Prize. Michael is an exceptional individual who has worked tirelessly to identify and bring home those with a Jewish ancestry. In one way or another, many of us are involved in this undertaking, but the recognition of his efforts is a boost for all of us and the work we do.

*Barbara Shair  
Becomingajew.org  
New City, NY*

### Shabbat in Port Harcourt, Nigeria

I arrived in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, airport predawn on a Friday morning in March. My host, Reb Yisrael ben Yehudah and entourage were there to meet me. There were about 10 of his *hassids*, three cars, and a hired Nigerian soldier to accompany us. They had spent the night at the airport to make sure they did not miss the plane. We then quickly sped away to Reb Yehudah's village, about 90 minutes from the airport.

The facilities are fine by African standards. His compound consists of a synagogue and many rooms. Many of the Jews come and stay at the facility for Shabbat and the *haggim*. He has his own generator, which mostly works (goes out about 4 am every night). My room had a refrigerator, air conditioner, and separate bathroom with cold shower (its hot enough here to not mind the cold water.)

Shabbat was fine. Reb Yehuda has taught them well. The service leaders chanted the prayers mostly in English, with some Hebrew. Hebrew is said mostly by Reb Yehuda. They really appreciated the four *siddurim* I brought, especially because they have the Hebrew transliterated in addition to translation. One *siddur* was given to each of the elders from the four synagogues in the area. It seemed to me they had only *siddurim* in Yehudah's synagogue. They used to have more books but they have been distributed to other congregations. Everyone keeps kosher, and everyone washes and say *brachas* before all eating. Also, *Nida* (family purity law) is very important to them.

Reb Yehudah's leadership is strong and in private conversations with the elders of the three other synagogues, they all said how much they appreciated his leadership. He is their rabbi, although they miss Rabbi Howard Gorin.

*Sandy Leeder  
Palo Alto, California*



# It Is a Joy To Do This Work ( cont.)

(Continued from page 1)  
man Foundation.

Thanks to our dear mitzvah partners at **American Jewish World Service** for support of Kulanu on-site volunteers and the Abayudaya-Kulanu Mirembe Kawomera Coffee Project.

We worked these weeks, as we do all year, on **malaria prevention, and health, hygiene, and nutrition education** thanks to grants from the Estelle Friedman Gervis Family Foundation and the Jewish Youth Philanthropy Institute and other donors. Our health education/disease prevention team includes school headmasters Aaron Kintu Moses and Seth Jonadav, Abayudaya medical student Samson Wamani, teachers, community health workers, the Abayudaya Women's Association, Abayudaya youth, and Kulanu on-site volunteers, all networking with local NGO resources. We also talked about the terrible lack of water during dry season and worked on truly viable options based on experience on the ground. I delivered several suitcases from Sid Rozenzweig and Intervol filled with much needed medical supplies to Abayudaya medical student Samson Wamani. Also delivered were donated reading glasses from Dr. Suzanne Arnapolin and Dr. Ronnie Williams.

Internationally, women are key to community development and



*New Chemistry Lab at SKHS*

Abayudaya women wanted a more active role in their schools.

Together we created an **Abayudaya Women's Association School Support Project** to train an Abayudaya mother, Rebecca Nantabo, through Mbale Red Cross and Family Planning, to work as a

para-professional youth counselor in the high school and primary school. All Abayudaya women are taking the health and family planning training at Kulanu-sponsored women's conferences.

We worked further developing **Abayudaya-Kulanu tourism, craft, coffee, CD music and guesthouse projects**, all of which foster self-help economic development. The **"Jewish Life in Uganda Mitzvah Tour and Wildlife Safari,"** now in its fourth year, features a fantastic African wildlife safari, followed by an unforgettable nine days visiting the Jewish community schools, projects and shuls. Samson Shadrack is our Abayudaya guide. Our accommodations are at lovely hotels but this is still the best bargain in African safari tourism. This year, several of us added an additional excursion (from which Abayudaya earn a commission) to see rare mountain gorillas in Bwindi forest. The Abayudaya Song and Dance Festival, a great community-wide celebration of African Jewish culture, developed and supported by this Kulanu tourism project, brings together singers and dancers from four villages and is not to be missed. Hope you can join us next year and bring friends to visit with friends!

We brought the **Abayudaya Bank/ Howard and Judith Mayer Small Business Micro-finance Program** out to Namatumba and Nasenyi. These villagers have trouble traveling so far without means of transport to the bank project on Nabagoye Hill. We included small business workshops in the loan fund trainings. I was *kvelling!* Naume Sabano and Joseph Mubole taught large gatherings of Abayudaya how these low-interest, long-term loans function, how to create a farm cooperative, and how to plan a small business, based on previous workshops we had done together with Howard and Judith Mayer. If you know anyone interested in contributing to the small business loan fund

(based on the Grameen Bank model) be sure to let them know we have an unheard-of 98 percent loan repayment rate.

We did many meetings with the **fair trade Mirembe Kawomera Coffee Cooperative** leaders working on a five-year strategic development plan. The coffee is certified organic two years ahead of schedule. In one year, farmers have gone from producing 1 metric ton to 3 metric tons of coffee, thanks to the \$1 per retail bag rebates from Thanksgiving Coffee Company from which farmers bought six new coffee pulpers for the cooperative. Thanks to Paul and Joan Katzeff at Thanksgiving Coffee ([www.thanksgivingcoffee.com](http://www.thanksgivingcoffee.com)) and their great staff, Ben Corey-Mann, and Holly Moskowitz (an Abayudaya volunteer last year).

When JJ Keki and I started this project we had no idea it would grow so fast. *Kol hakavod* to JJ for this remarkable achievement! It was so inspiring to see many farmers' mud shacks slowly being replaced with sturdy brick housing as a result of this Abayudaya-Kulanu project. Many US synagogues, schools and churches are using the coffee at all their events and to help build Interfaith coalitions in their communities. Thanks to Shanaan Meyerstein, a former Columbia student and Abayudaya volunteer, and owner Edoe Cohen, the wonderful new kosher **Café Nana at Columbia University Hillel (W115 St. NYC)** is serving **Mirembe Kawomera Coffee exclusively**. David Weisman made sure that Mirembe Kawomera Coffee went into every Purim basket at his shul this year. Thank you to everyone who is buying and serving this delicious kosher, fair trade, and now organic coffee. You are performing the highest form of *tzedekah*: helping to create sustainable employment.

We celebrated the publication of the first issue of **the Abayudaya Girls Magazine**, a creative writing newsletter written by Abayudaya teens, with technical assistance from Kulanu volunteers Sarah Gunther, Linda Jum and Eden Brandwein. We delivered a computer and camera dedicated for training Abayudaya youth. Anyone who can pursue a corporate source for computer donations, please contact Harriet Bograd ([hbograd@gmail.com](mailto:hbograd@gmail.com)).

We created a new **Abayudaya Adult Literacy Project**. Fewer than 5 percent of Abayudaya adults speak, read or write English, Uganda's national language. We need only \$2000 per year to fund this program, which will send Abayudaya reading teachers to four distant farm villages every week and supply English primers for illiterate Jewish farmers.

Thanks to headmaster Seth Jonadav, volunteer Hedy Cohen, Angela and Carl Milner, and the Estelle Friedman Gervis Family Foundation, we created a new



*JJ Keki and family on their coffee farm*

**SKHS Child Hunger Project**. The sad reality is that economically impoverished Ugandan high school students come to school hungry, making learning difficult and leaving them vulnerable to exploitation. Please help us help these kids.

This is only a partial list of what Abayudaya and Kulanu supporters are accomplishing together. Forgive any omissions due to space limitations; every contribution is deeply appreciated. Special honor to those many wonderful Bar/Bat Mitzvah and student projects, which

(Continued on page 13)

# Synagogue-Searching in Kerala, India (cont.)

(Continued from page 2)

Mr. Josephai encouraged us to take more photos while telling us about the Thokumbagam Synagogue across the street (“Why another synagogue?” “Five Jews, six views,” he explained, citing Eli Weisel.) It is now “Just a hall, not worth visiting,” he added. We took his word for it.

But our fires had been stoked. Back onto the ferry, we got off at Fort Cochin and went by foot to Mattancherry. Our destination: Synagogue Street in Mattancherry’s Jewtown. Mr. Josephi had indicated that the combined Jewish population in Ernakulam and Mattancherry numbers only fifty-two persons. We were in search of just one, the maker of silk kippot.

On Synagogue Street in Jewtown, we easily located the home/shop of Sarah Cohen. Lounging on a chair in her living room, she asked our forgiveness for her brother’s absence; he was resting upstairs. She, herself, was laid up with a leg problem but wanted to stand for a photo opportunity. Sales were under the supervision of a local Indian and I was delighted to find a couple of black kippot trimmed with gold sequins. Those of vibrant pink, yellow, orange, and blue, also bathed in sequins, seemed just a bit too exotic.

The Pardesi Synagogue in Mattancherry, originally built in 1568, is well documented, well cared for and well visited. We were told by the Indian caretaker that the near-by cemetery was not open to visitors, but a short stroll to Cemetery Road and a smile at its local caretaker enabled us to enter. This relatively unkempt resting place of Cochin’s former active Jewish community contains above ground tombs and all inscriptions are in Hebrew.

One name appears prominently in Cochin’s history and documents: the late Mr. Samuel. S. Koder. He was not only a patriarch of the Jewish community and vice-president of the Cochin Electric Company, according to our tourist brochure, but also an officer and benefactor of the Pardesi Synagogue. His imposing home, built in 1808, is



*Cochin Cemetery in Mattancherry*

located on Fort Cochin’s waterfront. Since late 2005 it serves as a luxury hotel complete with state-of-the-art health spa. The Koder House is well worth a visit if

not an overnight stay.

Putting aside that fantasy, we began to look for more off-the-beaten-track synagogues. My *Lonely Planet* guidebook described a “dusty” one in Parur, “built at the same time as its famous counterpart in Mattancherry.” The following day we took a bus from Fort Cochin directly to Parur’s center, where we made several unsuccessful inquiries as to the synagogue’s whereabouts. Suddenly, some well-meaning Indians pushed us onto another bus, explaining that what we wanted was not in Parur, but in Chennamangalam.

I remembered having read in the *Lonely Planet* of the Chennamangalam Synagogue, the oldest in Kerala, “slowly disintegrating.” We ended up, thanks to assistance from fellow bus passengers, on Chennamangalam’s Jew Street at the foot of which was a freshly painted synagogue.

Upon entering the Chennamangalam Synagogue, we were reminded by the Indian laborers to respectfully remove our shoes in the manner of worshippers and visitors at Hindu temples. A colorful painted door entry, decorative wooden ceiling, carved wooden ark, and graceful staircase leading to the women’s section were some of the surprises that greeted us.

Just six years ago, we later learned, the Kerala Department of Archeology, with funds allocated by the Indian Ministry of Tourism, had inaugurated the restoration project. A commemorative stone in the courtyard records the dedication held in February 2005; a photo exhibit and a new museum shop are among the attractions since its official opening in late February 2006.

A young Indian woman spotted us looking around the synagogue grounds and offered her services. She led us back down Jew Street, parallel to the Periyar



*Chennamangalam Synagogue (now fully restored)*

River, in the opposite direction from the synagogue. We turned a corner, dropped down below a mosque and continued on through a dirt path until finally, in scorching heat, we reached the small Chennamangalam Jewish cemetery. Only one above ground tomb remains visible in this overgrown area next to the Moslem cemetery and beneath a Hindu temple perched precariously on the hill above.

Leading us back to Jew Street, our guide invited us to sit on the porch of her home, once partitioned and occupied by two Jewish families. There she related the story of the stone monument in front of the synagogue. It was, she said, the burial site of a young girl who had died en route to Chennamangalam with the earliest Jewish settlers. Knowing of Jewish burial practices, I was skeptical at first, but later it seemed as plausible as many explanations we were encountering in India. As lunchtime approached, our self-appointed guide’s young daughter entertained us with Hindu songs and dances; then her young son escorted us to the bus stop. We downed some bananas, boarded a bus and resumed our quest for Parur’s synagogue.

Finding ourselves again at the central bus stand in Parur, we boarded another bus that continued on the same route as the one we had taken from Fort Cochin that morning. We got off just two stops later, still searching for Parur’s Jew Street and its Jewish synagogue. This time we found the street, but had difficulty locating the synagogue. Finally, two young men pointed to a nicely painted, securely closed building, identified it as the Parur Synagogue and reported that the guard had left for a meal and would be back at six. We took a picture, thanked them, and left without establishing the validity of their claims. (Later we learned that the nicely painted building was not the synagogue but its gatehouse; the synagogue is in the rear of the compound.) They had also identified a Jewish cemetery across the street. It too was locked. Since the heat was by now oppressive and since we needed to return to Cochin in preparation for leaving the area, we ended our searching.

The presence of former Jewish communities in today’s Ernakulam, Mattancherry, Chennamangalam, and Parur is hard to imagine. The impoverished state of these dirty and decaying towns with failing infrastructures gives little evidence of past vitality. Yet the interest in



# PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE

"How a Nice Jewish Boy Became a Chief Rabbi in Nigeria," by **Joanne Palmer**, is the cover story of the Spring/Summer issue of the *United Synagogue Review*. It tells the story of Rabbi Howard Gorin's most recent trip to Nigeria and his role as a "figurehead" to Ibos aspiring to be halakhic Jews.



The Winter/Spring 2006 issue of *AJWS Reports* carries "Developing World Meets Developing World: One Volunteer's Story," an article about Ugandan Michael Kaidhiwa's volunteer work in India, at: [http://ajws.org/uploaded\\_documents/web%20AJWS%20Reports%20Winter%20Spring%202006.pdf](http://ajws.org/uploaded_documents/web%20AJWS%20Reports%20Winter%20Spring%202006.pdf)

"A Tutsi Pesach?" by **Anath Hartmann**, appeared in the *Washington Jewish Week* on March 30, discussing Rabbi David Kuperman's seder in Brussels with Tutsi Kushites.

**Michael Freund's** "The Forgotten Massacre" appeared in the *Jerusalem Post* on April 26. It discusses the Lisbon massacre of April 19, 1506, in which 2000-4000 "New Christians" (forcibly converted Jews) died in an "orgy of violence."

**Freund's** *HaModia Magazine* article, "From Nicolau to Nissan: A Jewish Soul Finds Its Way back Home," appeared on April 10. It recounts the story of Rabbi Nissan Ben-Avraham, of Shilo, Israel, who was born into a religious Catholic family in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, in 1957. Some months after discovering that he was a *Xueta* (a slur term for someone with Jewish roots), he researched and embraced his true identity, moved to Israel to study further, and underwent formal conversion in 1978. In 1991 he became the first *Xueta* to be ordained a rabbi. He has written two books and aspires to help return Majorca's 20,000 *Xuetas* to Judaism.

**Aaron Leibel's** article in the March 30 *Washington Jewish Week*, "A Fusion of Different Cultures," describes the Idan Raichel Project, a multiracial and multiethnic group of eight that performs Israeli rock music in Hebrew, Amharic, Arabic, and other languages. Raichel's purpose: "It helps communities to understand each other and respect each other's culture." Over the past four years, 70 singers and musicians have taken part in the project.

In a February 27 JTA article, "Ad Campaign by Israel, Group Aims To Boost Ethiopian-Israeli Image," **Dina Kraft** reports on a campaign by the Israeli Ministry of Immigration Absorption and the Jewish Agency to boost the image of Ethiopians in the eyes of non-Ethiopian Israelis.

**Shalva Weil's** "Hebrew in Chennamangalam" appeared in *Haaretz* on February 16. The article discusses the history of the Jewish community of Kerala, India, and the restoration of the 1614 synagogue in Chennamangalam.

**Uriel Heilman's** 7-article series on the Falash Mura was published by JTA on February 16. The article titles are: "Ethiopians Want To Immigrate as Israel, US Jews Plan Their Future"; "Mission to Ethiopia Confounds and Commits Federation Leader"; "From Simplicity to Modernity: The Journey from Africa to Zion"; "Falash Mura Immigra-

tion Stalled by Cost, Doubt Over Jewish Identity"; "Final List of Falash Mura Olim Hampered by Inefficiency, Abuse"; and "Jewish Presence Still Persists in Remote Highlands of Ethiopia."

"Peru's Jews of the Jungle Receive Rabbi" appeared on Arutz 7 Israel National News on February 14. It reports on the emerging Jewish community of Tarapoto, consisting mostly of assimilated Moroccan Jews who had immigrated to the Amazon basin in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The community has received its first rabbi, courtesy of the organization Shavei Israel.

"Spain's Catalonia Region Reviving Its Jewish Past" was carried by AP on February 3. It discusses the restoration of Barcelona's oldest synagogue, the donation of a medieval Torah scroll, the arrival of a record number of visitors to the synagogue, the restoration of a Jewish medieval neighborhood in Gerona, and the excavation of a mikveh in Besalu. This article can be read at <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3226817,00.html>.

## Introducing Tebeka (cont.)

(Continued from page 2)

concerning issues such as personal status, housing, education, and the police's treatment of members of the community. In addition, the Center and the Bar Association cooperate in the latter's pro bono program; the organization's services are now available to the public at the absorption center in Netanya.

The Center identifies and provides legal representation in cases of blatant discrimination and racism. The New Israel Fund, a funder of the Center, describes these achievements:

"Over the year, the Center handled approximately 10 cases, including the following: the refusal of a banquet hall to hire a young Ethiopian as a waiter due to his ethnic origin (the case is pending); the decision by Israel Radio to reduce broadcasts in Amharic (following the submission of a joint petition by the organization and the Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews, the decision was revoked); a court decision to cease state funding of interpretation services in civil cases and to impose the costs on the two sides (after the organization appealed, the decision was revoked). Altogether the organization submitted three petitions to the High Court of Justice: against the government of Israel regarding a monument to those who perished in Sudan; against the Ministry of Education demanding they cancel the quotas for pupils of Ethiopian extraction (the policy was revoked following the petition); against the Ministry of Religious Affairs regarding the refusal of religious councils to provide religious services to Ethiopian immigrants (the petition has not yet been heard). Every case represented by the Center receives comprehensive media coverage."

The Center works to inform Ethiopian groups through lectures and leaflets on workers rights, housing rights, education rights, police relations, and basic legal concepts.

The Center's future plans include the publication of booklets on civil rights and the development of a national conference on the condition of Ethiopian communities in Israel.

# In Search of Zimbabwe's Jewish Architecture (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

For the next four decades, this building nicely served the community's needs, only for all to come to a cataclysmic end in early October 2004. A fire, said to be accidentally started by vagrants in the alley behind the building, destroyed much of the synagogue. Members of the congregation, dashing into the fire, were able to salvage the Sefer Torahs, but otherwise the contents were lost. While the original façade remained nearly intact, as shown in my watercolor completed from my visit in June 2005, otherwise only a shell was left. The intensity of the blaze literally melted the steel columns and trusses, and afterwards they dangled like listless puppets. Although the cause of the fire was officially listed as a mishap, I had doubts based on my own observation of the site. The synagogue wall running along the alley where the fire was said to have begun was actually in good condition, and it seemed clear that the fire had started in the main body of the building several feet away.

My visit to Bulawayo coincided with the official transfer of the synagogue property to an evangelical African church. This congregation had purchased the property from the synagogue property committee. The church was planning a massive and costly rebuilding effort. The rabbi of Bulawayo (Zimbabwe's only one in 2005), in town with his family for a three-year appointment, had taken me to the synagogue for an introduction to the new owners. He also wanted to confirm, by pre-arrangement, that he could have continued access to the *mikvah* (ritual bath), which had not been damaged in the fire. To our surprise, his gate key no longer worked. When we spoke to church officials on site (it seemed that the entire congregation was there touring their new property), all seemed fine and I was invited on the grounds for the next several hours to photograph and document the building. When I returned a few days later, that was not the case. I was not well received and, in fact, was sadly asked to leave. After serving as a Jewish site for 111 years, all had forever changed.

After the fire, services had to be shifted to a Jewish school and community hall built in 1970 by the Bulawayo Progressive Jewish Congregation. It is located on Bailey Road near Landau Drive in a pleasant and upscale residential district of town a few miles from downtown. While the building never contained a proper synagogue, the rabbi and Jewish community converted half the large social hall into a sanctuary. The men sat adjacent to the freestanding Ark and the women on an installed platform nearby. The ordinary space, very 1970s in feel, did feature attractive stained glass windows designed by the artist Leonora Kibel.

The Saturday I attended services, some dozen men and ten women were present. Afterwards, a friendly *Oneg Shabbat* was held and, once concluded, I was invited to the rabbi's provided home nearby for a pleasant lunch. After a rest, his three boys and I spent time playing in the extensive outdoor spaces with vegetable garden and menagerie of small farm animals. Following an afternoon service, I was given a ride back to the well-run and pleasant Jewish retirement home, Savyon Lodge, where I stayed in its guest room during my visit to Bulawayo. The facility, the only Jewish one in Zimbabwe, offers its residents good meals, a beautiful central garden, and regular services led by the rabbi.

Before leaving Bulawayo, I also visited the well-kept Jewish

cemetery. On the grounds are two chapels; one from the early 1960s and built at the time of the addition to the synagogue, and the other smaller and dating from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

A main road, 'tarred' and two-laned, connects Bulawayo in the south with northern Harare. Along the way, located in the Zimbabwe's Midlands and once prime farmland, are three small cities that once had Jewish communities: Gweru, Kweke, and Kadoma. Not too many years ago, with the decline in Jewish population, all three modest and architecturally insignificant synagogues were sold by the Jews.

In Gweru, the synagogue (a 42' x 25' space) dating from the 1940s and a later social hall, both still stand. Today they are used by the Pentecostal Assembly of Zimbabwe. The buildings can be found in the center of town on 7<sup>th</sup> Street, and I was warmly received by its minister and allowed to record the property. After completing my documentation and walking back to my hotel to check out before leaving the bleak town, I was approached by the police. A crowd suddenly gathered as they watched the Draconian scene unfold. My passport was apprehended, and I was escorted to the police station. There I was threatened with arrest and incarceration. Apparently plain-clothed police officers or paid informants, quite common in Zimbabwe, had spotted me arriving in town by bus from Bulawayo the previous night. They alleged that I had photographed sensitive government buildings and was likely an illegal



*The former Bulawayo Hebrew Congregation, Zimbabwe's first synagogue (watercolor by the author)*

foreign reporter. Dealt with in a rude and racially toned manner for two hours, I calmly did my best to repudiate the charges. Regrettably, I was not believed. Fortunately, I was able to leave the station, without my camera and passport, after a lengthy report was filed. I returned to my hotel and immediately contacted the US Embassy in Harare on a Saturday. Hours later, gravely concerned, I returned to the station to speak with the chief of police. After viewing my digital camera, and based on his conversations with the US government, he acknowledged that the charges were false and let me go. No apology was made, although he and colleague did seem to like my camera that he was returning. To this day, I hold the Zimbabwean police in the lowest of esteem and caution visitors to Zimbabwe about their commonly dangerous and unpredictable behavior.

The former synagogue in Kweke, built on Burma Road in a quiet district just southeast of town, was originally purchased by the local Hindu community and used some years for their religious purposes. Eventually they outgrew it and built a larger and more proper temple on adjacent property. The Hindus now rent the former synagogue (a 52' x 34' room with small accessory spaces) to an African church. I arrived in Kweke from Gweru by bus (hours behind scheduled and uncomfortably packed due to the fuel crisis) on a Sunday, meeting my contact at a Hindu wedding at a local country club. He graciously drove me to the church, and when we pulled up it was clear that services were in progress. At first I sat under a shade tree to wait, but soon I was approached by a congregational leader who insisted that I come inside and join in. That I did, and for the next two hours I sang, clapped, and became spellbound by the charismatic and spirited reverend of the all-black congregation. While the building was the same,

(Continued on page 13)

# *It Is a Joy To Do This Work* ( cont.)

(Continued from page 9)

inspire all of us greatly. Thanks to Lauri Donahue of Toledo for helping out with school projects. While in Kampala, I visited with Abayudaya college students who are so deeply grateful to Rabbi Jeff Summit of Tufts Hillel for the enormous mitzvah he performs by raising tuition money for Abayudaya college education in Uganda.

Finally, as you know, **Kulanu helps Abayudaya support both Hadassah Primary School and SK High School.** When current Abayudaya leaders got their education (with support from Kulanu and Rabbi Jeff Summit) the first thing they did was create their own schools. These Kulanu-supported schools, serving approximately 400 impoverished African children of all faiths, help protect this Jewish community, as Abayudaya children in Ugandan public schools were frequently targets of anti-Jewish harassment.

I want to report some of the details and needs of this work. **Kulanu has an immediate need for \$13,000 to fulfill a school matching grant** from the Weinberg Foundation. In addition, the Abayudaya need approximately **\$20,000 per year per school in sustaining operating support.** For the long run, Abayudaya need approximately **\$90,000 per school for capital improvements** to build proper dorms for Abayudaya boarding students from far-away villages, classrooms, decent sanitary facilities, food canteens, and small school libraries.

**Those of you in education know these are comparatively low costs to complete and sustain two schools. Every Jewish school in the world relies on Jewish community support. We know that the economic development projects in place now will eventually help the schools raise more of their operating funds from tuition in the future. For now, while the schools are being built, it is a constant struggle to help the Abayudaya fulfill their dream of a good educational foundation for their kids in a safe environment.**

**Can you join our resource team and help us connect to major donors so Abayudaya can educate their children in decent, safe schools, learning in peace with their neighbors? If you would like to adopt or help out on any of the projects mentioned above, small or large, we desperately need you, your expertise, and your networking. Please help Kulanu help African children have some of what American children happily take for granted.**

We have a new fundraising flyer available by request. We don't spend a lot of money on promotion because our funds go directly to the community, but we hope the flyer will be of some use to you in your efforts on behalf of Kulanu and the communities we serve. Would you be so kind as to distribute the flyer at any upcoming events? Please be aware we now have a Kulanu-Abayudaya slide show on disc available for your use, compiled by Volunteer Coordinator and photographer Dr. Chaya Weinstein and Kulanu Treasurer, Harriet Bograd,

Kulanu accepts donations for Abayudaya projects designated in the memo line for "Abayudaya" or "Abayudaya Education" or "Abayudaya Health."

Kulanu is a unique, direct-action, all-volunteer organization with minimal overhead and 10 years of international experience. A *tikkun olam*-social justice donation goes so far on Kulanu projects. You can really make a difference.

Thanks so much for helping to get the word out. Our grassroots network is our greatest strength.



# **Kerala Synagogues (cont.)**

(Continued from page 10)

preservation by national and state governmental bodies as well as academics, organizations and individuals, and the benign attitude of the Indian populace, suggests that, remarkably, some of the Jewish synagogues will remain long after most of the Jews have departed.

\* \* \*

My thanks to the following individuals with whom I have communicated and who graciously offered their assistance to KULANU readers. For an overview on the history of the Jews of Kerala and an exhibit at the American Sephardi Federation in New York, please contact Kenneth Robbins at [RAJANAWAB@aol.com](mailto:RAJANAWAB@aol.com). Ken is a psychiatrist in Maryland and amateur researcher-historian. For an Indian perspective on the Kadavumbagam Synagogue in Ernakulam, write to Elias Josephai, proprietor of Cochin Blossoms, at [avidarling@rediffmail.com](mailto:avidarling@rediffmail.com). Helen Sirkin and her husband completed the initial survey of the Kerala synagogues for the International Survey of Jewish Monuments in 1998. Helen continues to be actively involved in synagogue restoration efforts and can be reached at [hws@tcs.wap.org](mailto:hws@tcs.wap.org). For information on the Chennamangalam Synagogue, refer to the website at [www.chensyn.com](http://www.chensyn.com) or contact the Project Director, Marian Scheur Sofaer at [Marian@sofaer.net](mailto:Marian@sofaer.net). Marian is especially interested in receiving reader suggestions for the Synagogue's museum shop. To learn more about the plans for the Parur Synagogue restoration as well as information on other synagogues in India, contact Jay A. Waronker, Professor of Architecture, Southern Polytechnic State University, Atlanta, Georgia at [Jayawaronker@aol.com](mailto:Jayawaronker@aol.com). Jay spent several years studying, documenting, publishing and exhibiting work on all 34 synagogues in India and serves as co-curator of the museum in the Chennamangalam Synagogue. For questions or comments about this story, including logistics for visiting sites, please write Ann Haendel, a wandering Jew, at [ahaendel@tampabay.rr.com](mailto:ahaendel@tampabay.rr.com).

# **Zimbabwe Architecture (cont.)**

the effervescence of the service seemed an amusing departure from the staid and formal Jewish one surely once held there. After the service, and while a few African women were cleaning the sanctuary, I was allowed to document and photograph the building. After some outdoor socializing, I was courteously driven by a member of the church with his family to the bus stand for my next stop.

The synagogue in Kadoma, once located along the highway to Bulawayo, was recently demolished and replaced with a newer Jehovah Witnesses church. Dating from the 1940s, photographs of the former house of prayer show that it was a small structure of no true architectural distinction. Nevertheless, this building and the others found within Zimbabwe recall a proud tradition of some 125 years of Jewish life in the country. With the fate of the Jewish community and the architecture that served it irreversibly decided, threatened, or precarious, I set out to record them. As evidence of the way Jews spread about the world and established prosperous and meaningful communities, may this architecture never be lost or forgotten.

Jay A. Waronker lives in Atlanta, GA USA, where he is a practicing architect and professor of architecture at Southern Polytechnic State University. He recently returned on a Fulbright from southern Africa, where he documented the Jewish architecture of Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Zambia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. His earlier project, funded by the NEA, Graham Foundation, Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, another Fulbright, the Asian Cultural Council, Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Bokser Memorial Foundation, involved the documentation of India's 34 synagogues. A longer version of this work, which included a portfolio of watercolors, was published in *India's Jewish Heritage: Ritual, Art, and Life-Cycle* and is regularly exhibited. He is also the co-founder and co-curator of India's first Jewish museum in the restored synagogue in Chennamangalam, Kerala. It opened in February 2006. He can be contacted at [jayawaronker@aol.com](mailto:jayawaronker@aol.com).



# Historical Reflections on “Who Is a Jew?”

By Irwin M. Berg  
(Part I of a two-part series)

This article results from correspondence I had with a woman who described herself as a "Black British Jew of African Caribbean origin." I am not a professional historian, and I acknowledged to her that as an amateur, my attempts to answer her questions were perilous with error. One of her questions took me into the realm of theology as well as history. To this question, I was compelled to acknowledge that I was then entering a field where even professional historians fear to tread.

She asked me to read Isaiah 11:11 where the prophet says that God will redeem "the other part of his people ... from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and the islands of the sea," and she suggested that Isaiah considered all descendants of Jacob, whether genetic or spiritual descendants, to be Jews. Essentially, I was being asked three questions: (1) What has been the historic attitude of Jews toward the conversion of gentiles to Judaism? (2) What has been our historic attitude to Jews or descendants of Jews who separated and wished to return? (3) How have the answers to the above questions affected our history?

The Bible hints that Egyptian slaves other than the descendants of Jacob were absorbed into the Jewish fold. This is indicated from the "mixed multitude" that followed Moses into Sinai. (Exodus 12:38) After the conquest of the land, Canaanites ceased being referred to as a separate people living amongst the Israelites, indicating that they too may at some point have been assimilated into the Jewish fold. Ruth, although born a Moabitess, has been given an honorable place in Jewish lore, when she accepted Naomi's God as her God and the fate of Naomi's people as her fate. (Ruth 1:16)

The author of Isaiah 11:11 lived through the conquest of the ten northern tribes by the Assyrians and their forced relocation into the Assyrian Empire in the mid-eighth century BCE. But the places mentioned by Isaiah, even at this early time, go well beyond places to which the ten tribes may have been exiled, indicating that Isaiah believed that descendants of Jacob were everywhere in the world known to him. Egypt was never conquered by the Assyrians; nor were any of the islands of the Mediterranean; nor was Pathros, which is the name for Upper Egypt; nor Cush, which is Ethiopia.

The Macabbees (165 BCE to 63 BCE) conquered neighboring peoples whom they forced to become Jews. Antipater, the father of Herod -- the Herod who in addition to expanding the Temple in Jerusalem into one of the most magnificent buildings of the ancient world also built a temple to Jupiter -- was an Edomite who was among those who converted during the Macabbean period. Beginning with the Roman conquest of Israel in 63 BCE, there were several religious parties in the Land. Their acceptance or non-acceptance of the Herodian dynasty, Roman rule, or Greco-Roman culture differentiated the parties. Those who totally rejected the Romans and Hellenism became Messianists, militant Zealots, or separatists called Essenes. The most influential party of all, the Pharisees, who were the forebears of the Rabbis, adopted a middle course; but in the end their greatest leader, Rabbi Akiva, became a Messianist and supported a rebellion against Rome.

Many Jews who lived in the Greco-Roman world might be said to have "fused" their religion with Hellenistic culture. Jacob Neusner, in his forward to Edwin Goodenough's *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, writes that after the 1st Century CE, the Jewish religion was more varied and complex than extant Talmudic literature would have us believe. Some of these forms would not be recognizable to us today.

Beginning slowly after the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 CE, and more quickly after 325 CE, when gentile Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, these varied and esoteric forms of Judaism which existed since early Hellenistic times lost out to Rabbinic Judaism. Not only did their adherents assimilate into the Greco-Roman world, but their books were lost and our knowledge about them was largely lost. Among the most unusual of these groups were Jews who for several hundred years believed that the crucified Jesus was the Messiah but continued to observe Jewish law. By the year 800 CE -- except for the Karaites -- Babylonian Rabbinic Judaism was the only Judaism practiced in the Christian and Moslem worlds.

That does not mean that all other Jews disappeared from the face of the earth. These others lived in out-of-the-way places such as sub-Saharan Africa, Afghanistan, India, and China. Most of them eventually became Moslem. While visiting Songhai villages along the Niger River in Mali, I encountered many Moslems who claimed that their ancestors had once been Jews.

These remote peoples followed in the footsteps of their ancestors as closely as they could while cut off from the Rabbinic Jewish world. The best known today of these "outsiders" are the Shin and Kuki peoples of northeast India, who claim to be the descendants of the tribe of Menashe.

Many sub-Saharan Africans likewise claim to have Jewish ancestors. These Africans may be the descendants of Jewish colonies that settled along the Nile in Southern Egypt about 2,500 years ago; or they may be a remnant of those Jews who escaped the Romans after their defeat in North Africa in 115 CE; or they may have resulted from movements of peoples westward from Ethiopia and Yemen. Some Tutsis claim that they are descendants of Jacob who did not follow Moses into Sinai but remained in Egypt.

Others include the Lemba of South Africa, the Sefwi of Ghana, and the Igbo of Nigeria. There is a priestly class of Lemba whose DNA shows a connection with Jewish *Kohanim* (Priests). Other than the Lemba, these peoples have no "proof" that they were once Jews except for their customs and traditions, which they compare to the customs and traditions of the children of Israel as reported in the Torah. Also, even though Jewish tradition does not report on these peoples, early Arab historians have identified some of them as Jews. Speaking as a Jew as well as a dilettante historian, I think we should be respectful of the claims of peoples whose customs and traditions bear the indices of ancient Jewish practices. As I was told in a remote village in Mali near Timbuktu, Africans remember forever the oral traditions of their ancestors, particularly those relating to their origins.

The Beta-Israel of Ethiopia cannot be compared with these other groups. They have been long known to the Jews of Egypt and are the subject of a *responsa* by Rabbi David Ben Solomon ibn Abi Zimra, known as the Radbaz (1479-1573), who proclaimed the Beta-Israel to be from the tribe of Dan. Since they had no Talmudic training but followed the literal word of the Scriptures, he pronounced them Jews who were to be treated sympathetically as though they had been taken captive at a young age.

At different periods of time Jews isolated themselves from their neighbors and did not intermarry or accept conversion. At other times the opposite was true. I have already mentioned the "mixed multitude" that went out of Egypt with Moses, the Canaanites, Ruth, and the Macabbees.

Throughout the ages, gentiles have been attracted to our religion and to Torah. During Hellenistic and early Roman times (from 200 BCE to 200 CE), at the same time that Jews were abandoning their

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# Historical Reflections on "Who is a Jew?" (cont.)

*(Continued from page 14)*

religion, an unknown but significant number of gentiles converted to Judaism. Some historians have estimated Jewish numbers in the Roman Empire at about 10 percent of the population, or some 7 million people. In Alexandria, Egypt, Jews may have reached one-third of the population. In addition to those who converted to Judaism, large numbers were known as "God Fearers." God Fearers were inspired by the moral and ethical principals of the Torah and its antiquity. They are recognized by Josephus (a late 1st Century CE Jewish historian) and by the New Testament. Shortly before the Temple was destroyed, the Queen of the Kingdom of the Adiabene -- a sometimes Roman and sometimes Parthian province situated in today's northern Syria -- converted to Judaism. Other notable converts to Judaism included Flavius Clemens, the nephew of Emperor Vespasian, and Fulvia, the wife of a Roman senator. There is a tradition that some of Judaism's early rabbis came from gentile origins, including Rabbis Meir, Shemiah and Avtalyon. The father of Rabbi Akiva was said to have been a convert. Mohammed, recognizing the respect afforded Jews in the Arabian peninsula, sought to be accepted by the Jewish tribes of Arabia as a prophet.

The question: Why did it happen that the Roman world became Christian and the Arab world became Moslem instead of Jewish when both drew their inspiration from from Judaism?

*(To be concluded in the next newsletter)*

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