



The Overlooked Beit Avraham

By Amy Cowen

While nearly all Beta Israel have now been accepted and promised eventual access to Israel, there is a yet another Jewish community still hidden in Ethiopia's highlands: the Beit Avraham or House of Abraham. Extending from the northern Shewa region south to the capital city of Addis Ababa, the largest enclave of Beit Avraham is located in an area known as Kachene, numbering roughly 50,000.

Although nearly analogous in terms of their history to the remaining Beta Israel, or *Falash Mura*, this community has been overlooked by Israel and the rest of the Jewish world. They have no known relatives in Israel at this time and have not taken significant steps to disclose their identity. The success of other Beta Israel at throwing off the fetters that have silenced them for years has given a small number of Beit Avraham the confidence to defiantly speak the truth.

“My one desire is to make my people known to everyone around the world,” said Aselef Teketel, artist and advocate for his community.



Beit Avraham woman in purification hut (left). Beit Avraham men in discussion (above). Photos by Amy Cowen

Yet, the vast majority of the Beit Avraham remain silent, hidden, and even slowly losing their Jewish heritage.

Silenced by fear, discrimination, and persecution, the Beit Avraham's ancient past has remained a mystery and closed to outsiders, sometimes even the younger community members themselves. Similar to the *Falash Mura*, in an act of survival, the Beit Avraham hid their Jewish identity under a shroud of Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity for centuries. Rather than completely forfeiting their Jewish identity, the Beit Avraham outwardly appeared Christian, while continuing to secretly practice their forefathers' faith and Jewish traditions.

Writer and actor Feleka Abebe says, “My grandmother used to always tell me we're Jewish; it's who we are, our heritage.” Yet, for others, it remained a mystery. “We were so confused [as children],” said one young man. Community members shared stories of their parents attending church one minute and in the next going off to the countryside to practice some secret religion. Continually haunted by the question, “Who am I?” many began to seek out their true identity, and as a result discovered this “secret religion” was Judaism. (The author is a Visual Anthropologist who has done extensive research and documentary photography of Ethiopian Jews both in Ethiopia and in Israel. She made Aliyah in 2006. For a more complete essay on Beit Avraham and more photos, check the Kulanu website, www.kulanu.org, in the near future, selecting “Communities” and then “Ethiopia.”)

The Sun Shines on Uganda (and Long Island)

By Rabbi Joseph H. Prouser

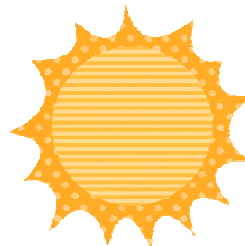
In 1981, the last time Birkat Ha-Chammah, the “Blessing of the Sun,” was conducted, I was a young Seminary student. I participated in this rarest of Jewish rituals in Manhattan's Riverside Park. We were cautioned, when bowing during “Aleinu,” to bow neither East toward the sun nor North toward Grant's Tomb – lest we appear to be venerating a divine (or very human) creation, rather than worshiping the Crea-

Birkat Ha-Chammah is recited only once every 28 years

tor Himself! Ora Horn, also a Seminary student, observed Birkat Ha-Chammah at the Kotel in Jerusalem – the first time the observance could be held in a united, free and sovereign capital of the Jewish State. I had not yet met Ora, whom I would marry 16 months later, and together with whom some 20 years later – with our three children in tow – I would travel to Uganda to lead Purim services.

Birkat Ha-Chammah is recited only once every 28 years. The ceremony takes place whenever (according to the astronomic calculations of the Talmudic sage Shmuel) the vernal equinox – marking the beginning of a new solar year – occurs on Tuesday evening – reprising the time provided by Genesis for God's creation of the sun: the beginning of the fourth day. The rarity of this occurrence makes Birkat Ha-Chammah a particularly precious, eagerly anticipated, and enthusiastically celebrated milestone. Jews all over the world will together offer this blessing... and together will sing and dance and celebrate... when Birkat Ha-Chammah is offered this year – on Wednesday morning, April 8, 2009 – the morning before the first Seder.

Because of the rarity of Birkat Ha-Chammah, this once-in-a-generation observance also becomes a time for deep introspection. Not unlike Rosh Ha-Shana, we look back... and we look ahead. We reflect on what we have accomplished, what we have done right... and we recognize missed opportunities and shortcomings. We also look ahead and contemplate what we will make of ourselves in the days ahead. On Rosh Ha-Shana we look back one year and ahead one year. At Birkat Ha-Chammah, we look back 28 years and ahead 28 years. We contemplate how years, our stock as to what take over the Ha-Chammah is power of 28! observed again to make the most service.



As I look back over the past 28 years, and as I reflect upon personal changes and achievements of that extended period... my association with Kulanu figures prominently. That family Purim spent in the

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

With a Blog and Facebook Page, Kulanu Enters the 21st Century!

By Harriet Bograd

Many of you are already aware that Kulanu entered the "blogosphere" this past winter when we launched the Kulanu Blog (visit www.kulanu.org/blog). With the help of our volunteer blog expert Matthew Feldman of Philadelphia and volunteer webmaster Miguel Vicuña of Madrid, Spain, we have been expanding the blog content to include upcoming conferences and events related to Jews around the world, as well as other news and updates.

We invite all of you to share relevant events with us so we can post them to our Blog. These posts will also be viewable on the kulanu.org homepage, as we have linked the Kulanu Blog to the main Kulanu website. To submit an event for consideration, please email the following information to events@kulanu.org: Name of the event, Time and date, Location (including address, city, state and country), Registration and contact info, Name of the sponsor or presenter, and a Short description of the event. (Photos are also welcome)

Also, on the "Web 2.0" front, Kulanu is now on Facebook! We thank music publicist Matt Merewitz for his *pro bono* help in getting us started. Facebook is a free, interactive online social networking tool for both individuals and organizations, allowing you to connect more easily and in a more interactive way with your friends, family, and the groups you care about. Millions of people use Facebook every day to keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet. We have already started posting news and events to the "Kulanu, Inc" page, and will continue to use this as a resource to connect with each other through messages, wall posts, links, and photos and videos. By becoming a fan of the Kulanu, Inc page on Facebook, you will be helping to spread the word about Kulanu, and it will give you the opportunity to meet other fascinating people around the world who are involved with Kulanu.

If you are already on Facebook, log in to your account, search for "Kulanu, Inc" and become a fan of our Kulanu, Inc page. If you are not on Facebook, you can sign up for free by going to facebook.com and following the instructions; once you have found the Kulanu, Inc page, click on the icon that says "Become a Fan" to show your support. To simply view the Kulanu page without joining Facebook, you can either click the link on the Kulanu.org homepage, or go to: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Kulanu-Inc/12607623971>.

Meet Katie Rosenthal

In our mainly volunteer organization, Katie Rosenthal, Kulanu's part-time development associate, is currently our only paid employee. She began working with Kulanu in November 2007 and now works with us three days a week.

Katie has a BA in International Studies and a double minor in Latin American Studies and Political Science. Katie's dedication to the nonprofit sector and building sustainable justice evolved in college with her involvement and leadership in campus groups such as Habitat for Humanity and ElonVolunteers!, her university's campus-wide volunteer organization, and continued with her AmeriCorps*VISTA experience working with Volunteers of America in Denver, CO. She has backpacked through Europe and South America, and has spent time in Costa Rica, Israel, and South Africa.

For Kulanu, Katie coordinates work on Kulanu's website (kulanu.org) and Facebook page, and she efficiently and cheerfully manages the database, donations, speaking tours, and the Kulanu Boutique. She recruits and supervises volunteers who help with our online presence and our office work. She helps with outreach to youth and congregations. She also provides support to Harriet Bograd, the president and treasurer

We are so lucky to have Katie on our Kulanu team!



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KULANU ("ALL OF US"), a tax-exempt organization of Jews of varied backgrounds and practices, finds lost and dispersed remnants of the Jewish people and assists those who wish to (re)join world Jewry. Kulanu is undertaking a variety of activities worldwide on behalf of these dispersed groups, including research, contacts, education, and conversion information if requested. This newsletter is published quarterly by Kulanu, 165 West End Ave., 3R, New York, NY 10023.

Invite an Abayudaya Speaker To Your Community!

Kulanu is delighted to host Athalia Nalongo for our Fall 2009 Abayudaya Speaking Tour. She is treasurer of the Abayudaya community, secretary of the Abayudaya Women's Association, treasurer of the local Heifer project, a coffee and maize farmer, a craftsperson, and the mother of five daughters who have attended the Abayudaya schools.

Visit Kulanu's web site, www.kulanu.org, for details about how to host an event in your community. Act quickly, since these tours fill up fast!

Hippos and Huppahs and Obama and More

By Laura Wetzler

Kulanu Coordinator for Uganda

You are cordially invited to join us on Kulanu's 2010 "Jewish Life in Uganda Mitzvah Tour and Wildlife Safari." The date has not yet been set, but it is important to let me know of your potential interest as soon as possible (laura@laurawetzler.com). This annual tour to visit the Abayudaya is very popular and fills up fast.

We thank Rabbi Bruce Elder and 10 wonderful members of Congregation Hakafa in Chicago for joining our most recent mitzvah tour and safari, which included some exciting sightings of zebra and hippos from beautiful Mihingo and Mweya safari lodges. Believe me, it was fun traveling through Uganda with a group from Chicago right after President Obama's election, as all East Africans were taking pride in our new President. It was a great point of connection.

This fantastic congregational delegation, including 13-year-old Melanie and 15-year-old Jack, "walked the walk" of *mitzvot*, and spent a cultural exchange learning day in Namutumba village, sharing art and math enrichment workshops with the children and a child development and Torah study discussion with Namutumba parents and youth. Many thanks to Laura and Howard Klapman for seeing the need and making a donation to our Namutumba microfinance project, and to the commitment of the entire congregation and Rabbi Bruce Elder for helping us purchase much needed beds for children at the primary school dorm.

All agreed that the Abayudaya community music and dance festival was particularly fun since there was the added joy of *three* Abayudaya weddings being celebrated under the *huppah* at the festival.

This tourism project brings employment but more importantly helps celebrate and preserve Ugandan Jewish culture. It makes possible a rare, all-village Abayudaya community gathering and the dancing and music are absolutely fabulous. Please try and join us on our 2010 tour for the time of your life.



A scene at the Abayudaya women's conference

The Nascent Jewish Community of Huánuco, Peru: One Year Later

By Rabbi Peter Tarlow

About a year ago, I wrote an article for Kulanu about my journey to the Peruvian Highland city of Huánuco and its nascent Jewish community. In March of 2008, I traveled to Huánuco with five of my Hillel students to found a Jewish community approximately 400 kilometers from Peru's capital city of Lima. During the past year these efforts began to take root and enough progress was made to return to Huánuco, this time with eleven more students.

As reported last year, the city and province of Huánuco had an active 19th century Jewish community. At the time Aschanazic Jews, who had come there for business, made up most of the community. These were people who had traveled up the Amazon River from Brazil, married, and were forced by 19th century Peruvian law to register their children as Catholics. The local Jewish community reports that there was even a rabbi in Huánuco, who, it was reported, died in a



Rabbi Tarlow (left) with new converts

boating accident. During the latter part of the 19th century and into the early 20th century other Jews found their way to Huánuco. These people were either Crypto-Jews (Lima was the Inquisition's headquarters during Spanish rule in South America) or people who no longer accepted Catholicism and were seeking other religious expressions. With the advent of computers

and modern genealogy, many of these people began to research their roots and rediscovered their Jewish heritage

These e-missions of rediscovery may have been the impetus for the formation of a new Jewish community last year. After many discussions and numerous telephone calls, about 20 people came together for a formal conversion ceremony, and in March of 2008 the community was legally recognized as a full religious community by the government. This recognition provided more than mere legality; it also permitted the community to own property and apply for national grants.

It is against this background that Texas A&M Hillel sent an additional 11 students to Huánuco during its Spring break in March 2009. This year's students came with three clear goals to accomplish -- (1) strengthen the ties of the Huánuco Jewish community with Texas A&M Hillel, (2) provide the needed man/woman power to create synagogue life in Huánuco, and (3) permit another 14 people to convert to Judaism.

The Hillel students arrived in Huánuco after a 25-hour bus ride from Lima due to mudslides. Once there, I divided the students into three groups. One group worked on building such items as a new bimah for the synagogue, one group painted walls, and five of the men aided me in questioning candidates for admission into Judaism. The following day (with the weather now permitting) all candidates were taken to a mountain mikveh for immersion and the ritual of *tipat dam* was then performed on all of the men (all were previously circumcised by a Jewish doctor).

On March 18th the Jewish community of Huánuco grew by 14

(Continued on page 5)

KULANU BRIEFS

Kulanu Welcomes New Coordinator

Kulanu is delighted that Navras Jaat Aafreedi has agreed to become a Co-Coordinator for India, joining Romiel Daniel. Daniel, a Bene Israel Jew now living in New York, founded the Indian Jewish Congregation of USA and works as a businessman and cantor. Aafreedi, of Lucknow, India, is a member of the Pathan Afridi tribe. He is a scholar concentrating on Indo-Jewish Studies in India.

Online Resources

Free non-credit online courses are offered by Rutgers University in New Jersey. The free courses are: The Bible and History, Israeli Political System, and Introduction to Rabbinic Literature. See <http://jewishstudies.rutgers.edu> and select Online Study

There is an excellent link to a Power Point slide show on Jewish Harbin, China, at http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/harbin/Jewish_Harbin.htm.

www.sefaradi.net is a Portuguese-language website covering the history of Sephardic communities in Iberia, Brazil, and the US.

<http://www.igboisrael.com/> is a new website and blog developed by Remy Itona with the assistance of Gil Kobrin, of Derusha Publishing. Its aim is the realigning of the Igbo-Israelites with other children of Israel.

Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies

The Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies will hold its 19th Annual Conference August 2-4 in Denver, Colorado. Please click on <http://www.cryptojews.com/> for details.

Sheba Film Festival 2009

Beta Israel of North America (BINA) will present its 2009 Sheba Film Festival May 14-17 in NYC. Films screened will include *The Name My Mother Gave Me* (following a group of Israeli adolescents, mostly born in Ethiopia, on a life-changing journey); *Vasermil* (about three teenagers growing up in a tough neighborhood, pining their hopes on football as a way out); and *Zrubavel* (about a family in cultural disarray on their journey from Ethiopia to Israel. For locations and other info, go to www.binacf.org/).

A Multicultural Tikkun Leil Shavuot

In a modern twist to the Tikkun Leil Shavuot, the Manhattan JCC will augment the traditional late-night study with a multicultural program that will include study, music, film, dance, meditation and food. Bechol Lashon is co-sponsoring this event, assembling programs that include Jews of all ages, colors, and cultures. This free event will take place from 10 p.m. on May 28 to 5 a.m. on May 29. For information, telephone 646-505-5708.

“Belonging Everywhere”

In 2006, DNAWORKS received a grant from the U.S. Embassy in Accra to lead an oral history project with members of the Jewish community in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana. This project is now the basis for the program “Belonging Everywhere,” which was developed to lead communities in conversations on issues such as Jewish identity, personal and communal return to Judaism, and the importance of testimony in the global Jewish community. The program has been presented widely for Hillels, Jewish Film Festivals, JCCs, and synagogues. For more information, visit www.dnaworks.org or call (212) 765-4914.

Speakers Spread the Word

(Compiled by Ephraim Levin)

On May 14, at the Manhattan JCC, **Rabbi Gershon Sizomu**, spiritual leader of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda, discussed the unique history of his community and the role music played in their survival. *Co-sponsored with Be'chol Lashon.*

On May 6, the Manhattan JCC presented the screening of the film *Pearls of Africa – The Abayudaya Jews of Uganda*, with a discussion led by cultural anthropologist **Y’sudah Yehudah**.

A Jewish Studies colloquy heard **Jean Naggar** discuss her book, *Sipping from the Nile*, a memoir of an idyllic childhood in Egypt, on February 24 at the CUNY Center for Jewish Studies. Expulsion from Egypt ended the life of the vibrant Jewish Community there.

Dr. Beverly Friend, Executive Director of the China/Judaic Studies Association, reported on the status of interest in Jewish culture in China, in Coconut Grove, Florida, on March 6. Along with Professor Xu Xing of Nanjing University, Dr. Friend is the coauthor of *Legends of the Jews of Kaifeng*.

Prof. Avrum Ehrlich, of the Center for Judaic and Inter-Religious studies at Shandong University, spoke at a Shabbat dinner on February 27 at the Manhattan JCC. His topic was his book *Jews and Judaism in Modern China*.

The Indian Jewish Congregation of USA and the New York Museum of Jewish Heritage co-sponsored a panel discussion on the old Indian Jewish communities of Kolkata, Kolchi, and Mumbai, on March 15 at the Museum. The discussion was preceded by a screening of the DVD *In Search of the Bene Israel*.

On March 16, **Sami Chetrit** spoke at CUNY on his forthcoming book, *The Intra-Jewish Ethnic Conflict in Israel*, exploring the cultural and social oppression of Mizrahi Jews of the Muslim world by the Ashkenazi-dominated culture in Israel.

Rabbi Shlomo Nisanov of the Kehillat Sephardim Ahavat Achim Synagogue and **Joseph Berger** of the *New York Times* discussed the history of the Bukharian Jews of Central Asia and their migration to New York, on March 18 at the Manhattan JCC. The program included Bukharian delicacies and music.

On April 2, **Juan Mejia**, senior rabbinical student at the JTS, shared his personal journey from his Catholic upbringing in Colombia back to the faith of his Jewish forefathers in Spain. He also discussed the current phenomenon whereby Latinos are reconnecting with their Jewish roots, and their efforts to enter the Jewish mainstream.

On March 31 an international conference at Yeshiva University Museum highlighted the historic and contemporary relationship of Israel and India. Of particular interest was a presentation by **Professor Maina Chawa Singh** of the University of Delhi on Indian Jews in present-day Israel.

On April 29, the American Sephardi Federation in Manhattan presented a talk by **Pearl Sofaer**, author of *Baghdad to Bombay: In the Kitchens of My Cousins*. Sofaer is a musician, artist, cantorial soloist, retired mediator, and gourmet cook.

In March **Jonina Duker** taught a five-part course at the Saul Bendit Adult Institute at Bethel El in Bethesda. The title: “More Lost and Found: Jews in Remote Places in the World.” **Mollie Berch** taught a course at the same Institute on “Pursuing the Sephardic Diaspora.”

Travel Opportunities

Jewish historian and educator Claire Goldstein Simmons leads Jewish History Study Tours to such places as Spain, Poland, Italy (Rome and North), and Morocco. See www.JewishHistoryStudyTours.com or call 240-387-4161.

And Rabbi Barbara Aiello and Dr. Laura Supino lead Italian Jewish History tours in Rome, Calabria, and Sicily in June and October 2009. See www.rabbibarbara.com.

BRIEFS

Genealogy Conference in August

The International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) and the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Philadelphia (JGSGP) are proud to co-sponsor the IAJGS 2009 conference, to be held August 2-7 in Philadelphia. Keynote speaker will be French priest, author, and humanitarian Father Patrick Desbois; he will speak on his recently published book, *The Holocaust by Bullets: A Priest's Journey to Uncover the Truth Behind the Murder of 1.5 million Jews*. Other speakers include film-maker Hava Volterra, discussing her film *The Tree of Life*, on her family and the history of the Jews of Italy, and Argentina-born film-maker Gabriela Bohm, discussing *The Forgotten Jews of South America* about the *Anousim*. Information will be available at the website <http://www.philly2009.org/>.

Mazal Tov

To **Gurion Sela** of the Bnei Menashe community, who has been ordained as a rabbi after studying in various *yeshivot* in Jerusalem for more than 10 years. He also served in the Israel Defense Force for over two years. He is one of the nine children of Eliezer Sela, who was Chief Cantor in Mizoram, North East India.

To **Joseph Mubale** of the Abayudaya Congregation, who has earned a Diploma in Accounting and Financial Management. Kulanu is proud to have provided the assistance necessary.

To **Debra Gonsher Vinik** and **David Vinik** of Diva Communications, who have been awarded their third Emmy in NY, this time for their documentary, *Yearning To Belong*, which chronicles the formal conversion of the Ugandan Abayudaya to Judaism, and their subsequent struggle for recognition as Jews. To see a clip, go to <http://www.divacommunications.com/Abayudaya.htm>

Todah Rabah!

Todah rabah to **Rachel Blazer**, who designated Kulanu as one of 11 charities she selected for her bat mitzvah project. She has created a website at www.rachelscharities.com and donated \$100 to each charity.

Todah rabah to these generous donors of \$2000 and above: **Congregation Hakafa; Woodlands Community Temple.**

And to these donors of \$1000-1999: **The Good People Fund; Jewish Community of Amherst; Howard Metzberg; Mosaic Law Congregation; Temple Emanu-El of Palm Beach; Marvin Wolf and Marilyn Kresky-Wolf**, and anonymous.

And to these donors of \$500-999: **Irwin M and Elaine R Berg.**

And to these donors of \$125-499: **Hope and Matthew Feldman; Judith F Helzner; Harriette Hirsch; Martha L Kahn and Simeon M Kriesberg; Mr. and Mrs. Tadeusz Kowikowski; Martin J and Susan B Kozak; Ruth Mason and Robert Trachtenberg; Shomrei Torah Synagogue; UIA Federations Canada; University of Guelph; Barbara H Vinick; Carol Wolkove.**

And to the \$100 Club: **The Blazer Family; Marguerite C and Raymond J Cross, Jr; Sherman L Cohn; Benjamin C Fieman; Amichai B and Shana J Heppner; Maria and Peter Lagios; Jack S and Stephanie J Ventura.**

Huánuco, Peru (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

people. The conversion and reentry ceremony were performed in their new synagogue. That evening the first Jewish wedding to take place in Huánuco in over 150 years was also celebrated. To add to the miracle of this rebirth, Jews and potential Jews from around Peru have contacted Huánuco's now functioning Jewish community.

Needless to say, there are still many challenges ahead for Huánuco's Jewish community. There is the need to establish an orderly budget process, to divide community responsibilities, and to develop an ongoing plan for Jewish education. However, there is now, despite all of the difficulties, a functioning Jewish community in Huánuco. Unlike the 19th century community, this is a legal community that can register both births and marriages. Full services are planned this year for the Jewish High Holidays.

(The writer is the Texas A&M Hillel director and rabbi.)

Calling All Supporters: Have you donated in the last year?

Kulanu is a very small organization with very big dreams and we rely on our community—the “all of us” referred to in our name—to fund our activities.

We at Kulanu hope you enjoy receiving this quarterly newsletter and reading all the latest news and fascinating stories about our organization's work partnering with Jewish communities and Jews around the world – we certainly love sharing it with you!

Every three months, we mail nearly 2,000 newsletters, with copies going to our supporters, friends and the communities we work with. Many of those newsletters are going to individuals who may have supported us in the past but have not made a recent contribution. Rising postage and other costs have forced a difficult decision on us—to **limit our distribution list to current and lifetime supporters**. Our overseas partner communities will continue to receive copies of the newsletters without the need to donate.

Please consider making a donation to support the work of Kulanu.

Thank you very much.



Chihuahua's Anousim: A Personal Reflection

By Edward Rensin

Over the past few decades, the volume of research on Jewish communities at the fringe has increased to nearly maximum decibels. Historians, geographers, theologians, and etymologists, or simply you and I, can have a field day poring through book upon book and website upon website until a remarkably detailed picture of hitherto unknown or unheralded branches of the Diaspora emerges. Rather than simply rehashing that which is already well-researched and documented, I thought it might be interesting to focus on one of my personal experiences among the Jewish periphery.

In the early 1970s, I learned that my extended family contained cousins from a remote *Anous* (Hebrew for “forced one”) community high in the Sierra Madre of Chihuahua state in northwestern Mexico. The *Bnai Anousim* are descendants of Iberian Jews who, at the onset of the Spanish Inquisition, were given the ultimatum of fleeing their homeland or converting to Catholicism. Many such converts clung clandestinely to their Jewish roots, some eventually leaving Spain for what they hoped would be greener pastures in the New World.

Sometime in the 1950s, my father's first cousin, whom we called Mutty, left his job as a Brooklyn firefighter and trekked into the Mexican wilds to manage a copper mining operation for a large metallurgical corporation. He was able to curry favor with the local Tarahumara Indians by trading with them for goods brought back from his occasional sojourns to Chihuahua city. Not long after his arrival, he married Lily, a woman from the *Anous* mining town of Uruachi (a.k.a. Uruachic) in western Chihuahua state, near Copper Canyon. He adopted her son, and the family eventually found its way to Tucson.

Copper Canyon is gaining attention as an increasingly popular tourist destination. There exists a parallel chasm. Sadly, but perhaps predictably, it is the one that separates the Mexican government's official version of the area's history from the oral accounts passed down by the *Anousim* themselves. As a matter of fact, in everything I have read about the area from “official” sources, neither the word “*Anousim*” nor the more common but politically incorrect Spanish “*Marrano*” ever once appeared.

The name Uruachi quite possibly is a Hispanic variant of the word “*uruachim*,” Hebrew for “brotherhood.” The official line, however, awards it to the Tarahumara language in which it, or something akin to it, means either “place of palms” or “place of black stones.” Take your choice. Officially, in 1719 the Jesuits settled the area by

establishing a mission some miles to the west at an even more remote location called Batopilas, but Mutty and Lily claimed that the first permanent settlers in the area, who in all likelihood predated the Jesuit mission, were latter-day refugees from the Inquisition whose intent it was to relocate to the most inaccessible place they could possibly find, so to divorce themselves from the yoke of enforced Catholicism. In Uruachi through the centuries, the *Bnai Anousim* gradually reverted to what they, in their isolation, were able to resurrect of their Jewish heritage, including shedding the *Jesús*es and *Marias* from their names and adopting more secular--or even Hebrew-sounding ones. Mutty told me that Uruachi was one of the only towns in Chihuahua without a cathedral (I've often tried to “Google” or “flickr” a bird's eye photo of the town to verify this, but haven't been successful.).

Cousin Mutty was apparently given to the occasional bout of exaggeration, once telling me that nearly every state government ministry in Chihuahua was headed by someone either openly or secretly Jewish! Nevertheless, he disseminated a wealth of verifiably credible information about historical events and landmarks in the region. So, while I can't vouch for the total accuracy of his account, neither can I dismiss it simply as folklore. He seemed to have been a rather prominent, well-respected figure in that part of Mexico, for during a day trip from Tucson I took with him south of the border to Nogales, he apparently knew and was greeted warmly by practically every other person in town. I told him I wanted one of the ubiquitous bullfight posters as a souvenir, and almost before I could snap my fingers, it was in my hand, courtesy of a merchant who, upon Mutty's request, removed it from his shop window. Long after leaving Mexico, he continued to maintain a sizeable ranch in the Sierra Madre which probably still belongs to his son.

There are, as I have recently learned, several other *Anous* communities scattered throughout the American Southwest, especially in Colorado and New Mexico.

I must confess that the closest I have been to Uruachi, Copper Canyon, and the Sierra Madre was perhaps six or seven miles, and that from a vertical direction a few years ago on flights from Houston to Cabo San Lucas and back again. Predictably rugged, though unexpectedly green and lush, these mountains beckon more intimate examination, but since the area is currently plagued by violence emanating from drug cartels, it might be advisable to keep one's distance, for a while at least.

A “Win-Win-Win” Bar Mitzvah

By Rabbi David Kay

We wanted to share with you a “win-win-win” story involving our synagogue's Social Action Committee (SAC), our son becoming Bar Mitzvah, and the Mirembe Kawomera coffee-growers.

When Mirembe Kawomera was being launched in the U.S., our congregation hosted the kick-off event (Holly Moskowitz at Thanksgiving Coffee is the grand-daughter of a congregant). We hosted JJ Keki and Seth Jonadav at our home – a nice connection, in that we had hosted Rachel Namudosi Keki two years before, when we invited her to visit with the congregation we were serving in Naples, Florida. We've felt a close connection with the Abayudaya since meeting Rachel, and were delighted to help get Mirembe Kawomera going in this country.

Since the kick-off event, we've been looking for a way to make Mirembe Kawomera the “official coffee” of our congregation. There was an understandable budgetary concern about using a premium cof-

fee every week at our *Oneg Shabbat* and *Kiddush*, so our recently-revived Social Action Committee came up with a plan – it would collect *tz'dakah* at each monthly meeting, to be used specifically to offset the additional cost of using Mirembe Kawomera.

Just about that time, we were planning the week-end of our son Jonah becoming Bar Mitzvah. In addition to the *Oneg Shabbat* and *Kiddush*, we hosted an *Erev Shabbat* dinner for out of town family and friends and *S'udah Sh'lisheet* on Shabbat afternoon. We had always planned to serve Mirembe Kawomera coffee for all those meals.

In addition, at the party Saturday night, we distributed T-shirts with the names, logos, and websites of several organizations we've supported during this process. In addition to Mirembe Kawomera, we promoted Ananse Village, where we purchased fair trade African cloth to make Jonah's talit, as well as Ten Thousand Villages.

As we were addressing invitations, though, we had another thought. Not wanting out-of-town relatives and friends whom we knew would not likely be able to attend to think we were “fishing” for

(Continued on page 8)

Publications of Note

Compiled by Morton Simon

✍️ “Rites of Passage: In Cuba, a Revival in Judaism Leads Some to Israel” by **Joel Millman**, in the *Wall Street Journal*, January 14, 2009. The prospect of emigration to Israel has sparked interest in Jewish identity after more than fifty years of Communism in Cuba. Joel Millman covers the saga and some anecdotal threads of the journey from Havana to Jerusalem. The revival in Jewish life here began in the early 1990s, when the Communist Party lifted the ban on members practicing religion. The number of people interested in rediscovering their Jewish roots picked up in the mid-1990s, when “Operation Cigar” moved 400 elderly Havana Jews to Israel. Some emigrants say life in Israel is as hard as life in Cuba, and a significant number of the *conversos* relocate to the U.S. or Canada. Two issues seem dominant: the obstacle of learning Hebrew and the violence of terrorists. Millman reports that for the first time in decades, more Jewish babies are being born in Cuba than elderly members are dying. This statistic may reflect a decrease in the number of elderly Jewish Cubans remaining there as well as a higher Jewish birthrate. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB123189390011979489.html>

✍️ “Yemeni Jews to be relocated” published in *JTA*, January 14, 2009. The 266-person community is relocated by the government following a murder suspected to be a “hate crime”. These Amran Jews will join the 66 Jews who moved to Sana'a in 2006 after a Shiite rebel leader in the northern portion of the country evicted them from his province. The two communities house the only Jews remaining in this country. <http://jta.org/news/article/2009/01/14/1002250/yemeni-jews-to-be-relocated>

✍️ “Fundamentally Freund: Uncovering Portugal's Hidden Jewish Past” by **Michael Freund**, in *The Jerusalem Post*, Feb. 10, 2009. Freund is introduced to a secret synagogue that was discovered during the renovation of a building in the old Jewish quarter of Porto, Portugal. Local historians confirmed that it had been used by Portugal's “hidden Jews” since 1497 when forced to convert or leave. Freund then skims over five centuries of their history and applauds their descendants “as increasing numbers of Portuguese *Anousim* are seeking to reconnect with their Jewish heritage.” Several interesting anecdotes follow, including group conversions and trips to Israel. He concludes with “there are a number of steps that can and should be taken to help the *Anousim*, including publishing more material on Jewish topics in Spanish and Portuguese, sending teachers and rabbis to reach out to them and raising awareness about their existence to smooth their reintegration into the Jewish community.” And finally there is mention that Freund chairs Shavei Israel (www.shavei.org), a Jerusalem-based group that assists “Lost Jews” seeking to return to the Jewish people. <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1233304741729&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

✍️ “Trailblazers – Were Marranos the First of the Moderns?” by **Adam Kirsch**, published in *Nextbook – A New Read on Jewish Culture*, February 23, 2009. Kirsch reports critically on **Yirmiyahu Yovel**'s book *The Other Within: The Marranos: Split Identity and Emerging Modernity*, (Princeton University Press 2009). He says, “What Yovel sees as Marrano, in other words, is the whole complex of social changes that are conventionally referred to as the Reformation and the Renaissance...” Additionally, “Yovel devotes most of his book to telling the history of the Marranos and it is possible to learn a great deal from his narrative without sharing his ultimate conclusions.” <http://www.nextbook.org/cultural/feature.html?id=3305&source=email>

✍️ “Fresh Rift Seen Over New Israeli Conversion Rules” by **Michale Chabin**, published in *Jewish Week*, Feb 25, 2009. Israel's Interior

Ministry will soon institute new, stricter guidelines for *Diaspora* converts wishing to immigrate to Israel. The minimum period of residence in a “recognized Jewish community” is increased by six months, and 350 hours of study therein are mandated. Rabbi Andy Sacks, director of the Masorti/Conservative Movement's Rabbinical Assembly in Israel said, “The first question I raised was, ‘What constitutes a recognized community?’” **Chabin** writes, “The new guidelines apparently are, in part, an effort to prevent non-Jewish foreign workers who reside in Israel from converting quickly in Jewish communities overseas, and then declare aliyah.” Rabbi Seth Farber, founder and director of ITIM, the Jewish Life Information Center, opines, “In essence, the State of Israel is completely disregarding the autonomy of recognized Diaspora Jewish communities, whether they be Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform, and doesn't allow for the local nuances of these communities.” Furthermore, these requirements, if enacted, are retroactive. http://www.thejewishweek.com/viewArticle/c40_a14986/News/Israel.htm

✍️ “Brewing Up Peace” by **Carolyn Slutsky**, published in *REFORM JUDAISM Online*, Spring 2009. Slutsky describes J.J. Keki's motivations for the Mirembe Kawomera (Delicious Peace) coffee project, its acceptance by neighboring Muslims and Christians, and finally backing by California's Thanksgiving Coffee Company. Next Slutsky reviews the history of Abayudaya from Semei Kakungulu to Idi Amin to J.J. Keki and his brother, Rabbi Gershom Sizomu. Ms Slutsky concludes with a brief fiscal wrap-up of the coffee cooperative. <http://reformjudaismmag.org/Articles/index.cfm?id=1434>

✍️ “Film Uncovers Amazonian Jews Who Want to Make Aliyah” by **Michael Fox**, *JWeekly.com*, November 14, 2008. Another review of **Lorry Salcedo Mitrani**'s documentary film, “The Fire Within” [previously Kulanu reported on “Hidden Roots in the Jungle” by Robin Cembalest] **Fox** writes: “*The Fire Within* adopts a surprisingly even-keel tone, allowing the Iquito Jews' remarkable commitment and perseverance to speak for itself. As one small example of their desire to be considered Jewish, some traveled six days by canoe to participate in the conversion process.” Slightly off topic, Fox mentions *Glass House*, another film documentary, this one about how El Salvador issued certificates of citizenship to help save Jews in World War II. Fox compares *The Fire* to another documentary which screened at the 2007 San Francisco Jewish Film Festival, *The Longing: The Forgotten Jews of South America*. This one focused on Ecuadoran and Columbian Jews – different peoples, different parts of SA, similar themes. <http://www.jweekly.com/article/full/36174/film-uncovers-amazonian-jews-who-want-to-make-aliyah/>

✍️ “Three Decades after Exodus from America, first Black Hebrew Becomes Israeli Citizen” by **Andrew Esensten**, published by *The Jewish Daily Forward* on March 18, 2009 and reprinted by *Haaretz.com*, March 26, 2009 and *jewcy.com* on 3-25-2009. The author is writing a book about the African Hebrew Israelites (Black Hebrews) in Dimona, Israel and it is sure to be a must-have/must-read when it is finished. While on a fellowship from Harvard University he lived in Dimona from September 2007 to November 2008 gathering material. This article in *Haaretz* whets this reader's appetite for more information on an obscure truth. The article's title is a mere premise to get the rest of the story out – a story clouded with assertions and counter-assertions, misrepresentations, guilt-by-association, ignorance, prejudice, anger and frustration. Are the black villagers of Dimona unjustly stereotyped or is there some truth to the accusations? Esensten slides toward unconvincing in an effort to remain objective. In these pages, however, he covers a remarkable story of African success amidst European dominated Israel. Read it! <http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/1073196.html>

An Interview with Rebecca Yehezkiel

(Editor's note: Yehezkiel is the author and illustrator of **Of Muse and Memories: An Illustrated History of a Jewish Family in India**. A member of the Bene Israel community, she made aliyah 38 years ago with her husband, Isaac. These are excerpts from a 2008 interview by Marcia Levinson.)



Sabbath Table by Rebecca Yehezkiel

What is the meaning of the book's title?

The word 'muse' derives from the same root as 'museum'. This book is my personal museum, and India, with its diverse landscapes, was my muse in composing this book - the warm colors, the red and orange of the mud and sand, the yellow of the bright sunshine and the green of the verdant trees. They have all helped to unfold the narrative of my early life and tradition.

What prompted you to start this project?

One of my grandchildren asked me one day about my roots, and I began to think of a good answer. This book is the answer. It involved not just my writings but also my paintings and drawings.

You came on aliyah in 1970. What made you take this big step?

We had a very comfortable life among our Indian neighbors, but we always valued our Jewish heritage very much and always yearned to settle in Israel one day. So, when our children were growing up, we decided to raise them in our homeland and to let my husband realise his dream of flying the skies of Israel.

The pictures in your book are very beautiful. What were the major influences on your work, and what are the motifs or icons that appear in them?

They are the things that rush to my mind when I think of India: the sacred lotus flower, the leaves of the *neem* tree, the elephant, the peacock, the cow, and the curves that are a dominant feature of Indian symbols and architecture.

I believe that it has been my heightened sense of self-identity and a relentless curiosity that has knit together history, mythology, fantasy, and memories to give articulate expression to my work. Art has no boundaries...

(Proceeds from the book go towards the Bene Israel Heritage Museum and Genealogical Research Center.)

LETTERS

Financial Training in Uganda

I am writing to express my sincere appreciation and many thanks to Kulanu for your timely help and assistance to our community for the Vocational tuition grants you extend to us to pursue further education.

I underwent a course of training for three years, which I successfully completed in December 2008. I graduated and was awarded a Diploma in Accounting and Financial Management

*Joseph Mubale
Mbale, Uganda*

Loving Kulanu in Illinois

I have loved Kulanu for many years. . . I find it so moving that people all around the world identify with Judaism, and I find it so disgraceful that some Jews seem to have different standards, that they would accept a convert who looks Ashkenazi or European and is affluent, but question one who is of another ethnicity and is less affluent or impoverished.

*Howard Metzenberg
Highland Park, Illinois*

A "Win-Win-Win" Bar Mitzvah (cont.)

(Continued from page 6)

gifts, we enclosed a note explaining that we were sending them an invitation only to inform them and share our joy, and that no gift was necessary. However, we continued, if you still insist on doing something to honor Jonah becoming Bar Mitzvah, please make a donation to our Social Action Committee's coffee project.

The result? We have received enough donations to fund the use of Miremba Kawomera in our congregation for the next year.

We are so impressed with the work Kulanu does – we wanted to share this story of one family that shares your concern for and support of Jewish communities in far-flung parts of the world.

Pesach Revisited — Get Ready for Next Year!

Barbara Nesin's HAITIAN HAROSET

1 cup dried papaya, diced*
1 cup dried mango, diced*
1 cup guava paste, diced*
1 cup shredded, sweetened coconut flakes
1 cup or more raw cashew nuts (or almonds or peanuts)
1 medium ripe fresh banana, cut up
¼ cup Manischewitz Concord Grape Wine

Combine all ingredients in food processor with steel blade and process until blended to desired consistency. (Not quite a paste, still slightly chunky is good; it will have to be processed enough to incorporate the very sticky guava paste.) Makes about 4 cups haroset.

*preferably unsulphured, reduced sugar dried fruits. Dried pineapple can also be added or substituted for any of the dried fruits listed. I sometimes use two packages of Dole diced mixed tropical fruits (with papaya, mango, and pineapple), and omit the guava paste.

The FOUR QUESTIONS in LADINO, courtesy of Rabbi Peter Tarlow

Kuanto fue demudada la noshada a esta mas ke todas las noshadas?

Ke en todas las noshadas non mos entinyentes afilu vez una la noshada la esta dos vezes.

Ke en todas las noshadas mos komientes levdo o sesenya i la noshada la esta todo el sesenya.

Ke en todas las noshadas mos komientes resto de vedruras i la noshada la esta lishuga.

Ke en todas las noshadas mos komientes i bevientes tanto asentados i tanto areskovdados i la noshada la esta todos mos areskovdados.



The Sun Shines (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

Abayudaya community was a blessing in its own right. Still earlier, in 2002, I was profoundly honored to serve on the Bet Din that traveled to Uganda to oversee the formal entry of its devout Jewish Community into Klal Yisrael. Indeed, as Jews observing Birkat Ha-Chammah around the world examine the events of the 28-year solar cycle now drawing to a close, the experience of the Abayudaya Congregation of Uganda (as, too, the rabbinic ordination of its spiritual leader) is properly to be viewed as a momentous element of our shared, historic journey.

It has been my privilege over the past year to prepare and to author the Siddur published by the (Conservative Movement's) Rabbinical Assembly for use at this unusual ceremony: "**Koach Ha-Berakhah: A Guide to Birkat Ha-Chammah – the Blessing of the Sun.**" My co-author, Gary Kitmacher, Manager of Communications for NASA's International Space Station Program, focused on the scientific aspects of Birkat Ha-Chammah and Shmuel's astronomy. I concentrated on the liturgy and rabbinic literature. Included in this prayerbook – as in every Blessing of the Sun service for several centu-

"Mumwebaze Adonai; kubanga mulungi...."

ries – is Psalm 136: "*Hodu l'Adonai Ki Tov...* Praise God, who is

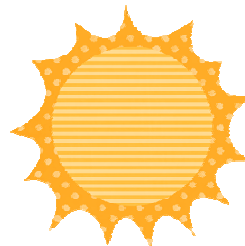
good; God's lovingkindness is everlasting." In tribute to the Abayudaya and their decisive role in the recent (and not so recent) history of the Jewish People... and in whose liturgical tradition Psalm 136 plays a central role, the Siddur I published for Birkat Ha-Chammah includes this Scriptural selection in Luganda – as my family and I heard it so lovingly chanted in the main synagogue at Nabugoye Hill:

"*Mumwebaze Adonai; kubanga mulungi....*" This year, my colleague Rabbi Gershom Sizomu will be leading the Abayudaya community in its very first Birkat Ha-Chammah. I will preside over a similar service as the sun rises over the Long Island Sound... but as Yehuda ha-Levi wrote (in an admittedly different context): "My heart is in the East" – with cherished friends among the Abayudaya.

I am gratified that my Siddur is to be used all over the United States and Canada... and I am pleased that it will also be employed by worshipers in the State of Israel. I am most deeply inspired, however, to know that it will play a supporting role in the celebration planned by the Abayudaya Community. In the Siddur they and I will be using, an extensive chronology of Birkat Ha-Chammah, documenting details of particular communities and individuals celebrating the Blessing of the Sun since 1421, is provided: from Padua's ceremony in 1505, to Prague's in 1785, to the Blessing of the Sun held atop the World Trade Towers in 1981. When, 28 years from now, Jews gather again to recite this Blessing (I

retired!!), I am Abayudaya ob-Chammah will moment in Jew-

I am grateful efforts during the close... and for family – to part-work. May its realized and



will – at best – be long certain that this year's servance of Birkat Ha-be recalled as a stellar ish religious history. ful to Kulanu for all its solar cycle drawing to a inviting me – and my ticipate in its sacred vision continue to be justly celebrated in the

new solar cycle that is upon us, as the Prophet Malachi foretold: "For you who revere Me, a healing sun of righteousness shall rise; you shall go forth in pleasure and plenty."

A Bnei Menashe Passover

By Michael Freund
From *The Jerusalem Post*

For 83-year-old Mendel Kingbol, a recent immigrant, Passover and its message of deliverance resonate far more strongly than perhaps any other festival. As one of the elder members of the Bnei Menashe community, Kingbol still recalls, with a mixture of fondness and nostalgia, the way his ancestors celebrated the festival over the centuries in the farthest reaches of northeastern India.

The Bnei Menashe reside primarily in the Indian states of Mizoram and Manipur, along the border with Burma and Bangladesh. They are descendants of the tribe of Manasseh, one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel exiled by the Assyrian empire in 723 BCE.

A century ago, when British missionaries first arrived in India's northeast, they were astonished to find that the local tribesmen worshiped one god, were familiar with many of the stories of the Bible and were practicing a form of biblical Judaism, including observance of the Sabbath, *kashrut* and the laws of family purity.

Before long, the missionaries succeeded in converting most to Christianity. Some, however, continued to adhere to the ways of their ancestors. Indeed, in recent decades, the Bnei Menashe have built dozens of synagogues across India's northeast, and three times a day they turn fervently in prayer, with their eyes raised toward Zion, to which they collectively long to return.

In March 2005, after I approached Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar and asked him to study the community and its origins, he decided to formally recognize the Bnei Menashe as "descendants of the Jewish people" and agreed to facilitate their return.

Over the past decade, thanks largely to Shavei Israel, some 1,500 Bnei Menashe have moved to Israel, where they have undergone formal conversion to Judaism to remove any doubts regarding their status. Among them are Kingbol and his family.

Now, comfortably ensconced in the Galilee, he is adjusting well to his new surroundings. Asked about Passover, he proceeds to recount the remarkable manner in which the festival, known in the Mizo language as *Chapchar Khut*, was commemorated by his ancestors. "Chapchar Khut is an ancient ritual that I have always believed is strongly connected with Passover," Kingbol says.

The holiday was typically celebrated for seven days during the spring, in the month of March, and at its center was a ceremony with remarkably Jewish overtones.

"The Bnei Menashe in Mizoram live in mountainous villages, so to grow crops we needed to make a clearing," he remembers. "This period of clearing, which was done immediately before Chapchar Khut, was regarded as a new year for us," much in the way that the Torah enumerates the Hebrew months starting with Nisan, when Passover falls.

Along with clearing a field for agricultural purposes, the Bnei Menashe would also fashion a new road as part of the traditional observance of the holiday. This, it appears, was intended to symbolize the long journey out of Egypt that lay ahead of their ancestors at the beginning of their deliverance from bondage.

Since this was considered the start of a new year, a blessing for the entire community was recited, with the village priest taking four or five people with him to the outermost edge of the settlement where, while beating the bushes, he would chant: "Behold, bushes of above and below! Make way, for the sons of Menashe are coming!"

On the first night of the festival, Kingbol relates, the villagers would all gather at the hut of the local chief, where they would sing and dance until the early hours of the morning. The celebration started precisely at midnight, Kingbol says, because that is when all the first-born of Egypt were slain in the 10th plague, as recounted in the Bible.

"The next morning, on the threshold of the village, everyone had to eat a quick and hurried meal," he says. "They did this because our

ancestors, when they left Egypt, did not have time to bake their bread. The villagers would feed each other very quickly. This was known as *chhawng hnawt* - I don't know exactly what this phrase means, but it signifies something that had to be done hastily, because our ancestors were under pressure to leave after Pharaoh's command to depart Egypt."

While Kingbol's recollection of Chapchar Khut revolves around the social and communal aspects of the holiday, another Bnei Menashe elder named Yossi provides an additional perspective on how the Bnei Menashe celebrated its ritual components.

On the first night of the holiday, after sundown, the village priest would don special white garments in preparation for carrying out the sacrificial rite. These garments included, according to Yossi, one that had strings dangling from its four corners, recalling the tallit.

(Continued on page 12)

Live and Become: Five Stars, for Sure

Film Comment by Karen Primack

Live and Become is Radu Mihaileanu's bittersweet drama about a young Ethiopian boy in a Sudanese refugee camp who is Christian but passes for a Jew in the 1984 Israeli airlift. The film, in Hebrew, French, and Amharic, covers the boy's life over the following 15 years in Israel, France, and Sudan.

The settings are breathtaking. The overhead views of the desert and refugee camps in Sudan are unforgettable, as are those of the absorption center dining hall and the rococo anatomy lecture hall in Paris. Also captivating are the close-ups of beautiful Ethiopian faces. Many views of Israel are seen – a synagogue, apartment interior, kes's cottage, battlefield, Tel Aviv beach.

There is humor, and much of it comes as the boy, Schlomo, arrives in Israel and discovers new experiences like seeing water coming from a shower head, putting on socks, using a fork, and looking behind the television set for the source of the pictures.

There are poignant moments as Schlomo sleeps on the floor next to his bed, and takes off his shoes to feel the ground under his feet. There is also the scene in which a school pupil rubs Schlomo's hand to see if the color comes off.

Schlomo is adopted by a secular family. He goes on to excel in school, form a few friendships, and aspire to become a doctor, but his background and his secret continue to haunt him. The final scene leaves the viewer gasping.

You may have seen *Live and Become* in a film festival near you (it has won 18 Audience Awards across the US), or you may have the opportunity to see it in a theater soon. If not, you can now order it on DVD for \$29.95 from Menemsha Films at www.menemshafilms.com.



Roni Hadar and Sirak M. Sabahat as Sarah and Schlomo

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BOOKS/MUSIC

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A Short Story from African Israel Story told by Remy Ilona, an Igbo researcher in Nigeria

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New! Lecha Dodi CD A new collection of songs from the Abayudaya of Uganda for Shabbat

Shalom Everybody, Everywhere! CD Recording of the unique sounds of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda

The Igbos: Jews in Africa? Remy Ilona's fascinating research into the Jewish ancestry of the Igbos of Nigeria

Under One Canopy: Readings in Jewish Diversity Reflections, essays, and poems by Jews worldwide

JUDAICA/JEWELRY

Abayudaya Kippot Hand crocheted small or pillbox-style skullcap (assorted colors; let us choose one for you)

Aish Chai Jewelry Lapel pin and tallit clips fashioned of sterling silver with gold plate, depicting in Hebrew letters *Chai* (life) coming out of *Aish* (fire), suggesting the return of *Anousim*

Challah Covers Colorful, embroidered challah covers from Ghana. **LIMITED INVENTORY!**

Five-Strip Kente Cloth Tallitot Magnificent purple and yellow prayer shawl from Ghana. **LIMITED INVENTORY!**

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A Bnei Menashe Passover (cont.)

(Continued from page 10)

"The priest would take an animal and slaughter it, and then collect the blood in a special pouch," Yossi says. He would then dip a branch or leaf into the blood and smear it on the doorways of people's homes, just as the Israelites had done before leaving Egypt.

The priest then had to carefully separate the meat from the bones of the carcass, for if even one bone were to break, it would invalidate the animal for use in the ceremony. For anyone familiar with the Torah's description of the Paschal sacrifice, this requirement will sound more than a little familiar (see Exodus 12:46).

Having successfully completed this task, the priest would place the animal on an altar and offer it up to G-d, in the process reciting a series of ancient Bnei Menashe chants and prayers. Perhaps the most extraordinary of them is "Miriam's song," as it is known among the community. "We had to cross

the Red Sea," it began. "Our enemies were coming after us with chariots but the sea swallowed them all as if they were meat. We are led by the cloud during the day and by fire at night. Take those birds for the food, and drink water coming out from the rock."

The echoes of the biblical account of the Exodus and its aftermath are unmistakable - a Bnei Menashe version of the Haggada as it narrates the story of how their ancestors left Egypt, together with our own.

Now, after so many years of wandering, the Bnei Menashe are once again setting out on the long journey back to the Promised Land. May the road ahead lead to their safe and quick return.

(The writer serves as Chairman of Shavei Israel (www.shavei.org), a Jerusalem-based group that reaches out and assists "lost Jews" seeking to return to the Jewish people. He can be contacted at: michael@shavei.org)

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Edited by Karen Primack

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