



# KULANU

Volume 18 Number 1 Winter, 2011

## ***Life-Changing Birthright Trip for Surinamese Jewish Youth***

*By Sheila Gogol*

Kulanu Overseas Correspondent  
Amsterdam, Holland

Everyone in Amsterdam knows about the former Dutch colony of Suriname, with its Creole music, Hindustani delicacies and Chinese shopkeepers. But Jews in Suriname? Who knew?

In fact, the Suriname Jewish community, which recently celebrated the 325th anniversary of the Bracha V' Shalom Synagogue (Blessing and Peace), built in 1685 in the Jodensavanne, and the 175th anniversary of the Neve Shalom Synagogue (Oasis of Peace) in Paramaribo, has a long history of Jewish settlement. It was known as a port of refuge for Jews fleeing the tentacles of the Spanish Inquisition. At its peak, the community boasted some 1500 to 2000 Jews. Today, it numbers about 200.



*Suriname students visiting Bedouin tent in Israel.*

With the diminution of the Jewish population over the years due to economic hardships and political upheaval, the community became more isolated and cut off from the Jewish mainstream. Last winter, as reported in the pages of this newsletter, Kulanu was instrumental in arranging for a three-month stay in Suriname of Rabbi Haim Beliak, the first rabbi serving the commu-

### ***IN THIS ISSUE***

<b><i>SURINAME BIRTHRIGHT TRIP .....</i></b>	<b><i>1</i></b>
<b><i>BENE EPHRAIM, INDIA.....</i></b>	<b><i>2</i></b>
<b><i>PARUR, INDIA .....</i></b>	<b><i>5</i></b>
<b><i>ETHIOPIAN REMEMBRANCE .....</i></b>	<b><i>8</i></b>
<b><i>ZAMBIAN SYNAGOGUES .....</i></b>	<b><i>10</i></b>
<b><i>ISSAJ .....</i></b>	<b><i>13</i></b>
<b><i>BOOK REVIEWS .....</i></b>	<b><i>15, 20</i></b>
<b><i>TRAVELS WITH NANCY .....</i></b>	<b><i>17</i></b>
<b><i>FEED HUNGRY UGANDAN CHILDREN..</i></b>	<b><i>21</i></b>
<b><i>DONORS .....</i></b>	<b><i>22</i></b>

---

*One can just imagine the excitement surrounding the Birthright Trip of 16 young Surinamese Jews.*

---

nity in 40 years. One can just imagine, then, the excitement surrounding the August 2010 trip of 16 Surinamese young Jews between the ages of 18 and 26 on the Birthright Israel trip. Jacob Steinberg, Kulanu coordinator for Suriname, views the Birthright Israel tour (in Dutch) as one of the most profound events in the recent history of the community. Kulanu is justly proud of its financial contribution...paying for the young people's

***CONTINUED ON PAGE 6***

# ***The Bene Ephraim of Andhra Pradesh, India***

*By Anthropologists Yulia Egorova and Shahid Perwez  
(University of Durham, UK)*



*Andhra  
Pradesh*

For the past 18 months, we have been studying the Bene Ephraim Jewish community of Andhra Pradesh, India to gather information for a book we are preparing on the religious and social life of the community. In order to understand the day-to-day life and Jewish practices of this small and emerging Jewish community of 40 nuclear families, Shahid Perwez lived in their village of Kothareddypalem from June 2009 to June 2010. Community members welcomed him into their midst with kindness and hospitality and we anticipate that the relationship forged during this “visit” will be the beginning of a fruitful collaboration.

Kulanu newsletter readers have been fortunate over the years to read about the Bene Ephraim in these pages through articles by Jason Francisco (1995), Tudor Parfitt (2002), Karen Primack (2007), Rabbis Bonita and Gerald Sussman (2007). In this issue, we would like to share with Kulanu supporters some of our preliminary observations about the Jewish traditions and practices of the Bene Ephraim within the context of their lives.

## ***Rites, Festivals and Dietary Laws***

Like Jewish communities around the world, the Bene Ephraim look to the Sabbath each week to join Jews worldwide in prayer. Every Friday evening after sunset, community members gather in their synagogue to welcome the arrival of the Sabbath. The *menorah* (candelabra) is lit and a plate of offerings is prepared with flowers and fruits. The synagogue consists of one room, where men sit on one side and women on the other. The service is normally led by Sadok Yacobi. When he is away, his twenty-three year old son Jacob or other family members take this responsibility. In accordance with Jewish tradition, men and boys wear *kippot* (traditional Jewish skullcaps); women cover their heads with a headscarf or with saris.

According to orthodox Jewish ritual, the onset of the Sabbath signals a cessation from all work from sundown on Friday night until sundown on Saturday evening. Cooking is also prohibited. In Kothareddypalem, however, as most community members are daily wage earners, either agricultural laborers or construction workers, they cannot afford to stop working completely on Saturdays. If they did so, that would mean no income, hence, no food for the day. Those few who can afford not to work do their best to maintain a day of rest. Refraining from cooking is also problematic for most Bene Ephraim families as almost no one has a refrigerator and food must be prepared daily.



*Children of Bene Ephraim Jewish community.  
Photo by Bonita Sussman.*

Those community members who are able to refrain from work on the Sabbath join the Yacobis for prayers on Saturday around mid-day. The service lasts for about an hour and involves the recitation of verses from the Torah and the *Siddur* (prayer book), and singing songs in Hebrew and in Telugu, the vernacular language of the Bene Ephraim in Andhra Pradesh. Congregants return in the evening after three stars are visible in the sky and per-

form the final ritual of the Sabbath, which consists of a short prayer to bid farewell to the day of rest.

In addition to observing the Sabbath, the community celebrates a number of Jewish festivals. Some of these were (re)introduced into the life of the community relatively recently. However, the main holidays of Judaism have been practiced for at least 20 years. In our 2009-2010 fieldwork, Shahid witnessed Sukkoth and Chanukah celebrations, which were carried out with great fervor.

Chanukah 2009 was marked with an additional festive event – the installation of a replica Torah scroll



(donated by Rabbis Bonita and Gerald Sussman) in the village synagogue. The celebration involved a large group of community members and invited guests who gathered in the synagogue yard to initiate the rituals of Torah scroll dedication. Amidst drum beating, chanting in Hebrew and Telugu, and dancing, Sadok and his nephew Shmuel Yacobi led worshippers in a march in the courtyard of the synagogue. Then Sadok called his son Jacob to hold the Torah scroll during its dedication. Community members embraced it, and then Jacob installed it in the prayer hall. The ritual continued with a kosher luncheon organized by the community.

Most members of the Bene Ephraim claim to know the laws of *kashrut* (Jewish dietary laws) and say that they could make any meat kosher though they have not been formally trained yet to do so. At the end of Sabbath, the Yacobis would often collect money from the members to slaughter an animal and distribute its meat equally to all. We sometimes observed Bene Ephraim refusing to eat food containing meat in the houses of other villagers on the grounds that the food prepared there would not be kosher.

### ***The Jewish Life Cycle of the Bene Ephraim***

As the community started practicing Judaism in public about 20 years ago, it can now boast a number of young men and women who grew up in the Jewish tradition and have experienced a number of Jewish life cycle rituals. Those (older) Bene Ephraim who missed out on such practices are embracing them now.

Today, when a Bene Ephraim child is born, he or she is given both a Hebrew and a Telugu Hindu name. The former will be used within the family and during community interactions, while the latter will become the 'official' name, to be used in interactions with 'government authorities' and at schools, colleges, and other state institutions.

Another Jewish ritual practiced by the community is circumcision. In our interactions with the community, every male member reported he had undergone circumcision either during childhood or at a later age. In the absence of a *mohel* (ritually trained circumciser), circumcision of most Bene Ephraim is performed by a doctor at a local hospital. Some community members have told us that if they have a boy in the future, they will try to make sure that the circumcision is performed on the eighth day after his birth, as it is done by Jews elsewhere.



*Markings on a Jewish home.*

Photo by Bonita Sussman.

As for the institution of marriage, although most community members told us they would like their children to marry other Jews, in practice this is often difficult to achieve. As the Bene Ephraim community is very small, numbering around 120 souls, there are not enough eligible brides and bridegrooms to marry. As a result, boys generally marry a girl from a Christian Madiga family in or around the village. We have documented four such marriages, to which we were invited within the last year. These brides gave up their Christian faith and started identifying themselves as members of the Bene Ephraim. Currently, they are learning the religion of their husbands, and attending the synagogue regularly. For girls, it is more difficult. According to Indian custom, girls marrying outside of their faith are expected to take on the religious practices of their husbands. As a result, girls are often lost to the community.

End of life traditions among the Bene Ephraim are marked in a special way. Although we did not observe any funerals in the village during our 18 months in the community, we did visit the local Christian Madiga cemetery, where the tombs of the deceased Bene Ephraim are marked with the same Jewish symbols as their houses – Stars of David, signs symbolizing the *menorah* (candelabra), the words 'Zion' and *Shaddai* (a word used to signify G-d), written in Hebrew.

On the whole, it appears that the community is doing its best to embrace contemporary Jewish practice. In addition to the difficulties detailed above, the Bene Ephraim are forced to leave their village during the year to look for work elsewhere as seasonal farm work migrants. In these circumstances, keeping kosher becomes impossible. Even in the village, many community members struggle to observe all forms of *kashrut*. For instance, keeping dairy and meat products separate

is hard for community members who often lack basic utensils. Finally, the community was separated from any Jewish historic connection for many generations and are engaged in embracing what for many Bene Ephraim are new practices.

To counteract these disadvantages, Sadok and Shmuel Yacobi are keen to make their community economically more independent and self-sufficient by promoting small business initiatives within the community. The goal is to make the community less dependent on outside work, thereby curtailing the need to travel outside the community for work. If the standard of living is raised and community members develop their own businesses, they will have more control over their religious observance.

Finally, we were particularly impressed with the degree of devotion demonstrated by the children and young people of the Bene Ephraim. For them, Judaism is a tradition into which they were born and raised and being Jewish is as much a given as it is for children and young people from 'conventionally' Jewish households in the West. In early 2010, during the course of a household survey of Bene Ephraim families in the village, we asked a twelve-year old community boy about his 'Telugu' name. He was not sure what we were ask-

ing as he had already told us his name. Taken aback, he replied that he was Jewish and only knew his Jewish name.

### *Acknowledgements*

*Special thanks to Shmuel, Sadok and Miriam Yacobi, who have been extremely helpful, accommodating and patient with us. The study of the Bene Ephraim was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (UK), and we are grateful for their support.*



*Synagogue. Photo by Bonita Sussman.*



### **PROGRESS IN 2010**

Last June, Kulanu received a \$5,000 grant from the San Francisco/Marin Jewish Community Teen Foundation of the Jewish Community Endowment Fund for a chicken project to be started in the Bene Ephraim community. The chickens will enable community families to create a small business in keeping with the desire of community members to gain self-sufficiency and take more control of their religious observance. In addition, Kulanu's friend and colleague Michael Freund, founder and chairman of Shavei Israel, has arranged to pay for the translation of Hebrew books into Telugu, the language of the community, as well as to put together an educational program with the goal of strengthening the community's Jewish knowledge and practice.



## Restoration of the Historic Indian Synagogue in Parur, Kerala

By Jay A. Waronker

Kerala, the southernmost coastal state in India, is today home to seven synagogue buildings, although only the famed Paradesi Synagogue in the Mattancherry area of Kochi (Cochin) remains a functioning house of prayer. Included in this collection of religious buildings is the former synagogue in the small town of Parur (or Paravoor), located some twenty miles to the north of Kochi and easily accessible by hired car or public bus.

The synagogue's history dates back to medieval times, and over the centuries it was rebuilt for a range of reasons. But in the mid-1950s, most of its congregation emigrated to Israel, and the synagogue has not been an active place of worship since the mid-1970s. In recent years, the condition of the Parur synagogue deteriorated and there was concern for its structural survival. Fortunately, the Kerala government is now renovating the building as part of a larger plan to protect and preserve the state of Kerala's cultural and religious heritage.

In response to domestic and international interest and broad-based local recognition of the cultural importance of regional architecture, the State of Kerala, with support of the government of India, embarked on a long term plan called the Muziris Heritage Site in 2009. The popularity of the government-restored synagogue in nearby Chendamangalam, which opened as a museum in 2006,\* played a key role in inspiring the plan. The new archaeological site will be one of the highlights of an impressive effort of protecting, restoring, and sustaining a number of natural and built sites. These will be linked by existing canals, bike paths, and roadways within the central region of the state of Kerala.

Among the first of the structures to be restored is the Parur synagogue. During the spring and summer months of 2009, the Kerala government negotiated with the Association of Kerala Jews to assume ownership of the Parur synagogue while the Jewish community maintained a right of use. Once these details had been worked out, the restoration effort formally began

\*The museum was co-founded by Jay Waronker and Marion Sofaer of the USA and Shalva Weil of Israel.

in April 2010, and work is scheduled to be completed by the spring of 2011.

This ambitious undertaking is being coordinated by several government divisions, particularly the Kerala De-

partments of Tourism and Archaeology.

The Parur synagogue will be brought back to form by a team of restoration experts and skilled craftsmen, under the advisement of those familiar with the history and architecture of the building. It will also be linked with a number of other important Kerala cultural sites, both religious and secular.

Unique to the synagogue at Parur is the way its parts are formally arranged in a highly axial, extended, and ceremonial fashion. Of all Kerala's extant synagogue buildings, the one in Parur has the longest procession: from the street, through the gatehouse, out into a walled outdoor room, past a foyer flanked by twin storage rooms, along a narrow columned breezeway, into the *azara* (name of the courtyard space of the

ancient Temple in Jerusalem), then by the sanctuary with its low balcony, spilling into a double-height space containing the central *tebah* (stage), and finally to the *heckal* (ark) as the termination point.

Some historic Hindu temples of Kerala and other religious buildings in the immediate region, including Syrian Christian and Catholic churches and Muslim mosques, are similarly organized. As a local building type, there is little doubt that buildings belonging to the larger religions influenced neighboring synagogue architecture, as did regional secular design traditions. Perhaps most interesting are the broad similarities between the Parur synagogue and the ritual linking of spaces that existed in the Court of the Temple in Jerusalem, and its use of terminology identical to that in the ancient sacred Jewish places.

*Photographs by V. Issac Sam with the Support of Marian Scheuer Sofaer*



Kerala, India

# Suriname Birthright Trip,

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

flights to and from Miami, with Birthright Israel paying the rest of the transportation costs and all expenses in Israel. The trip is what this article is about.\*

It is not surprising to hear how overwhelmed the youngsters were by the Birthright Israel trip. "When I heard I was going to Israel, I was curious and couldn't wait to see what it was like," says Amanda Laret. "Those ten days were life-changing. I learned so much. Our tour guide Itai was one of the most amazing people I have ever met. I was so lucky to be able to experience how other Jews think about being Jewish. I am Jewish and I have always felt Jewish, but this trip taught me more than I could ever learn about being Jewish. It was breathtaking to hear the story about Masada and actually be there. To see the sunrise the Jewish people saw so many years ago was amazing. And to be on the mountain top in the middle of the desert was a new, calming and yet exciting and beautiful experience."

Joel Ranchor described how hyped they all were before the trip, and then disappointed when the flight was postponed for a day due to mechanical problems. But when they landed, everyone was overjoyed. As Joel recounts, "We had jet lag after the 12-hour flight, but when we saw the beauty of Israel, we were full of energy. We were finally in the Holy Land!"

---

*For many, the Wailing Wall was the most impressive experience of the trip.*

---

The trip began in Jerusalem and for many of the young people the *Kotel* (Wall) was the most impressive exper-

---

\*The trip would not have been possible without the untiring efforts on the part of Rabbi Haim Beliak and Jacob Steinberg. Thanks also goes to The World Union for Progressive Judaism and Union for Reform Judaism in North America, which helped with arrangements both in Israel and Miami. And to Jonathon Kahane Rapport of Toronto and James Snyder of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem whose encouragement and support made the difference.

ience of the whole trip. Joel's comments summed up the feelings of many of the young people when he said, "So much history and meaning in one wall that is thousands of years old. For us it was a chance of a lifetime. From a small community in Suriname, there we were face to face with the wall we had heard so much about. We all got a chance to say a private prayer."

One of the most poignant experiences on the trip was the opening of a special exhibition in The Israel Museum in Jerusalem. The exhibition features a replica of a Suriname synagogue that closed more than ten years ago when the two remaining synagogues in the capital of Paramaribo merged. Numerous religious items were moved to Jerusalem for permanent display. Many of the 16 youngsters who attended the opening burst into



*Amanda and Lisa Laret writing notes to place in the Western Wall.*

tears when they saw the synagogue where their families had prayed and their fathers and grandfathers had their bar mitzvahs. As Rogan van Leeuwen says in the video of the event, "My grandmother told me about this synagogue. I don't remember it because I was so young, but she told me so many wonderful stories that I could not keep my emotions inside."

For Amanda Laret, the opening of "OUR" synagogue in the Jerusalem museum was a special thrill. "Israelis and people from all over the world can see our synagogue and learn a little bit of Surinamese Jewish history."

Interviews with the young participants on their experiences in Israel elicited many enthusiastic comments. The youngsters all seemed to love the Negev, where they were graciously received by Bedouins who played music for them and served them tea. They hiked in the desert, slept in tents, rode on camels, went swimming in Ein Geddi waterfalls and in the Dead Sea and loved every minute of it. Amanda really liked the camel rides in the desert. "Who would have thought I would be able to ride a camel? It was a really exciting ride. The Dead Sea was a weird experience! We just floated in the water." For Joel, it was Masada which excited him. "History came alive for us there," he said. For Rogan, it was

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7



the Wailing Wall most of all. However, she did feel a bit uncomfortable when Israelis expected them to be more orthodox than they were.

Another highlight was the trip north to Safed where they met a friendly Kabbalist “who to be honest looked a bit loony,” according to Joel’s account, and learned about the Jewish mystics. When they wondered why so much was painted blue in Safed, they were told that “if the devil came to Safed he would be confused and think he was in heaven and flee.”

One of the special experiences of the trip was the interaction of the Surinamese youth among themselves. Joel described how the group “talked till late at night about our community and how we would like to change it for the better.”

---

*“My mother has always talked about being Jewish and coming to Israel. Now I know what she was talking about.”*

---

During the visit, it was natural to make some comparisons with their own country. When asked what it is like to live in a Jewish community of 200 people, Benjamin Duym said, “It is nice because you know everyone. But my mother has always talked about being Jewish and coming to Israel. Now I know what she was talking about.” Benjamin and his mother are planning to make *aliyah* (immigrate to Israel) soon and he plans to join the Israeli army, he said.

The only two negative comments expressed about the trip dealt with the rudeness of some Israelis and, for Yigal Kopinsky, the strangeness of seeing a female rabbi. It was “just not right,” he said. But on the whole, everyone was enthusiastic.

*For more information on the  
Suriname Jewish community,  
please see:*

*www.kulanu/suriname.org  
and  
www.suriname-jewish-community.com*



Amanda summed up the feelings of most when she said, “This ten-day trip was a deeply emotional experience. It changed our lives and our attitude to Judaism.” A young man, who was overwhelmed by his time in Israel and wanted to remain anonymous, said, “The positive thing is that I found the inner Jew in myself and it was a revelation that I want to be a Jew for the rest of my life and live like a Jew.” And that “we were greeted with open arms wherever we went. I didn’t feel like a foreigner, I was just one of the Jews there.” The

---

*“I found the inner Jew in myself and  
it was a revelation that I want to be  
a Jew for the rest of my life.”*

---

only major disappointment shared by all was that the trip had been shorter than expected.

When I ask the youngsters if they want to go back to Israel, they all say yes, although Elvira Arrias says she could only imagine living there if the rest of her family was there too. And when I ask if the trip was what they had expected, they all agree it was much better. “It opened our eyes and made us realize how important Judaism is to us,” Joel recalls. “That is something that is hard to understand if you live so far from Israel and from other Jewish communities. Jules Donk, president of our Jewish community, said to us when we left, go and find yourself in Israel! And we did.”

There is just one more thing the youngsters want to say to Kulanu. “Without the help of Kulanu and the other sponsors, our trip would never have been possible. Humbly, *Todah Rabah* (thank you) for giving us this chance!”

# *Ethiopian Remembrance*

## *Kabbalat Shabbat*

*(Ceremony Welcoming the Sabbath)*

*By Sam Tadesse, Kulanu Coordinator for Ethiopia*

Oh! *Kabbalat Shabbat*, where have you gone? You used to visit me every Friday, rain or shine, summer or winter. Where have you gone, my dearest *Kabbalat Shabbat*, my beloved? Those were the days when you brought happiness and joy to my heart.

Our small community awaited you with joy and received you with ululation and songs and with our unending dances, our hands outstretched to heaven. Our mothers, after preparing a special feast for you, would go to the river to bathe and adorn themselves with their snowy white home spun *kemis* (dress) and *shema* (shawl). They would rush back home and carry the *Injera*, *Watt* and *Dabbo* (Shabbat Bread) they had prepared for you to the synagogue. There they would wait for the fathers and the young men to join them to celebrate you with songs and dances and feasting.

---

*The synagogue smelled nice and warm;  
it radiated peace and joy.*

---

The little girls, our sisters, who earlier in the day cut grass from the riverbank, mixed it with fresh eucalyptus leaves and spread it on the floor of the synagogue, would wait for you standing behind their mothers. Dear beloved, your arrival week after week created a special holiday atmosphere for the old and the young. The synagogue smelled nice and warm; it radiated peace and joy. On your arrival, we all felt safe and protected from our enemies.

Our fathers, after their long day of toil, rushed to the river to bathe and to put on their best cloth, all the while singing and praising your name. Kes Abraham and Kes Shumulachew, the two elders of our community, used their musical voices singing and urging you to come. Kes Tadesse, their junior, led the chorus encouraging the young and the old to join in the singing and dancing. I was entranced and my small legs jumped up and down as I walked from the riverbank to the synagogue behind the men and the big boys. The walk was especially timed so that the elders would enter the synagogue at sunset signaling your arrival. As



*Sam Tadesse. Photo by Laura Alter Klapman.*

Kes Abraham, Kes Shumulachew and Kes Tadesse entered the synagogue, our mothers, who were waiting on their side of the synagogue, would clap their hands together and ululate as if their daughters were being wed. For them you were the beautiful bride who was spending the festive night with her family before going away with her handsome groom in the morning.

---

*I had an image of you as a beautiful  
angel descending from the heavens...*

---

Oh! *Kabbalat Shabbat*, I did not know what you looked like but I had an image of you as a beautiful angel descending from the heavens and slowly entering the synagogue smiling at each of us. As I gazed up at the ceiling of the synagogue and felt your presence, I would pray to *Adoni* to please give me the eyes to see you. Week to week I asked my father if he had seen you. His response was always "Yes, my son, and you too have seen her." But I was always puzzled by what he meant. As it was our tradition, I did not challenge or argue with my father for it would have been disrespectful. At the same time I felt guilty and sinful as I could not see you. Oh! My beautiful *Kabbalat Shabbat*, please forgive my ignorance!

*CONTINUED ON PAGE 9*



Oh! my dear *Kabbalat Shabbat*, where have you gone? When the sun slept and you arrived, the synagogue was engulfed with happiness. We sang and danced, reveling in our joy and did not break bread until midnight. When we did finally eat, each bit was accompanied by our praise of *Adoni*, the G-d of Abraham, Sarah, Joseph and Moses. Then it was time for story telling. I do not remember when I went to sleep, but I woke in the morning at my father's feet with my brother Joseph's head on my stomach.



Sam and Menbi Tadesse.  
Photo by Laura Alter Klapman.

One of the stories etched in my mind is about the long journey Moses made to Ethiopia to meet with our fathers and to wed one of our beautiful and most gentle and kind women. It is said that when Moses was returning back to Misr with his bride, G-d appeared to him over Mount Semien. Since then, for thousands of years, Mount Semien was a sanctuary and fortress for our people. Over time, draught, hunger and the incessant attack from our Christian emperors and neighbors forced our people to leave the sacred mountain and to find other places of sanctuary.

---

*Draught, hunger and incessant  
attack forced our people to leave  
the sacred mountain.*

---

Oh! My dear *Kabbalat Shabbat*, where have you gone? I never tired of working hard to help my mother prepare the feast for your arrival. Along with my friends, I went into the woods to climb trees and collect dry twigs for the fire. I would tie both ends of a string into a circle and hook it on to my tiny feet, stretching it out as far as I could, and climbed up the tree.\* Each time I broke a dry branch, I would say this one is for you until there were no dry branches left. My friends and I would tie up the branches and carry the bundles home on our heads to deliver this precious firewood to our mothers.

---

\* Once the string was tied, we put both our feet in the circle and stretched it. As we climbed up the tree, the string hugged the bark providing us with more traction and preventing our feet from slipping.

Even while sitting in the classroom I daydreamed of you. Oh! *Kabbalat Shabbat*, where have you gone? Is this the result of our enlightenment and modernity, or is this because I am on a different path. My community has scattered and the cord that bound us is no more.

The rivers have dried up. Those that run are polluted and they don't anymore give their abundant *ketema* (grass) for us to spread on our syna-

gogue floor to welcome you.

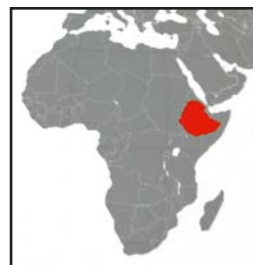
Although we gather to celebrate you, we don't do things the way they ought to be. Where are our mothers and sisters who cheered and ululated? Where are the elders with the musical voices that announced your arrival? I don't believe things will ever be the same again. Oh! *Kabbalat Shabbat*, the love of my childhood, I long to see you again and celebrate you with our elders, fathers, mothers, and sisters in the old traditional way.

IN MEMORY OF MY ANKOBER COMMUNITY  
BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF THE COMMUNISTS.\*\*

SAMUEL SON OF KES TADDESSE ALTAYE

---

\*\*Emperor Haile Selassie was toppled in September, 1974, when a Soviet-backed Marxist-Leninist military junta deposed him and established a one-party communist state. Thus began a reign of terror and fear. The Communists permitted no religious observances and introduced a villagization program which mandated that people leave their land, tear down their homes and rebuild their dwellings in a designated place. As a result, Jews were forced to live among strangers who were hostile to Jews and could no longer practice their religion.



Ethiopia

# Architectural Remnants of Jewish Life in Zambia

Text and Illustrations  
by Jay A. Waronker



Zambia



Zambia has been the home of a Jewish Diaspora for nearly one and a quarter centuries. The first Jewish immigrants came from mostly German-speaking areas of Western Europe and arrived in Zambia, then called Northern Rhodesia, shortly after it fell under the British sphere of influence in 1888. This initial wave of immigration was followed in the early 20th century by Eastern Europeans speaking Yiddish. Open to new challenges, these settlers arrived in Livingstone, the capital city of Lusaka, and at Kitwe, Mufulira, and Ndola in the central Copperbelt Region of the country. Some Jews came to start businesses or to become traders along the Line of Rail. Others, starting in the mid-1920s and continuing in the 1930s, were also active in real estate development. Later, as a consequence of the turmoil in Europe and the beginning of World War II, Jewish refugees found their way to Zambia.



Former Livingstone synagogue

independence from Britain in October, 1964. At that time, the number of Jews, which had remained steady for some decades, began to decline. Today, within an overall population of twelve million, fewer than one hundred Jews remain in Zambia.

As a Fulbright scholar in sub-Saharan Africa in 2005/2006, I spent time in Zambia documenting its existing and former Jewish architecture. With the support of a Littauer Foundation grant, I returned to Africa in 2008 to document synagogues and other Jewish buildings elsewhere in the African continent. My discoveries and experiences in Zambia are described below:

## Livingstone

My first stop was Livingstone, once home to the oldest Jewish community in Zambia. The city, which is located near Victoria Falls and borders Zimbabwe, has no Jewish residents today. As a result, my contact there was a white Christian woman, Maureen Colette, hired by the African Jewish Congress (based in Johannesburg) to watch over the tiny Jewish cemetery. On arrival, my first stop was the synagogue, the Livingstone Hebrew Congregation, established in 1910 but constructed in 1927-28. In addition to the sanctuary, the community also built two small structures used for a Jewish school, social hall, and rabbi's house. By the late 1940s, some one hundred Jews were members of the synagogue. With the congregation's decline and eventual demise in the 1960s, the buildings were sold to the Livingstone Central Church of Christ, an African congregation, which at the time of my visit was using them in their nearly original and unaltered condition.

The Jewish cemetery of Livingstone is small, and today it is surrounded by many non-Jewish graves. To maintain its identity and to conserve the gravesites,

---

*Zambia's Jewish communities thrived through the first half of the 20th century.*

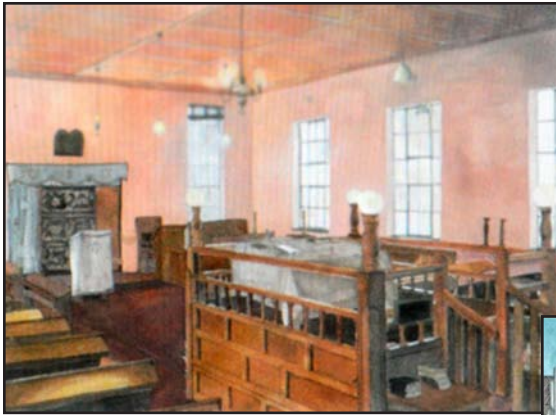
---

When the country's Jewish population peaked at around one thousand individuals, community leaders recognized the need for synagogues and other Jewish institutions. Leaders in Livingstone responded to this need, building the country's first synagogue in 1928, followed more than a decade later by synagogues in Lusaka and the Copper Belt cities.

Despite instances of British anti-Semitism, social dislocation, and the marginalization or alienation of white outsiders from the native black population, Zambia's Jewish communities thrived through the first half of the 20th century. However, this situation changed considerably in the 1960s as the struggle for national autonomy took root, resulting in the country's

CONTINUED ON PAGE 11





*Lusaka synagogue*

Maureen hired workers to build a wall around the small parcel of land. After I photographed and documented the cemetery, Maureen drove me back to the border and the Zambian entrance to Victoria Falls.

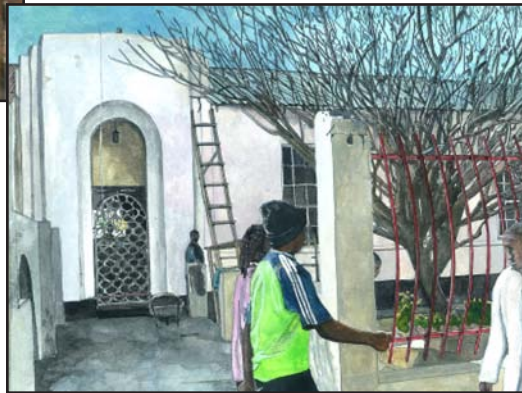
### **Lusaka**

On my second trip to Zambia, I visited Lusaka, the sprawling capital city of two million. I was greeted at the airport by employees of my Jewish contact, Michael Galaun. Michael's family has lived in Lusaka for decades, and his agriculture company's offices are located in the former rabbi's house adjacent to the synagogue. Michael met me in his office and accompanied me next door to the synagogue. The building is surrounded by a dense arrangement of trees, making it difficult to view. At the time of my visit, a new metal roof had just been installed, and workers were constructing a security wall around the property.

For a number of years in Lusaka, religious services were conducted in a private home or local cinema, but when Cantor Feivel Metzger arrived from Germany during World War II, he initiated an effort to build a synagogue. The synagogue's foundation stone was laid on July 20, 1941, and the building was completed the following year. Jewish leaders built the synagogue west of the railway where most members of the community lived and owned businesses, although the Anglican, Methodist, and Catholic churches, a mosque, and the Hindu temple were in the newer part of town east of the railway.

The building was a single-storied structure with a corrugated metal roof set over a timber frame resting on thick masonry walls veneered in off-white chunam

(lime plaster) and a painted black base. The outside of the synagogue, in keeping with the modern aesthetic of the time, had clean lines and minimal detail. The sanctuary featured an ark with doors finished in Zambian mined and pressed copper, a distinctly indigenous touch. In 1951, a community hall and classrooms in the same architectural style were added. These accessory rooms have been sold to a non-Jewish school, and during my visit an outside dividing wall was being added. Today the synagogue, which is well preserved, serves an active, albeit small Jewish community.



### **Ndola**

After a day in Lusaka, I flew northward to Ndola in the Copperbelt Region. My contact there, suggested by Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, the spiritual leader of the sub-Saharan Jewish community, was Gus Liebowitz, a warm-hearted man who is now the only Jew living

full time in the area. Gus was waiting for me at the small airport, and we climbed into his car to begin the long day's journey to visit the area's three former synagogues.

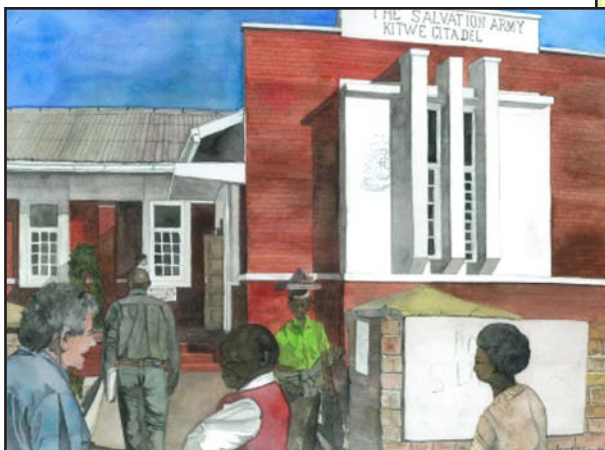
The main cities of the Copperbelt are Ndola, with a population of three quarters of a million, and Kitwe, a place of nearly half a million. In both cities, Jewish communities were established and a synagogue built. A third synagogue was constructed in nearby Mufulira. While a *minyan* (10 Jews needed for a communal prayer service) was organized for the first time in Ndola in 1923, it was not until the beginning of the region's construction boom in the 1930's that congregations were formed. It was the influx of refugees from Europe that provided the impetus for their creation. The three small synagogues dating from the mid-1940's still stand, although none functions today as a Jewish congregation.

---

*The former ark is now  
a storage closet.*

---

Ndola is the official administrative capital of the Copperbelt Province, but it was never a major mining town, concentrating instead on manufacturing. Today its former synagogue, sold a few decades ago to the Catholic



*Former Kitwe synagogue*

Diocese of Ndola, survives on the edge of town. Some years ago, the Church built a much larger sanctuary to accommodate its growing congregation, and the synagogue was converted to administrative space. Although the original building has been altered, its original *magen david* affixed to the façade remains. The former ark is now a storage closet.

### ***Kitwe***

From Ndola, Gus drove me to Kitwe along a quiet, derelict highway patrolled by guards that skirts the border with the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The city, long the center of Zambia's mining business, is Zambia's second largest. There I found Kitwe's former synagogue and community hall dating from 1946, a one-story red brick and pre-cast concrete structure with a corrugated metal roof. Since no Jews are left in Kitwe, the property was sold some years ago to the Salvation Army. The sanctuary, including its original wooden benches, flat ceiling, double hung windows, and lighting fixtures, has changed little. On the prayer room's far opposite wall, the remnants of an ark are visible. A *magen david* that once graced the front of the synagogue was removed and abandoned on site. Gus retrieved the symbol and has preserved it as an historical record.

### ***Mufulira***

The quieter town of Mufulira was once home to Zambia's third Copperbelt synagogue. Today the sanctuary with adjacent support spaces belongs to the Foursquare Gospel Church. Set in a peaceful area surrounding by mature plantings and a vegetable garden, there is little evidence that this modest building was once a Jewish house of worship. Yet on closer examination, some

remnants of the synagogue are visible. On the exterior, the outlines of the ark can be seen; on the inside, the sliding wooden doors of the ark are still in place. The *bimah* (stage) and all original furniture and fittings are missing, and the sanctuary's ceiling has been replaced by acoustical panels. The original pulpit, metal casement windows, painted concrete floor, plaster walls, and wooden wainscot are intact.

Within one day and with Gus's help, I had visited three former synagogues, buildings that once served the needs of Zambia's Jewish communities. Now, owing to political and social changes over the past forty years, they are all that is left of once vibrant communities. Before they were forever lost and forgotten, I set out to record them.



*Former Mufulira synagogue*

© Jay A. Waronker, 2010  
Readers may contact me at  
[jayawaronker@aol.com](mailto:jayawaronker@aol.com)  
regarding this article.



# ***Scholars of African Judaism Gather in London***

*By Len Lyons*

Since ancient times, Jews have been interested in other Jews from distant lands and other cultures. From the 8th century BCE, the early writings of the Hebrew prophet Isaiah (11:11) prophecy that the Lord will “*recover the remnant of his people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea.*”

A thousand years later, Eldad HaDani wrote, with dubious accuracy, about “black Jews on the other side of the river Cush (often translated as *Ethiopia*)” as well as accounts of Jews in Persia and in the land of the Khazars. Eldad and other writers during the Middle Ages traveled widely and were prone to attribute the origins of every unexpected population group to one of the Lost Tribes. In the 12th century, Benjamin of Tudela (from northern Spain), set out to catalog Jewish communities along a circuitous route to the holy land. Then in the 19th century, the French Jewish community sent Rabbi Joseph HaLevy, a competent linguist, to investigate reports of black Jews in Ethiopia, setting in motion a historic *aliyah* (immigration) that continues to this day.

---

## ***The fascination with Black Jews has never abated.***

---

The fascination with Black Jews, even among Christians, has never abated and in recent years has captured the imagination of university scholars who are attempting to unlock the secrets of origin and identity of African Jews in Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Cameroon, Mali and South Africa.

In 2009, Daniel Lis (University of Basel) and Edith Bruder (University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies, or SOAS) created the International Society for the Study of African Judaism (ISSAJ) to foster an interdisciplinary approach to research, discussion, and understanding of Jews of African origin. On October 30 and 31, 2010, SOAS hosted ISSAJ’s first conference. The two-day gathering, which drew 60 to 70 attendees to each session, was a compressed, multifaceted gem of scholarship, sparkling with glimpses into various scholars’ past and ongoing studies.

The format was 20 to 30-minute presentations -- lectures, slides, and two documentary films -- followed by spirited and revealing Q & A. Tudor Parfitt (Professor

of Modern Jewish Studies, SOAS) and Edith Bruder, the conference organizers, assembled an impressive array of scholars from the US, Europe, and Israel, providing a wonderful opportunity for networking with



*Edith Bruder, co-organizer of the ISSAJ conference, with, from left to right, Esther Roniyah Stanford- Xosei of England, Guyana and Barbados and Yishibah Emunah Baht-Gavriel of Trinidad, England and Israel.*

key players in the field of African-derived Jewish studies. The gathering included about twenty “practitioners” – members of the groups being studied, although not current residents of African countries. The tone of the sessions was interactive, often passionate, and quite collegial.

The greatest challenge for those in attendance was absorbing the abundance of material presented. Jacob Dorman (University of Kansas), a historian of the African American Hebrew Israelite movement, noted that the conference was extraordinary in attracting not only academics, but a surprising number of “intensely interested” lay people as well as members of the faith communities. A challenge for presenters, he noted, is being able to speak effectively to both the scholars and those whose interest is more personal than professional. Daniel Lis welcomed the diversity of attendees, because it “showed that research in this field is in constant dialogue with the communities concerned.”

Here are only a few of the topics presented: the Ethiopian Jews; the Lemba of South Africa, and their priestly clan, the Bhuba, who are the most likely to carry

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

the Cohen Modal Haplotype (a genetic marker of the priestly class); the Igbo of Nigeria; the Hebrew Israelites of Dimona, Israel, and the evolution of the Hebrew Israelites in Harlem in the 1930s. (*A complete list of the presenters, the 18 papers and two documentary films presented, and brief abstracts are available at [www.issaj.com](http://www.issaj.com); click on "Conferences."*)

The diverse approaches of the presenters raised interesting questions beyond the topics themselves. For example, some researchers (e.g., Parfitt) drew conclusions from DNA testing; while others, such as Shalva Weil (Hebrew University), remain unimpressed with the significance of genetic testing. Indeed, it is valid to wonder about the various criteria for Jewish identity: practices and observances, self-perception or self-definition, or the criteria of *halacha* (Jewish law) -- having a Jewish mother or a formal conversion.

---

*It is valid to wonder about the various criteria for Jewish identity.*

---

Similarly, while Bruder finds antecedents for Jewish identity among the Igbo of Nigeria in ancient trade routes, and Lis finds them in literary sources from the 18th Century, Johannes Harnischfeger (University of Frankfurt) believes Igbo "Judaism" is a blend of Judaism and Christianity. According to his interpretation, Igbo Judaism developed during the war for Biafra in independence in the 1960s, when the Igbo began to idealize and identify with the embattled Jewish State.

As Dorman commented in a conversation following the conference, "History is not just a collection of facts, but a collection of interpretations." Perhaps some future conference will have a panel discuss "meta" topics, such as conflicting methodologies and criteria.

But there is another important challenge to the conference of a pragmatic nature: the lack of African scholars and practitioners in attendance. Visas are more tightly controlled than ever, and the cost of travel and lodging is prohibitive for most black African Jews or intellectuals. In an effort to make it easier for Africans to attend, the next ISSAJ will be held somewhere in southern Africa in 2012. (Consult [www.issaj.com](http://www.issaj.com) for specifics.) I am already saving my pennies for the airfare from Boston, because – judging by the 2010 conference – I can look forward to exceptional content, lively discussion, and a chance to meet the leading scholars in the field.

## GIFTS *and* BULK ORDERS



from **kulanuboutique.com**

Buy Kulanu products from around the world:

- As gifts for friends and family
- To add diversity to your Judaica shop, synagogue craft fair or school market night.
- For Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations and other special occasions.
- For your school or social action committee fund raising projects.
- You can re-sell these special products and donate the profits to Kulanu, or keep the profits to support your organization.

The Kulanu Boutique now has bulk rates available online! Visit [www.kulanuboutique.com](http://www.kulanuboutique.com) for these great deals and more!

From Ethiopia: check out our beautifully woven multicolored baskets and scarves. And watch for new *tallitot* and *atarot*, coming soon!

Proceeds from the sale of these unique products benefit the communities that made them and Kulanu's work with isolated and emerging Jewish communities around the world.



## BOOK REVIEW

### *THE CHOICE: CONVERTS TO JUDAISM SHARE THEIR STORIES*

By Arnine Cumsky Weiss and Carol Weiss Rubel  
University of Scranton Press  
Scranton and London: 2010

*Reviewed by Barbara Vinick*

In the foreword to *The Choice: Converts to Judaism Share their Stories*, Rabbi Lawrence Seibert of Town and Village Synagogue in New York City gives a brief, little-known history of Jewish conversion. He notes that conversion to Judaism is not a new phenomenon. In fact, widespread conversion during the Second Temple period (500 BCE to 70 CE) was, for the most part, regarded positively by Jewish leaders. The maxim that “converts are more beloved to God than the multitude that stood at Mount Sinai,” is attributed to Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish in the third century.

Beginning in the Middle Ages, however, the Christian Church invoked severe penalties including death for those daring to convert openly or those who were identified as recent converts. Needless to say, the number of converts dwindled. In more recent times, the number of converts to Judaism has increased substantially. However, there does not seem to be any universally accepted number for those who have chosen to embrace Judaism.

How does one become Jewish? And what are the requirements for conversion? The answers to these questions are not simple. What we do know is that conversion can be a complicated process and difficult to understand, both for Jews and those seeking to become Jews. As illustrated by the stories in this volume and as described by Rabbi Seibert, the conversion process varies according to the branch of Judaism involved and the individual rabbi working with the convert. Although learning about Jewish practices and principles is common among all branches of Judaism, after that demands differ.

Traditional branches of Judaism require an interview by a *beit din* (a three-member rabbinical court), which

may entail questions of knowledge, judgment or attitude, according to descriptions presented in the book. This is followed by immersion in the *mikvah*, the ritual bath, which for many has deep significance. For men, conversion involves ritual circumcision in which a symbolic drop of blood is taken from those already circumcised, or actual circumcision for those who are not. In the book, one of those profiled had to undergo a surgical procedure that seems a true test of conviction. For more liberal rabbis, requirements are often less stringent and the preparation time shorter.

The book consists of forty-three personal histories of men and women who have converted to Judaism. The stories, generally five to ten pages long, are presented as first-person accounts (“I did this or thought that.”) However, they were written by the authors, Arnine Cumsky Weiss and Carol Weiss Rubel, based on interviews with the subject of each chapter. Presumably, the authors recorded the interviews and then transcribed them, but it is unclear how many of the informants’ actual words were used in preparing the individual stories.

The first two sections of the book are grouped according to the time of life individuals embraced conversion in early adulthood or later.

The second section features stories that involve conversion after marriage or remarriage, and the blending of families. The third section features converts who have chosen to become rabbis and cantors, and the last contains two brief essays from rabbis who have guided and counseled converts.

---

*“For me, Jewish life is an anchor in confusing times,” one convert said.*

---

The authors have done a good job in selecting meaningful details for each story and in summarizing material from what must have been much longer narratives. The particulars vary, but the use of similar key words and phrases is noteworthy. Among those words is “searching” and “questioning,” used most often by college age individuals who began to consider converting in their younger years. These young people can be characterized as seekers and thinkers in the realm of religion,

*CONTINUED ON PAGE 16*

sometimes as students of religious studies. For most, religion was a central concern, not a peripheral one.

Other phrases individuals used to describe themselves before conversion are “lost” and “not fitting in.” Stories of broken and dysfunctional families are common in this collection, as are personal psychological and physical challenges. Many were unhappy with the religion of their birth and upbringing, and found Judaism a good “fit” that made them feel authentic and comfortable. As one woman acknowledged, “For me, Jewish life is an anchor in confusing times.” Another woman, raised as a Southern Baptist, reflects the feelings of many when she says, “I never felt I made a choice. I did what I was.” “I was born with a Jewish identity” said another informant, as did one woman whose father was half Jewish: “I’ve always thought like a Jew. Judaism is in my heart, my soul.” The protagonist of a story in Part One describes a “critical mass” leading up to his conversion: the detrimental teachings of a Christian minister in his youth, consequent feelings of rootlessness, and finally meeting and falling in love with a Jewish woman.

The stories in Part Two affirm the importance of prior life experiences followed by a catalyst that solidifies the decision to convert. Not surprisingly, that critical influence was most often a loving relationship with a Jewish partner. One woman, for example, tells a moving story of being a Catholic-born divorced mother of two when she met her Orthodox husband. Now living in Israel, married for twenty-five years with two more adopted children, she proudly proclaims, “I am an Orthodox woman...evolving into the best Jewish woman I can be...When I see my grandchildren sitting and learning with...their grandfather, I feel really blessed.”

---

*The critical influence was most often  
a loving relationship with a Jewish partner.*

---

The great majority of stories are upbeat and emphasize the positive aspects of conversion to Judaism – security, community, serenity – but they also illustrate the need for courage and fortitude to face obstacles and opposition, at least at first. Some converts whose stories are told here had to contend with parents who disagreed with their decision to become Jews. Some eventually reconciled; other parents did not. Time and again, informants were sustained by the word: *bashert* – meaning preordained or fated, especially regarding a mate. As author Carol Rubel wrote about her own his-

tory, “[T]he heart follows its own direction. And, sometimes, *bashert* can present itself as the extraordinary juxtaposition of two opposites. That is just what happened for us.”

Although falling in love may be the most obvious and “traditional” push toward conversion, the stories tell of a variety of influences and circumstances. These include people raised Jewishly whose mothers are not Jewish (a requirement that sometimes sparks initial resentment on the part of people who feel they are already Jews), people whose first conversion in a liberal branch of Judaism is not recognized by the Orthodox establishment, and conversion of babies after adoption. One story features an *Anous* (from the Hebrew meaning “forced one,” also referred to as Marrano, Converso or Crypto-Jew). A Kulanu colleague, Stephen Gomes, was raised in a Catholic household and discovered his family’s roots in 15th century Portugal, when thousands of Jews were forced to convert to Christianity. He now helps other *Anousim* in their quests for their Jewish heritage and family history.

---

*The stories are diverse, revelatory,  
telling, and often touching.*

---

The stories collected in *The Choice* are diverse, revelatory, telling, and often touching. Readers expecting an academic treatise or an organized survey will not find it here, nor was that the intent of the book. However, I wish that the authors had devoted a bit more effort to elucidating the themes that the stories portrayed and that they had paid more attention to the big picture beyond their one-paragraph introduction to each section. That said, those contemplating conversion may find affirmation through identification with elements of one story or another. By condensing and illuminating a variety of scenarios leading to conversion, the authors have filled a gap in the literature and provided role models for those individuals on their conversion journey.

### **CONDOLENCES**

The Kulanu community sends condolences to long time Kulanu volunteer Shep Wahnnon on the death of his father, Albert Wahnnon. May his memory be for a blessing.



# Travels with Nancy

By Nancy Cuevas Guzman

## ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT (MAY, 2009)

With some awkwardness, I managed to convey to my Muslim cab driver that I wished to visit the Jewish synagogue of Alexandria. He informed me that no one was allowed to enter, but he would stop in front and wait for me to take a look. The synagogue was situated on a busy commercial boulevard and its huge gates were heavily guarded by armed soldiers. I peered through the bars and asked if I could enter the compound to photograph it. The answer was a resounding “no.” But I could come back at another time and speak to the officer in charge.

A day or two later I returned. There, at a side gate, I was questioned by a second officer and asked to show my passport. “Only Jews are allowed to enter,” he said. I pulled out the chain hidden beneath my clothing and flashed the Star of David. That promptly changed everything. The officer radioed to another guard and soon a soft-spoken Egyptian gentleman appeared and asked, “Are you Jewish?” “Yes,” I said, flashing my ‘badge,’ and I was admitted into a building.

I noted that the attendant who escorted me from the gate was wearing a fashionable cap and I suspected that it was his “disguise” for a *kippah* (skull cap). I was asked to wait and I ran my eyes over the walls covered with old black and white photographs of synagogues and congregations long since gone, writings in French and names of Jews from the past, letters of recognition and lists of donors and friends.

I was brought into an office and interviewed by a man who I assumed was an Egyptian in charge of administrative duties. There I showed my passport, which he carefully studied and then asked the inevitable question, “Are you a Jew?” This time I mentioned some schools I attended and places I lived in Israel.

---

*Nancy Cuevas Guzman is a descendant of Spanish Jews and traces her roots back to the Spanish Inquisition and the Jewish community of Curacao. She has been trying without success to find acceptance as a returnee in Israel's orthodox community.*



Portugal,  
Tunisia,  
Egypt

“Okay,” he responded, “this gentleman will show you the synagogue.”.....whew! I felt like I had just passed three judges, one at a time, at a *Beit Din* (court of law)! My guide confirmed my suspicions when he told me that he was also Jewish, which left me shocked....I thought all the Egyptian Jews were gone! He also informed me that on special holidays, Jews still came to the synagogue to worship.



Great Synagogue of Alexandria.  
Photo by Nancy Cuevas Guzman

Up to this point I had not even glimpsed the actual synagogue and I had no idea what was in store for me. My guide led me through well-manicured grounds to a magnificent building with steps leading to a pillared entrance and huge doors. When he opened the door, I was shocked! I felt like I was stepping into a time warp....a time when buildings were made with fine dark wood, marble and stone and many elegant details. This synagogue is a masterpiece with chandeliers, giant pillars, balconies and beautiful woodwork.

Despite some camera malfunction I was overjoyed to have the opportunity to photograph this wonderful synagogue. I lingered, breathing in the spirituality permeating this quiet, lonely monument to Jewish Egyptian life, a glorious era gone, the histories of many Sephardic (Jews of Spanish descent) families now ended on Egyptian soil. And I wondered what became of those faith-filled worshipers and what will finally become of this grand old “Great Synagogue of Alexandria” in today's Egypt.

## TUNIS, TUNISIA (MARCH, 2010)

When I heard that a small community of Jews still lived in Tunis, and with my Spanish visa about to expire, I decided Tunisia would be close enough to my current home base of Mallorca for a short visit. After receiving no response to my calls and faxes to a Chabad-run school on Palestine Street (I am not kidding)

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18

that a friend from Valencia, Spain had given me, I decided to just show up. I needed help in locating a hotel and a place to spend *Shabbat* (Sabbath). Once again, I was faced with armed guards and had to present my passport. Again, I was asked to return later, this time to meet the school's director, a Mr. Hattab.

When I arrived two hours later, Mr. Hattab greeted me from a second story balcony and beckoned me to come in. I climbed the stairs, and at the top, I found a happy, bearded middle-aged man who did not speak a word of English! The room was full of beautiful, smiling children, sitting like perfect angels at their desks. He was teaching a class. When he asked me in French what I wanted, I answered in a mixture of English and Spanish. Mr. Hattab called another teacher who knew some English.

---

*The room was full of  
beautiful, smiling children.*

---

I asked for help in locating a hotel in walking distance to the synagogue for *Shabbat* (Sabbath) and a family to visit with for *Shabbat* and *Purim* (Jewish holiday), which was that same weekend. When I asked about the Chabad rabbi, they told me he died some years ago and no one had replaced him. As a result, there is no one to receive a fax or phone call. Mystery solved.

Friday morning I went in search of the synagogue per instructions from the hotel's reception desk. After walking a long way without finding the synagogue, I realized I must have been going in the wrong direction. But everyone I questioned pointed in the same direction. It wasn't until I arrived at a Catholic Cathedral that I realized that for Muslims, a non-Muslim meant Christian. I had no choice then but to use the magic word "Israel" for people to understand that I was looking for the synagogue. With that information, they sent me on my way, in the opposite direction. At least now I knew where to go for services.

When Shabbat came, I arrived at the synagogue ready to pass through the front door, but instead, I was led to a back door and a small room overflowing with men. As the only female present, I sat outside the room following the service from a *siddur* (prayer book) in the dimly lit grand synagogue. After the service Mr. Hattab, his sons and the teacher walked me to the Hattab home to celebrate the *Shabbat*.



*Little girls dressed up for Purim in Tunis.*  
Photo by Nancy Cuevas Guzman.

The Hattab family consisted of Mr. Hattab, his beautiful wife and 10 beautiful children. The day was marked by respect for everything Jews hold sacred. The husband praised his wife; the children showed great respect for their parents. During the *Purim* service, all the attending families were modest and simple. The children were well behaved and the poor were given seats at the *Purim* table. That was particularly touching for me to watch. I heard the *Megilla* (scroll of Esther) reading and Mr. Hatab's lectures in French, Arabic and Hebrew and then Mr. Hattab escorted me to my hotel with cakes that he had baked himself.

When all the festivities were over, the *chag* (holiday) and *Havdallah* (ritual to mark the end of the Sabbath and the beginning of the new week) were past, I was given my chance to photograph the Great Synagogue. By then, the photography was secondary to the experience of the wonderful people who had opened their homes to me.

#### **BELMONTE, PORTUGAL (MAY, 2010)**

Prior to my visit to Belmonte, I had been warned that community members there are wary (and perhaps weary) of outsiders coming to their town to meet them... the crypto Jews of Belmonte...the Jewish community that practiced Judaism in secret for over 500 years and had just been "discovered" some 80 years ago. I didn't know what to expect.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19



I arrived unannounced at the synagogue on Saturday morning and went straight up to the balcony. I watched from there as the *Hazzan* (cantor) motioned to another member of the congregation that “an intruder” had entered the synagogue and to go get me. I heard the man coming up the stairs to where I was sitting and continued to read from my *siddur* (prayer book). The first thing he said to me was, “Get out.” I turned to him and smiled. He seemed surprised by my response and questioned me about where I came from. I responded in Spanish telling him that my mother is Jewish, a Levy and my father a converso (Crypto-Jew) and that currently, I was living in Puerto Pollenca, Mallorca. A few more questions and he smiled back and reassured me that all was good.

After the service was over, I descended the stairs of the balcony hand-in-hand with an elderly woman who had motioned to me that she needed my assistance in getting down to the main sanctuary. For me, this was a normal learned gesture from my Latino background, walking arm-in-arm with an old woman. The congregation recognized it as such and showed me great respect and acceptance. They were warm and welcoming and invited me for *Kiddish* (blessing over the wine after Sabbath services) and made sure to tell me the time of the next service.

---

*By the afternoon service, the whole town seemed to know my entire background.*

---

By the afternoon *mincha* service, the whole town seemed to know my entire background, even people on the street. People greeted me wherever I went. When I entered the synagogue the second time, a 12-year-old boy came over and asked if I was from Spain. The people of Belmonte seem to respect the Spaniards as neighbors who had experienced a similar fate as the Jews of Portugal during the Inquisition. (Of course, many Spanish Jews originally fled to Portugal to escape the Inquisition.) It seemed we were all Crypto-Jews (secret Jews).

When the service was over, one of the women from the congregation walked me back to my rooming house,

sheltering me from the rainstorm with her umbrella, and, like any other Jewish mother, chewed me out for not being married. She was probably 35 to 40 years old herself. After Shabbat I was invited to join a group of young people in their 20's at a local restaurant. One young woman spent an hour talking to me about boys and the problem of finding a suitable mate in her community.

When I suggested she might go to Israel, she said she did not want to leave her family, which I think is reflective of *Latinas* (Latin women). She did say she wanted to marry a Jewish man, not, interestingly, a “Crypto-Jew.” Unfortunately, the teacher Michael Mseyas said some members of the community have married Catholics because of the lack of choice in finding a mate.

On Sunday before *mincha*, I was invited to attend a class given by Mr. Mseyas, an American of Portuguese descent, who had come to Belmonte from Jerusalem to teach Hebrew to community members. Among the students were the *Hazzan* and some other men. The *Hazzan* could read Hebrew but prior

to the arrival of this teacher, he did not understand a word of what he prayed. I was the only woman present and was not allowed to pray with the men. I had to sit outside the room.

When I think about my experience in Belmonte, I am overwhelmed by the community's acceptance of me. Obviously, there was a commonality of shared history. It was my Spanish heritage that erased any barriers that might have been between us. It was the unspoken gestures and mannerisms of the “small village” that Crypto-Jews recognize among themselves. My father used to point them out to me...all the old fashioned, secluded Latino ways. This was my childhood; this was my family. My responses were automatic and came from my inner self. I have to say that these behaviors are not characteristic of today's Spanish communities; they represent the behavior and air of the old world... the world of my parents and the old secluded world of Belmonte. I know this culture. The visit was very special for me. I felt like one of them. And they treated me as such.



*Beautiful little synagogue in Belmonte, built 1977 with donations from French benefactor. Photo by Nancy Cuevas Guzman.*

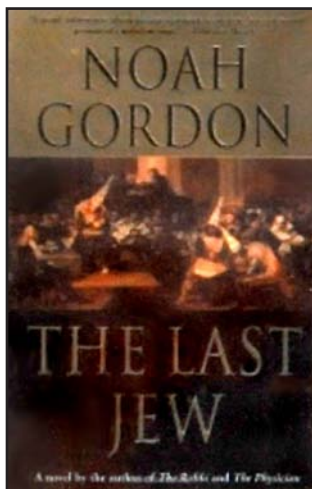
## BOOK REVIEW

### *THE LAST JEW*

By Noah Gordon  
Thomas Dunne Books  
St. Martin's Griffin, New York: 2000

*Reviewed by Steven Prowler*

The magnitude of the Holocaust surely has no parallel in Jewish history. And yet, there was another painful epoch in the distant past that also was characterized by gruesome atrocities, excessive loss of life and property and the permanent disappearance of a large and illustrious Jewish population from history. That era was the Spanish Inquisition during which Jews were faced with conversion or exile. Those who converted (Crypto-Jews) were later hunted down amid accusations of heresy and many were burned at the stake for living as Christians and practicing Judaism in secret.



*The Last Jew*, a vivid and extensively researched and detailed historical novel by American author Noah Gordon, portrays the plight of the Jews in Inquisition-era Spain. The story masterfully blends period events and historic figures with adventure, romance and high suspense to create an interesting and eventful work that stimulates our desire and curiosity to read on.

Protagonist Jonah Toledano, the son of a prominent Jewish silversmith, manages to escape the worst of the Inquisition, while at the same time, refusing to become a converso. His father and younger brother have been murdered but their separate killings involve more than just religious hatred. They center on the disappearance and probable theft of a holy object, which becomes the focus of Toledano's unrelenting search.

During the course of the story, the reader travels with Toledano through a patchwork of subcultures in Spain as he tries out various occupations in an attempt to survive the vagaries and hatred of the Inquisition. He travels to Granada and interacts with the local Roma (gypsies). Then he moves to Gibraltar where he works

as a metal working apprentice. And finally, he tries his luck at sea, working briefly as a seaman aboard a cargo ship.

The book culminates in a personal triumph as Toledano ultimately excels as a physician, which provides him with the wealth and respect he craves as well as the means of countering the villains of the Inquisition. However, his attempts to understand historic events remain unsatisfying. Some of the most moving episodes in the book touch on Toledano's inner conflicts and his desire to preserve his religious identity.

Overall, *The Last Jew* is a compelling novel that depicts danger and pain as well as individual heroism in an epoch of misery and darkness. The introductory chapters are marred slightly by some tedious digressions as the author establishes the setting and period realism. But if the reader persists, the novel is satisfying and meaningful.

### **B'nai Anousim Conference and Tour of Israel**

Kulanu board member Rabbi Stephen Leon has organized a trip to Israel for B'nai Anousim to take place August 1-11, 2011. The trip will include attendance at the 8th annual B'nai Anousim Conference in Jerusalem and a tour of places of interest to B'nai Anousim.

A major highlight of the visit will include a gathering of tour participants at the Western Wall on Tisha B'av to memorialize the tragedy of the Spanish Inquisition and to celebrate the return to Judaism of many Crypto Jews. For information on this historic visit, please contact Rabbi Leon at rabbisal@aol.com or (915) 526-3693.



*Western Wall and Dome of the Rock.*  
Wikipedia.



# ***President's Message: Help Feed Hungry Ugandan Children***

***Dear Friends,***

I just returned home from three weeks in the Abayudaya Jewish community in Uganda. One of the most touching and instructive moments came when I was given a letter from Elifaz Balungi, a student at the community high school that Kulanu created and supports. It read:

*We humbly send our...gratitude to the donors and well-wishers of Semei Kakungulu High School for sacrificing and standing by the students... The (food Kulanu pays for) has many useful impacts. Academically, students have improved as they only (used to) concentrate on thinking about what to eat. It has improved the health of the students as they (now) have a balanced diet. It has also helped the parents to send the students to school without worries. It helps the school and the students not to...dodge classes, especially in the afternoon session, as they get assured of breakfast and lunch. The (food) service makes students be punctual, as they don't (have to) travel long distances to search for what to eat....On behalf of the other students, we request the service to continue. (It) is highly appreciated by the students, the school, and the parents.*

As I read the letter, I thought proudly of all that Kulanu has accomplished and all that remains to be done. Imagine that until recently students were late for their afternoon classes because they had to search for food at lunchtime! We never want that to happen again. As the Abayudaya elementary and high schools gain in reputation and as more students pass their national examinations, enrollment is increasing each semester, now up to 730. Finding money to pay for simple breakfasts and lunches is a continual challenge, one that our donors have responded to with generosity in the past.

We are asking you, for funds to continue our highly successful school nutrition program. The benefits were corroborated by Naume Sabano, coordinator of the school's feeding program, who reported that absenteeism and dropout rates have been dramatically reduced since we introduced the feeding program in the school, and that concentration, mental health, and discipline have improved "tremendously."

Whatever amount you can donate for school nutrition will be, as Elifaz wrote, "highly appreciated." For those who can afford a larger gift, we have a special re-

quest. The Estelle Friedman Gervis Family Foundation has once again come to our aid by offering a \$10,000 challenge grant for new or increased contributions between \$500 and \$1200. We aspire to meet that challenge, which would go a long way toward the \$30,000 a year needed to feed all the students. But, again, every donation counts and will help us continue to feed the Abayudaya students and their Christian and Muslim classmates.



*Abayudaya high school students serving breakfast.*  
Photo by Seth Jonadav.

To donate to the nutrition program, write "Uganda nutrition" in the memo field of your check, payable to Kulanu in US dollars, and mail it to me at 165 West End Ave, 3R, New York, NY 10023 – or donate online at [www.kulanu.org/donate](http://www.kulanu.org/donate) - and be sure to write "Uganda nutrition" in the comments field.

It would be wonderful if you used your social networking connections such as email, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and blogs to spread the word about this appeal. Here's a "tweet-length" message you can use on Facebook, LinkedIn, or Twitter:

Help Kulanu feed hungry Jewish, Muslim & Christian kids at Abayudaya Schools in Uganda! <http://tinyurl.com/feedUgandakids>.

Thank you so much.

***Harriet Bograd, President***



## THANK YOU, DONORS

Donations through 12/31/2010

\$14,000-15,000

The Smart Family Foundation, L. Weider.

\$5,000

The Otto and Marianne Wolman Foundation.

\$2,000

Karen and Andrew Thorburn, Anonymous.

\$1,000-1,999

Werner and Phoebe Frank, Lois K. Levy, Angela and Carl Milner, Aron and Karen Primack, Gail B. and Mel Werbach, David H. Wise, Woodlands Community Temple.

\$500-999

Congregation Darchei Noam, Joseph Slifka Center at Yale - Yale Hillel, Ellen W. Larsen, Yvonne and Stuart Lorch, National Center to Encourage Judaism, Edward Rensin, Congregation Beth Shalom, Herbert Stein.

\$125-499

Bruce Aaron, Susan Agate, Irwin M. and Elaine R. Berg, Diana G. Blum and Bill Scott, Louis H. Blumengarten, Lisa Burnstein, Bonnie Cham, Alice Chary, The Community Synagogue, Allan Donsky, Jonathan Louis Dorfman, Rachel Efron, The Yadin Family, Judy Featherman, Hope and Matthew Feldman, The Madav IX Foundation - a supporting foundation of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland, Pamela Fox, Dr. Arlene F Gardsbane, Drs. Roberta P. Glick and Terry Gene Unterman, Debbie Glotter, Dolores Goldfinger, Harriette Hirsch, Howard and Helene Jacob, Julian J. Jaffe, Stacey and Mike Johnson, Richard Katz, Dr. Adina S Kleiman, Mr. and Mrs. Tadeusz Kozikowski, Rabbi Scott Kramer, Eli Kwartler, Marshall and Laura Derby Charitable Fund of the Boston Foundation, Marilyn Bernice Morrison, Jacob Mussen, Dr. Zev Nathan, Hasha Musha Perman, Peter Persoff, Ira and Marilyn Polon, Barbara & Ed Rachlin, Malcolm C. Rich and Dr. Lise Weisberger, Dr. and Mrs. Kenneth Robbins, Howard and Michelle Rosenbloom, Binyumen and Carol Schaechter, Charles E. Scheidt, Drs. Seymour and Wendy E Scheinberg, Myra Schiff, Judith M. Schlaeger, Amy Schuman, Dr. Claudine Schweber, Mark W. and Rhonna Shatz, MD, Drs. Karen and Fred Shtetman, Cameron Silbar, Peter R. and Betty J. Silvergate, Aleene Smith, Jeffrey M. Solotoroff, Rosette W. Tucker, Chaya Weinstein, Dr. Norman and Mrs. Bonnie Weiss, Howard J. Wial.

\$100-124

Anonymous, Kim Ainis, Am Kolel Sanctuary and Renewal Center, Rabbi Marc D. Angel, Bank of America Match-

ing Gifts, Marla Belostock, Elaine B. Brichta, Lynda S. Brodsky, Rabbi and Mrs. Ronnie Cohen, Steven Corn, Syrel D. and Michael E. Dawson, Richard and Dorothy Dorsay, James Feldman and Natalie Wexler, Jane and John Fisher, Marsha W. Frank Kaufman, Frida K. Furman, Elkan Gamzu, Dr. Arlene F. Gardsbane, Elizabeth and Ron Goodman, Michael Goodman, H.D. Gordon, Gail R. Harris, Jeffrey M. Holland, Robert Honig, Lorna Penelope Hopf, Raymond and Rebecca Kaplan, Laura Alter Klapman, Hollis B. Landauer, Judith Lee, John N. Lieber, Barbara Lockhart, Steven Lorch and Susanna Kochan-Lorch, Judith Ann Manelis, Jeffrey John Manning, Randal L. Mars, Dr. and Mrs. Morton Meltzer, Judith Mishkin, Marvin and Beth Najberg, Drs. Benjamin H. Natelson and Gudrun Lange, Martin Okun, Claudia Corwin and E. Anthony Otoadese, Dr. Karen Pierce, Marshall Phillip and Sabina Primack, Rhoda Posner Pruce, Jeffrey and Judy Remz, Stuart M. Riback, Mordecai and Paula Rosenfeld, Martin Bernard and Anne Rosensky, Stanley Savitz, Laz and Ellen Schneider, Frank and Susan Schuster, Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Schwartz, Bruce Shapiro, Mark J. Sugarman, David Tabak, Gilbert and Lillian Zinn, Steven Zuckerman.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 23

### LETTERS

*Jody Goldman of Swampscott, MA, writes:*

Enclosed is a check in the amount of \$500 representing a donation from my daughter, Sydney Goldman. Sydney chose to raise money for the Abayudaya community after having seen a slide show in preparation for the visit of community leader J.J. Keki. Sydney was impressed by what she saw and wanted to help the children of the Abayudaya community. To raise money for this mitzvah project, Sydney held a bake sale at her school, Cohen Hillel Academy, and sold bookmarks. In addition to the funds she raised from these activities, she also donated some of her own money. Sydney would like the enclosed money to be used for the education of the Abayudaya children.

*Rabbi Romiel Daniel, Indian Jewish  
Congregation of USA, writes:*

Congratulations to the Magen Aboth Synagogue in Alibag, Konkan, India, which celebrated its 100th anniversary on Sunday, December 26, 2010. This is one of two synagogues still functioning in the Konkan area. It is a source of pride that the Bene Israel Community in India has maintained its culture and heritage up to the present day.



# **DONATIONS IN HONOR OF...**

(Donors' names in italics)

Shari and Chuck Granat: *Norma and Gary Libman*

"The Blue Waffles" soccer team: *Cameron Silbar*

Aharon Kissa and Family: *Sheryl Gordon*

Aliza Kline: *Debra Gonsher Vinik*

Aron and Karen Primack: *Marshall and*

*Laura Derby*

Barbara Vinick: *Harriet and Daniel Tolpin*

Brian Primack and Family: *Marcia Kaplan*

David Friedman: *Sarah Friedman*

David Wise: *Raymond and Joan Hausmann*

Jack and Diane Zeller: *Theodore Kram*

Jamie, Maia, and Ethan Stone: *Syrel and*

*Michael Dawson*

Joshua Ethan Lempert: *Jeffrey Davidson*

Matthew Feldman: *Beverly Feldman*

Fred & Phyllis Gordon: *Dr. Claudine Schweber*

Mr. and Mrs. Hauptman: *Thelma and*

*Marty Finkelman*

# **DONATIONS IN MEMORY OF...**

(Donors' names in italics)

Bob Claremon: *Francine Levy*

Eugene Goodwin: *Francine Levy*

George Gordon: *Richard and Ellen Lederman*

Joanna Nichols: *Joy Nichols*

Mortimer Smith: *Aleene Smith*

Murray Lobel: *Laura and Art Brecher*

Rabbi Moshe Cotel: *Rabbi and Mrs. Ronnie Cohen*

Roman and Eva Rodgers: *Miriam Rosenthal*

Sidney Blank: *Roberta Sackman*

## **Copyright Notice:**

*All text, photographs and layout designs appearing in this newsletter are © 2011 by Kulanu and/or its participating writers and photographers, and may not be reproduced, either electronically or in print, for any commercial purposes, without written permission from Kulanu or participating copyright holders. Readers are welcome to forward the electronic version of the newsletter to other interested individuals or organizations for personal, non-profit charitable or educational purposes only, provided all photo credits, authorship of articles and Kulanu identifications are preserved.*



*Abayudaya high school girls enjoying breakfast.*  
Photo by Seth Jonadav.

## **Kulanu Board of Directors and Officers**

*President*  
Harriet Bograd

*Vice President*  
Judith Manelis

*Secretary*  
Barbara Vinick

*Treasurer*  
Harriet Bograd

*President Emeritus*  
Jack Zeller

*Other Board Members*  
Matthew Feldman, Rabbi Stephen Leon,  
Peter Persoff, Andria Spindel,  
Jacob Steinberg, Rabbi Bonita Sussman

*Honorary Board Members*  
Aron Primack, Karen Primack

Kulanu ("All of Us") is a tax-exempt organization of Jews of varied backgrounds and practices, which works with isolated and emerging Jewish communities around the globe, supporting them through networking, education, economic development projects, volunteer assignments, research, and publications about their histories and traditions.

This newsletter is published by Kulanu  
165 West End Avenue, 3R, New York, NY 10023

Report changes of address to: [database@kulanu.org](mailto:database@kulanu.org).  
For further information, see: [www.kulanu.org/about-kulanu](http://www.kulanu.org/about-kulanu)

Newsletter Editor: Judith Manelis  
Layout and Photography Editor: Enid Bloch



**KULANU**

*Supporting Isolated and  
Emerging Jewish Communities  
around the Globe*

**165 West End Avenue, 3R  
New York, NY 10023**

*(212) 877-8082*

**Nonprofit Org  
US Postage Paid  
Buffalo NY  
Permit No. 558**

**Address Service  
Requested**



Photo by Barbara Vinick.

## ***NEW PLAYGROUND EQUIPMENT IN UGANDA***

Kulanu's Abayudaya speaking tours can have a lasting impact. In Vancouver, British Columbia, the Rosen Garten and Friedland families first learned of the Abayudaya Jewish community when their children's King David High School was preparing for the arrival of community leader J.J. Keki's from Uganda in November, 2009. Excited by the visit, the school subsequently fundraised and made a substantial contribution to Abayudaya education. The two families wanted a hands-on experience as well and decided to initiate a project to provide playground equipment for the Abayudaya Primary School in Nabugoye Hill. They arrived in the

community on Dec. 28, 2010, in time to help install and paint the equipment, as well as paint four classrooms inside and out. The families are Dr. Mark and Natalie Rosengarten, with David, 17, Gabrielle, 13, and Adam, 9; and Phillipa Friedland with Aaron, 18, and Eli, 11. Their donations totaled about \$5,000, with help from the Vancouver Talmud Torah School. Natalie said the families were thrilled to go to Uganda to take part in the project. The families attended *Shabbat* services at Nabugoye Hill where Rabbi Gershom Sizomu expressed the community's deep appreciation and gratitude.