



KULANU

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What's Happening in Africa: Cameroon, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda, Zimbabwe

by Judy Manelis

Judaism continues to grow and thrive in Africa. In small villages, often with few amenities of the modern world (electricity, plumbing, running water) and far from major urban centers, Jewish communities are somehow taking root and flourishing. In Uganda, for example, where Kulanu has been actively involved in the community for 18 years, there are now seven villages with seven synagogues and close to 1500 Abayudaya Jews. The largest village of Nabagoya Hill sits a few miles outside of the town of Mbale, northeast of the capital city of Kampala. From there American trained Conservative rabbi Gershon Sizomu leads a wonderfully inspiring Jewish

For Rosh Hashanah this year the shofar was blown by Shealtiel ben Shealtiel - one of the builders of the Great Zimbabwe synagogue and son of Shealtiel [senior], a highly respected shofar blower in the community.

Photo by Rabson Wuriga

community known for its vibrant Jewish life and committed congregants. In 2019, the community will be celebrating 100 years of Jewish religious practice.

In Cameroon and Kenya, there are small but no less devoted Jewish communities whose spiritual journeys have taken them from Christianity to Judaism. Like the Abayudaya of Uganda, they embraced Judaism without ever having met a Jew in person. Unlike the Jews of Uganda, both of these communities are of more recent vintage. The Kenya Jewish community in Kasuku numbers about 50 people and has been practicing Judaism for about 12 years*. The Cameroon Jewish

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*See *Accidental Tourist* by Ari Witkin in *KulanuNews*, Fall 2011

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African Communities with Kulanu Connection

- (1) Ethiopia
Beta Israel & Beta Avraham
- (2) Zimbabwe
Lemba
- (3) Ghana
Sefwi Wiawso
- (4) Nigeria
Igbo (Ibo)
- (5) Cameroon
Beth Yeshourun
- (6) Uganda
Abayudaya
- (7) Kenya



location of Sefwi Wiawso in the mountainous region of Ghana for its protective quality and difficult accessibility. For them, Judaism is a return to their ancient traditions.

Finally, we come to Zimbabwe and the historic link of the Lemba to their Jewish brethren, to us. Today, as I write this article, an extraordinary partnership between the Lemba and Kulanu is being forged, a partnership that has far reaching consequences both for the Lemba and for world Jewry. The needs of the Lemba are different. For them, the mission is to reinvigorate their ancient faith and to reconnect them with the Jewish world

community numbering some 60 practicing Jews* has been ardently practicing Judaism for about 15 years. Neither of these two communities has a resident rabbi, but each has inspired leadership, men and women who are devoted to Judaism and committed to transmitting the Jewish faith to their communities. As Kenya borders Uganda, the Jews of Kasuku look to Rabbi Sizomu for spiritual and religious guidance as well as for Jewish educational materials and prayer books. The Cameroon community looks to Kulanu volunteers Rabbis Bonita and Gerald Sussman of Staten Island, New York as their spiritual mentors.

In Ghana, Jewish community leader Alex Armah spent four years traveling back and forth between his home in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana to Nabagoya Hill, Uganda to study with Rabbi Gershom Sizomu. Armah is determined to educate himself Jewishly as much as possible in order to provide religious leadership to his community of 15 families and 120 practicing Jews, who call themselves the House of Israel. Members of the community believe they are descended from Biblical Jews who hid their Jewish origins and practice to avoid persecution. Their oral history includes details of migrations from Israel to Africa including centuries spent in Mali and the Ivory Coast where the community suffered discrimination and much hardship before their arrival in Ghana. According to community members, their ancestors chose to settle in the remote

before their faith is lost in the modern world*. The total Lemba population of Zimbabwe has been estimated at 100,000 with more Lemba living in South Africa. So the stakes are high.

In this issue of KulanuNews, we will give you, our readers, information on five African Jewish communities that Kulanu is working with and will share with you some recent successes as well as Kulanu's future plans and goals. We hope in this way to keep you informed of progress made, and hopefully, to inspire you to join us in the continued support and mentoring of these special Jewish communities.

IN CAMEROON: Rabbi Bonita Sussman, Kulanu Coordinator

As many of our readers may remember, the Cameroon community of Beth Yeshourun (The House of the Righteous) first communicated with Kulanu in March of 2010. In response to their request for help on their Jewish journey, Kulanu invited Rabbis Bonita and Gerald Sussman to visit Cameroon. In the summer of 2010, they did. What they found was a thriving and

**See The Lemba/Jewish community of Zimbabwe: Its History, Jewish Practice and Challenges by Modreck Zvakavapano Maeresera in KulanuNews, Spring 2012 and Passover in Mapakom- here by Sandy Leeder and An Insiders' View of Zimbabwe Seder by Modreck Maeresera, both in KulanuNews, Fall 2012.*

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**See Cameroon's Beth Yeshourun by Rabbis Bonita and Gerald Sussman and Serge Etele in KulanuNews, Fall 2010*

dedicated community practicing the Jewish faith in a knowledgeable and highly motivated manner. Prior to the visit by the Sussmans, community leaders Serge Etele and his father, Moreh (teacher) Nachman Etele had spent years scouring the Internet researching Judaism, learning about Jewish religious observance and practice and transmitting their knowledge to members of their community. Their grasp of Jewish ritual and law and the sophistication of the questions they asked the Sussmans during their visit reflected the depth of their knowledge. While the Sussmans were excited by what they found in the Cameroon Jewish community, the community members... meeting Jews for the first time, and two rabbis no less, thought the visit was nothing short of a miracle.

Since that initial visit, Kulanu has maintained a close relationship with the community. Serge visited the United States for six weeks in the winter of 2012. His visit began with a conversion to Judaism under Orthodox credentialed rabbis. After that, he spoke in cities across the United States about his community's Jewish journey, visited rabbinic seminaries, participated in the repair of a Torah scroll and took Judaica classes. Since returning home, with the encouragement of the Sussmans, he applied for and was accepted as a student by Pirchei Shoshanim, an Orthodox educational program that provides online religious studies.

In the last year and a half there has been an exciting project initiated by Serge and Kulanu to help the community become economically self-sufficient. Communal leaders hope to provide employment for their members and generate income for the community in a country where poverty and unemployment are endemic. Goals include building a self-standing synagogue*, a guesthouse for visiting teachers and volunteers, and pursuing more Jewish learning opportunities. Although Kulanu rarely engages in economic development projects, the board decided to help the community advance these goals through an agricultural development project.

**The community now gathers in the home of Moreh Nachman and Marceline Etele, Serge's parents, for services and religious observances.*

Two years ago, a private seller offered the Beth Yeshourun community the opportunity to purchase 100/247 acre tract of land for agricultural development.



Community members Serge Etele, at left, and Viany Abia at the community's farm in Cameroon.

Photo by Naser Nama

Kulanu agreed to advance the community a one time loan of \$22,500 for this project to be repaid after five years. Beth Yeshourun planned to set up a cocoa farm, a well-known crop in the community. Serge's father owns a successful cocoa farm and many community members have worked as laborers in cocoa fields. In addition, Cameroon is the third largest cocoa producer in the world. The project seemed a good fit.

Since that time, Serge and his community have worked diligently on this project, with Serge serving as project manager. The first year, the community was able to acquire the land, buy materials, build a house for workers as the land is a distance from the community and attract laborers to plant the first crop. While waiting three years for cocoa trees to mature and produce cocoa, they planted other short-term crops and even managed to sell the crops produced. The community has now entered the second of its five-year plan.

Serge has proved to be a wonderful leader both for his community as well as for other African Jewish communities. He is adept at networking with other

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*Plantains growing as an interim crop as cocoa plants take five years to mature
Photo by Serge Etele*

African Jewish leaders, in advising newcomers to Judaism and in developing and sharing the extensive lists of Jewish resources he has found on the Internet. Two other young leaders serve as cantors and compose Cameroonian-style melodies for traditional Jewish prayers.

AND AS WE GO TO PRESS:

Kulanu Cameroon Coordinator Rabbi Bonita Sussman made this announcement: “We are thrilled to report that Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, chief rabbi of Efrat, Israel, has agreed to partner with Kulanu to help develop Jewish life in Africa. To that end, Kulanu has worked out an arrangement for community leaders to study some months in Israel at Rabbi Riskin’s yeshiva Ohr Torah Stone, where he serves as chancellor.”

IN KENYA:

Ari Witkin, Kulanu Coordinator (The Kenya report was written by Ari Witkin)

For every community, progress means something different. When I asked my friends in Kenya what progress would look like for their community, known as Kasuku, they told me that above all else they want more opportunities for Jewish learning. Though it has been more than two years since I visited, I am excited that the community is taking some big steps in that direction. The progress is due entirely to the Jewish commitment of its leaders.

In Kulanu we know that the best leadership is homegrown and that the most effective educators are the ones who know their students. Therefore, we are excited and encouraged by the leadership of Samson Nderitu and Yehudah Kimani from the Kasuku community, and the support of Rabbi Gershom Sizomu in Uganda. All of them continue to work with us to empower the Jews of Kasuku to reach their goal of advancing Jewish education in their community. Samson currently lives in Mbale, Uganda and attends Rabbi Gershom’s yeshiva class. His brother

Yehudah, who also studied with Rabbi Gershom, has returned home and is taking a leadership role there.

Community members who are financially able send their children to Uganda to take advantage of the Jewish educational opportunities among the Abayudaya. However the cost of travel and living expenses in Uganda and the difficulty of attending school in another country, has limited the number of students who have gone to study there. Furthermore,



Samson Nderitu with tallit and tefillin (phylacteries)

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this education is available only to school-age children while the adults too are thirsty for Jewish educational opportunities

With these issues in mind, and with leadership from Rabbi Gershom Sizomu and from Yehudah, we have developed a new education model that will utilize and further develop the leadership and education experience of the Kusuku community. The plan we have developed together is built upon three pillars: visiting educators, an infusion of Jewish materials, and increased communication with the broader Jewish world.

Currently, Samson is living in Uganda and studying with Rabbi Gershom. Over the course of the next year, with the Rabbi's guidance and support from Kulanu, Samson will travel home to Kenya three times to teach, lead services, and help his community prepare for chagim (holidays). In this way, he will be able to share what he has learned with members of his community.

In addition, thanks in part to a generous book donation from the P.J. Library, a program of the Harold Grinspoon Foundation, we will be sending books and educational materials that will form the foundation of the Kasuku community's Jewish library. Lastly, Kulanu will purchase the community's first computer and support their Internet access. With Yehudah's leadership at home many members of the community will have the opportunity to learn computer skills and be able to do research on Jewish life and ritual as well as communicate with their friends abroad. Also important, parents will be able to communicate with their children who are studying in the Abuyadaya schools in Uganda.

Twelve years after its inception, the Kasuku community continues to deepen its Jewish commitment and expand its Jewish knowledge. It has been my great joy as a friend of the community to be part of this process and to help them on their journey.

IN GHANA:
Harriet Bograd, Kulanu
Coordinator

Over the years, Kulanu has helped the Ghana Jewish community of Sefwi Wiawso become more self-sufficient.

With encouragement from Kulanu, community members began designing and creating challah covers



Havdalah Services in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana
Photo by Ike Swetlitz

and kente cloth tallitot. Kulanu has been the major seller of these products. Through sales, the community has received some \$50,000 from Kulanu, which they have used to purchase health insurance for members of the community, build a guesthouse for visitors and pay for other community needs. Kulanu supported the first of four trips of community leader Alex Armah to study in Uganda with Rabbi Gershom Sizomu. The community appears to be doing well.

People can continue to support the Sefwi Wiawso community through the purchase of their products at



Inside the Sefwi Wiawso synagogue
Photo by Ike Swetlitz

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kulanuboutique.com. Visitors to the community are welcome to stay at the new guest house.

IN UGANDA:

Laura Wetzler, Kulanu Coordinator

The Abuyadaya of Uganda at 1500 strong, and the first known “Jews by choice” community in modern Africa, has certainly found its way into the hearts of many American Jews. Abuyadaya fans marvel at the community’s unusual beginnings. They kvell over the Jewish knowledge of its congregants, the commitment of its young and the length of time the community has been observing Judaism (94 years). And those of us who are supporters of Kulanu are proud of Kulanu’s 18 years of involvement with the community.

Kulanu’s many programs during these years of collaboration with the Abayudaya community include the support of two schools that serve more than 700 Jewish, Christian and Muslim children, the development and funding of nutrition programs so children need not go to school hungry, women’s empowerment projects, the building of classrooms (most recently a two classroom block from anonymous donors for the Semei Kakungulu High School), dormitories, boreholes for fresh water and electric hook ups to provide villages with electricity. In addition, Kulanu donors have paid to modernize synagogues and sent prayer books and Jewish ritual objects to the community. Kulanu economic development programs have included the very successful interfaith coffee project, which has won international recognition, and the more recent grain mill project dedicated two years ago in the village of Namutumba.

It should be noted here that Kulanu was the organization responsible for arranging the Beth Din of three rabbis (Jewish court) who traveled to Uganda in 2002 to

convert community members, who by that time had been practicing Judaism for more than 83 Years.

Latest News:

In addition to Kulanu’s on going support of Abayudaya



Photos of Abuyadaya women taken by Shoshanna Nambi for her research project on the empowerment of women in the community

schools and nutrition program, in the last three years, the board nominated three young people from Uganda* to attend the extraordinary Brandeis Collegiate Institute in California. All three were accepted and all have participated. In this case, Kulanu paid for the visa applications and some travel expenses and the Institute provided scholarships for the program itself and airfare. This year, Yoash Mayende, a college graduate and the heart and soul of the Grain Mill project in Namutumba, and Sara Nabagala a law student, spent two months in the United States, four weeks at the Institute with young Jewish leaders from around the world, and four

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**Kulanu also nominated young leaders from Cameroon and Ghana who were accepted by the Institute but denied visas by the American embassies in their countries. Two students from Kaifeng, China participated in the summer of 2012.*



*A villager shows the condition of the water before the repair of the borehole
Photo by Yoash Mayende*

weeks visiting Kulanu hosts in Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston and New York. Yoash said the opportunity to travel to the United States and attend the Institute changed his life.

Kulanu's continued support of Abayudaya programs resulted in two recent gifts worth noting. In the first, it meant the gift of health and maybe life; in the second it meant life changing circumstances for six children.

During his visit to the United States, Yoash Mayende reported that the borehole (well) in his village had broken down. Faced with a lack of fresh water, community members had resorted to drinking and cooking with dirty water from creeks and streams. The villagers knew the water they were using was unclean and carried the threat of typhoid and other diseases. Prior to the installation of the village borehole, community members used the dirty water to ill effect. But they had no choice as the only other source of fresh water was a long distance from the village. (ED: Distance and well breakdown are common problems in Africa.)

During their last week in the United States, Kulanu president Harriet Bograd invited several Kulanu supporters to meet the two young leaders from Uganda. On hearing about the broken borehole, one long time Kulanu supporter Ed Rensin agreed to fund the needed repairs. Yoash arranged for the repairs as soon as he arrived home, and the villagers of Namutumba are once again able to use their beloved well. Kulanu is now making plans and seeking donations to repair other broken wells in Abayudaya villages and to provide training and support to village water committees so they can learn how to maintain and oversee the usage of their wells to reduce breakdowns.

A second supporter whose donation brought the gift of hope was inspired by a story this author wrote in the Fall,



*Villagers get water from the repaired borehole
Photo by Yoash Mayende*

2012 issue of KulanuNews "Changing the Lives of Deaf Children". The article told the story of six children, also from the village of Namutumba, who carry a

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genetic disease that causes deafness, and in some case, blindness as well. Community leaders introduced Kulanu coordinator Laura Wetzler to these children after Laura had visited them several times. Family members had kept the children hidden at home out of shame or fear. Most did not attend school and, those who did, were forced to sit in the back unable to participate. Needless to say, no learning occurred.

After meeting these children, Dr. Liz Feldman, a visitor from Chicago took on a five year commitment to raise funds from her synagogue chavurah and colleagues to support these children's education. Laura, in collaboration with community leaders in Uganda, arranged for the children to attend the Kavule Parents School for the Deaf, to give them the chance for an education, an opportunity to be with other children with similar problems, and to help prepare them for employment training.

With the fifth year approaching, the article expressed hope that another donor would take up the commitment so the children could continue their education. The article generated a spate of calls. Werner and Phoebe Frank of California donated \$10,000 to Kulanu to pay for three additional years of schooling for the children. Their gift was made in honor of the couple's good friend, Rabbi Gershom Sizomu and his wife Tzippora of the Abayudaya community.

IN ZIMBABWE:

Sandy Leeder and Jack Zeller, Kulanu Coordinators

As mentioned above, the Lemba of Zimbabwe offer Kulanu an historic opportunity; i.e., that of helping save an ancient Jewish community at risk of disappearing. Recent articles in KulanuNews have focused on the traditions and religious beliefs and practices of the Lemba, the Passover seder organized by Sandy in the Lemba heartland of Mapakomhere in 2012 and the beginnings of the cyber learning program organized by Jack Zeller from Israel. Since then, much as transpired in Zimbabwe.

Some Recent Highlights:

- * Construction of the Great Zimbabwe Synagogue in the village of Mapakomhere is well underway. One can already see walls going up and excitement is building.
- * Kulanu published Dr. Rabson Wuriga's book documenting the history and Jewish practices of the Lemba. (See page 16 for a review.)
- * Lemba leader Modreck Maeresera visited the United States on a seven state speaking tour in the winter of 2012 and was converted under Orthodox credentialed rabbis during the trip.

* The cyber learning program organized by Jack from Israel two years ago has grown to include many teachers. According to Modreck, they include: Rabbi Micha Lindenberg and his wife Miriam, the first teachers to reach out to the Lemba, and Rabbi Aaron Rehberg from Israel; Phil Alcide, who teaches via his facebook page House of Prayer on the parasha of the week, from Miami; Idit Benmor-Piltch, who teaches Hebrew from Norfolk, Virginia, and Joel Yan, who teaches prayers and songs, from Canada.



*Under construction: the Great Zimbabwe Synagogue
Photos by Rabson Wuriga*

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Harare Synagogue a Reality (August 2013)

by Modreck Maeresera



*Modreck and Brenda Maeresera with their children
Photo by Elaine Berg*

The Lemba Jews have always lived in small isolated villages. But today, just as in the rest of the world, the young and educated have begun to leave rural areas and migrate to the city in search of employment and better opportunities. In Zimbabwe, this has meant the Lemba are moving to Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe.

Because of the need to cater to this large and expanding Lemba population in the city, it became clear that we needed to create a second congregation in Harare in addition to the Great Zimbabwe Synagogue we are building in Mapakomhere in the Lemba heartland. Beginning in May 2013, we rented a house

in the Bluffhill area of Harare*. The rent is US\$800 per month. Donations (external contributions) cover the cost of the rent, security deposit and utility bills and paid for the furnishings. The house is serving as a synagogue, a communal gathering place, apartment for the synagogue president, who is currently leading services, as well as for guests/teachers who visit.

The house has two kosher kitchens, one is milchick/parve and the other is meat, enabling us to follow

**Initially Kulanu board members Sandy Leeder and Jack Zeller paid for the house out of their own pockets. This summer Kulanu assumed responsibility for all expenses.*

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kashrut (Jewish dietary laws) and separate milk and meat in all utensils, plates, pots etc. Ritual slaughter, quite similar to rabbinic standards, is also conducted on site. Our intention is that meals will be available for guests everyday and at all times of day. In addition to the kitchens, there are three furnished guest bedrooms in the building and two unfurnished guest rooms for visitors and volunteer teachers.

We are grateful for the support, be it financial, material, educational and moral that we have received so far. The infusion of support has generated enthusiasm and optimism never before experienced in the past. We hope that soon we will be able to stand on our own. We know there is nothing simple about Judaism. Most of all, we need teachers both here in Zimbabwe as well as on the Internet. We need to be able to read directly from the Torah, to recover from the loss of these skills over the centuries. We want to be full Jews.

learning and discussions on the weekly parsha (Torah portion of the week). This will enhance the excitement of being alive and Jewish in Zimbabwe.

Because of modern and foreign influences, Lemba traditional education has been on the decline. The synagogue community is in an intense catch up mode, which began even before the building was rented. This was due to the generosity of Jewish teachers from Israel and elsewhere who volunteered their time and teaching materials. Our cyber

The synagogue building has a spacious fenced-in yard. In the near future we plan to plant a garden and start a chicken project, which we hope will generate income to support the day-to-day running of the synagogue. We also have a room, which serves as a library. To date the library has only two shelves and around two dozen books. But we have scores of teaching materials from our volunteer cyber-learning teachers available on computers and memory chips, which are translated into Shona, our local language. The synagogue also serves as a religious school for the Lemba community. We have appointed a committee that deals with finance, maintenance, education and liturgy, which includes the promotion of Hebrew literacy.

Since the beginning of May, we have been meeting for Friday evening services. Since July 13, we have been meeting on Shabbat mornings as well. Offering services on Friday and Saturdays make it easier for congregants to attend at least one service. To date an average of 30 people attend each service and we expect the numbers to grow. In time, we believe many families will stay in the house throughout Shabbat for socializing,

learning program has been in existence for almost two years.

The Harare synagogue, together with the Great Zimbabwe Synagogue in Mapakomhere, signifies the fulfillment of a Lemba dream: the dream of having our own places of worship. We hope to lure back those who have been seduced by Islamic and Christian missionaries because of the lack of Jewish places of worship. It is our expectation that in the future we will be opening other chavurot in the suburbs of the city. We are not finished. We only have only just begun.

Kulanu is assisting the Lemba Jews of Zimbabwe to modernize their circumcision implements and techniques. We are interested in finding volunteer Mohels who are able to go to Zimbabwe to perform this great Mitzvah. If you are or know of a trained mohel who can volunteer a week or two of his time in late May 2014, please contact Sandy Leeder: Sandy@Leeder.com



House rented in central Harare, Zimbabwe by Lemba community with support from Kulanu, Inc. The large house is on 1.5 acres of land and is being used as residence for community leaders, guest house for visiting teachers, volunteers, and travelers, space for Shabbat and holidays services, study center, community center
Photo by Elaine Berg

Two Burgeoning Jewish Communities in Ecuador

by Daneel Schaechter



*A day trip with Hillel and Havivi Batioja and Samuel Reyes in Quito
Photo by Daneel Schaechter*

This summer I worked as an economic and political analyst at the U.S. Embassy in Quito, Ecuador. In my spare time, I traveled all over the country visiting nascent and isolated Jewish communities as the Latin American Coordinator (and board member) for Kulanu. I met, taught, and interviewed Ecuadorian Jews in Quito, Guayaquil, Cuenca, Ambato, Baños, Huaquillas, and Santa Rosa. In addition to learning about the needs and aspirations of these Jewish communities, I also focused my interviews on the intersection of politics and religion in Ecuador as part of the research needed for my senior thesis at the University of Pennsylvania.

During my travels, I developed particularly close relationships with two emerging communities. The

first was the *Shtibel Igualtaria de Guayaquil*, whose guiding light is Rabbi Juan Mejia*, a Conservative rabbi who lives and works in Oklahoma, and is a friend and colleague of mine. The second congregation was *La Sinagoga Sefaradi del Ecuador*, which I accidentally stumbled upon in Quito.

I arrived in Guayaquil in early May and spent the greater part of a week living at the *Shtibel Igualtaria*, which also happens to be the apartment of a local

**Rabbi Mejia was born in Colombia into a Christian family with Crypto-Jewish roots. As a result, he is particularly sensitive to the aspirations and identity issues of South American Jews with similar backgrounds and others who seek to convert and join the Jewish people.*

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couple, two congregants of the community. Because of his prior visits to Ecuador, Rabbi Mejia put me in touch with several Jewish communities in Ecuador and facilitated my stay at the couple's house. The Defrancis, along with four other families in the *Shtibel*, have spent nearly a decade on their journey from Christianity to Judaism.

In their quest to join the Jewish people, *Shtibel* members have traveled through different denominations and rabbis, some of whom were fakes, until they found Rabbi Mejia a few years. Rabbi Mejia takes this pro-bono job very seriously. From his home in Oklahoma City, he gives them weekly Skype classes on the mishna and other canonical Jewish texts and answers any questions they have about Judaism. He is planning to lead the conversion of this small community with a halachic Conservative Beit Din (*Jewish court*) in the near future.

As I got to know this community, I became more and more excited about spending time with an observant, egalitarian Conservative community in which halacha (Jewish law) and Torah are taken seriously. For the holiday of Shavuot, I led a tikkun leil Shavuot, (an evening learning program) about how holy means separate in Judaism, a topic of great interest to the community, given their desire to convert to Judaism in a country in which a mere .007% of the population is Jewish. I read the Torah portion in the morning for Shacharit (first service in the morning, taught women how to put on tefillin (phylacteries, and helped lead the congregation's service, being careful not to transform their local traditions learned and developed over the years. I also worked with the son of the couple I stayed with, to prepare him for his bar mitzvah, while simultaneously teaching the congregation a few new melodies to make their services more interesting and musical.

After a week in Guayaquil, I arrived in Quito, the capital of Ecuador. A friend had warned me before I went to Ecuador not to enter the *Sinagoga Sefaradi del Ecuador* in Quito because it was a Messianic community parading as Jewish. However, as soon as I met Yosef Franco, 40, the Moreh (Judaics teacher) of that congregation, it was clear that I had been given inaccurate information. Yosef, who was born in El Salvador, moved to Ecuador several years ago and serves as the community's spiritual leader. After meeting with him twice for my thesis research, each



Samuel Reyes, 18, of Quito helping gather the Four Species for Sukkot

Photo by Daneel Schaechter

time for two hours, and enjoying several Shabbatot with him and his family and in their synagogue, I concluded that the rumors were untrue and that the community is sincerely pursuing Orthodox Judaism according to Sephardic (Spanish) tradition. The community, which numbers some 40 people, is awaiting a formal conversion with an Orthodox Beit Din.

Some congregants have been practicing Orthodox Judaism for years. Currently, the one obstacle standing in the way of conversion is the lack of a mikveh (ritual bath) required for conversions and for ritual purity obligations. Additionally, some members struggle to live according to Orthodox Judaism due to their geographic distance from the synagogue. Those congregants who live nearby can walk to services on the Sabbath, but others, whose apartments are located in neighborhoods far afield, must travel by car or bus to

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reach the synagogue. To deal with this problem, several families are searching for apartments in the Ciudadela Kennedy neighborhood, where the synagogue is located, in order to be able to walk to the synagogue for Sabbath and holiday services.

Until August 2013, the *Sinagoga Sefaradi del Ecuador* in Quito did not have a Torah scroll for their prayer services. Instead, they used a printed, child-sized

and men during prayer) and about 40 white plastic chairs. Saturday morning services are conducted in Hebrew and last for three hours. The chazan (cantor), Avraham Reyes, a middle-aged former Evangelical pastor, who is self-taught, recites every word out-loud in the traditional Sephardic manner. Although many community members have studied Hebrew with Yosef and the chazan and are able to read basic Hebrew, they tend to rely on the transliteration as it is easier for them to participate in services.



*Yosef Franco in his Sukkah
Photo by Daneel Schaechter*

Torah in order to symbolically remove it from the Aron Kodesh (ark). However, they read the Torah portion in Hebrew from the Shem Tov Chumash. This fall the community was able to celebrate Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) with a real Torah. Rabbi Manny Viñas, a Cuban-American Orthodox Rabbi, visited the community and brought them a new Sephardic Torah.

Because of the distances involved, and the desire to avoid traveling twice on Shabbat, families in the community celebrate Friday night services in their own homes. On Saturday morning the congregation prays together. Given my own geographic proximity to the Franco's home, I was able to share Friday night services with the family on several occasions. Congregants also meet on Sunday mornings for weekday services. All services take place on the ground floor level of Yosef Franco's house. It is where he keeps a bima (altar), aron kodesh (ark), a mechitzah (divider to separate women

After services, the congregants convert the prayer room into a dining hall for lunch. Traditionally, each family eats together. I was "adopted" by Avraham and his family, who have been practicing Judaism for the last five years. The men then discuss the weekly Torah portion, while the women clean up. This discussion is followed by a more formal two hour shiur (class) given by Yosef Franco for both men and women. After the shiur, there is Mincha (the afternoon service), Seudat Shlishit (the third meal) and the evening prayer, "Arvit" as the Sephardim call it. During one of my visits, I was asked to lead an Ashkenazi havdalah service* which most community members had never experienced.

Sabbath observances appear to be in keeping with Sephardic tradition, as congregants consider themselves Bnei Anousim, (also known as Crypto-Jews**) descendants of those forced to convert to Christianity during the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition. During all my visits to this community, I felt comfortable and confident that everyone was sincere about their Judaism. I never saw any hint of Messianism. As result, I plan to maintain my

**Havdalah, from the Hebrew word l'havdeel meaning to separate, is a brief service that signifies the separation of the holiness of Shabbat from the rest of the week.*

***Crypto-Jews, conversos, anousim, marranos are all terms used to describe the Spanish and Portuguese Jews who were forced to convert at the time of the Spanish Inquisition.*

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

relationship with the congregation under the auspices of Kulanu, which has pledged to give a small grant to help the community move forward.

The community plans on building a mikveh (ritual bath) in order to follow the laws of ritual purity and, hopefully, qualify for orthodox conversions. Once the mikveh is completed and deemed kosher, they hope to arrange for an Orthodox Beit Din to travel to Quito to perform the conversion ceremony. This could happen as early as the summer of 2014.

My time in Ecuador ended on an especially positive note. I hosted an amazing Heart to Heart* Shabbaton at my U.S. Embassy apartment. I invited many Jewish friends and families, most of whom are in the process of converting, to join me for Shabbat prayers and dinner. The group that joined me was religiously and economically diverse. Among my guests were Sephardic Orthodox Jews, Ashkenazi Jews from Comunidad Judía del Ecuador, the official Conservative synagogue in Quito, and other friends. We had a uniquely beautiful minyan (ten Jews required for communal prayer) on my terrace, watching the sunset behind the Pichincha Mountains. Our dinner, prepared by myself with help from new friends, included the singing of Shabbat songs in Ladino (the ancient tongue of Sephardic Jews) and Hebrew. Yosef Franco gave a short but sweet dvar torah (explanation of the Torah portion of the week) and we blessed the food with the traditional Ladino Bendigamos (grace after meals).

What I was most proud of that evening was its inclusiveness. It was perhaps the first time an interdenominational Jewish group observed the Shabbat together in Quito. For several years now, the Orthodox Sephardic in-the-process-of-conversion Jews and the wealthy established Ashkenazi Conservative Jewish community have had no contact. Sadly, there is very little desire for this situation to change, due to a large gap in social class. This is a problem found in



*Havdalah service at Sinagoga Judia Sefardita del Ecuador
Photo courtesy of Daneel Schaechter*

many countries in Central and South America as well as elsewhere.

In retrospect, the summer was an extraordinary experience. Personally, I was able to make some lasting friendships with Ecuadorian Jews and Bnei Anousim. And I was able to identify the needs and aspirations of several emerging Jewish communities in Ecuador that could use the help Kulanu offers. It is my wish for the new year that Kulanu be able to continue expanding its network of reemerging communities in Latin America that are in dire need of guidance and resources and that we continue to help them with Jewish resources and funds. In the daily amidah, we say: “Sound the great shofar for our freedom, raise a banner to gather our exiles and gather us together from the four corners of the earth. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who gathers in the dispersed of G-D’s people Israel”.

Every day when I recite these words, I cannot help but think about the tremendous work that has been done to help isolated and emerging Jewish communities all across the world -- Ecuador, India, Zimbabwe, Nicaragua -- over the last decade. However, from my summers spent in Latin America, I know organizations like Kulanu have only been able to scratch the surface. For every 10 communities that we have aided, there are 10 more that have not reached out to us. Nonetheless, I view it as my obligation as an American Jew whose religious affiliations and practice are so easy, to seek out and help isolated and underprivileged Jewish communities around the world.

**Heart to Heart is a grassroots movement of Jewish college students sharing Jewish life with their peers. It is based on the values of loving all Jews and caring for others. We believe we are changing the face of Jewish communal life: connecting Jews to meaningful Jewish life, vibrant communities, and to each other – all through peer-based relationships, intimate Jewish experiences and innovative community building.*

Letter from the President

American Jewish community leaders are troubled by “A Portrait of Jewish Americans” as presented in the recently published Pew Research Religion and Public Life Project. The report says that many American Jews are not very involved with Judaism or interested in Jewish education.

In contrast to this disheartening picture, I have the pleasure of receiving nearly daily emails from people in Jewish communities far from the US who are passionately eager to study and practice Judaism. These letter writers are yearning for Jewish books and ritual objects. But they especially crave visits from other Jews, especially teachers, rabbis and cantors who can help them increase their knowledge of Judaism and develop their practice. With few opportunities to study with Jewish religious leaders, many are using the Internet to teach themselves.

Irwin and Elaine Berg of New York City just returned from a month teaching Lemba Jews of Zimbabwe while living in the Harare Lemba Synagogue and Guest House. Though living conditions were sometimes challenging, they were deeply impressed by the students who came to their classes. The students demonstrated a deep commitment to Judaism and a desire to learn Hebrew, Jewish customs, history, etc.

Right before the Bergs left Zimbabwe they were privileged to hear Lemba musician Hamlet Zhou share his newly composed version of Psalm 136 in Shona, the local language. They videotaped the song on their iPhone and brought it home to Kulanu. Please go to Kulanu’s youtube channel and hear it for yourself: tinyurl.com/lembahodu.

At the end of the visit, Modreck Maeresera, a leader of the Harare Lemba community in Zimbabwe, wrote:

Dear Elaine and Irwin

By now I am sure you have arrived back home. I hope you had a safe and comfortable journey. Everybody back here is all right, although we miss you a great deal. Within a month you had become part of our family and we had gotten used to you around the house. Aviv [age 4] has been checking your room almost every hour, somehow he just cannot believe you won’t be back.



*Harriet Bograd, President of Kulanu
Photo by Viviane Topp*

Thanks for being the first people to visit us. In our journey to reintegration you will always occupy a special place as the people who strengthened our belief that we can do it. You will be remembered as the people who made the senselessly indecipherable Hebrew characters make sense. People are enthusiastic about the prospect of being able to read from the untransliterated siddur and eventually from the vowel-less Torah scroll. Thanks to you, we now believe it will happen soon.

Another remote community, this one in Madagascar, is studying by email with Kulanu volunteer Rabbi Jerry Sussman. He recently received this letter:

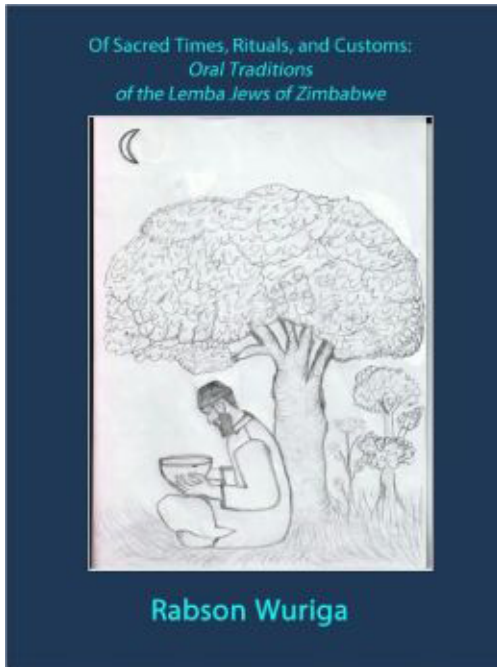
Dear Rabbi Sussman,

We read your answer to our letter to the community members last Yom Rishon (Sunday). Everybody was very pleased on hearing what you wrote. So we

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

Of Sacred Times, Rituals, and Customs: Oral Traditions of the Lemba Jews of Zimbabwe by Dr. Rabson Wuriga

A review by Elaine and Irwin Berg



Dr. Rabson Wuriga, a scholar and religious leader of the Lemba Jewish community of Zimbabwe, spent more than five years interviewing Lemba elders in order to record the oral traditions of his people. His desire is and has been to ensure that the details

surrounding the early history of the Lemba and their religious practices, as recounted throughout the centuries by word of mouth, will be preserved for future generations.

According to Wuriga, the Lemba “story” has been repeated for as many as 20 centuries by the elders who describe the tribe’s journey from Judea to Sena in Yemen and finally to Africa long before the colonization of the continent by West Europeans. He cites an author who believes that the name “Lemba” derives from a town east of the Dead Sea that existed in the 2nd Century BCE. He also notes that the remains of a city by the name of Sena can be found today in Yemen. Dr. Wuriga acknowledges the uncertainty surrounding

the dates of departure from the Holy Land and from Yemen, but, he reports that the elders agree the Lemba left Yemen for more favorable trade opportunities in Southern Africa.

In addition to the oral tradition surrounding Lemba history, there are Lemba practices that identify their origins. These include Sabbath observance, circumcision, kashrut (dietary laws), niddah (laws of family purity) and shechitah (ritual slaughter)*.

One might ask why Lemba oral tradition and Jewish practices did not alert the Jewish world – especially Jewish scholars – to the Jewish origins of the Lemba. If truth be told, few people took this history or practice seriously. Wuriga suggests that one reason might be Lemba secrecy surrounding their religious practice. They were, he said, fearful of outsiders and foreign influences. Another reason could be the uncertainty of dates and times of Lemba migrations. Then again, racism could have played a role. Today, there is interest in the Lemba because of recent DNA testing of the Lemba priestly clan and the identification of the Cohen gene in percentages (52-53%) comparable to Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews around the world who identify as Cohanim.

There has always been pressure on the Lemba to assimilate by marriage and practice into the culture of their African neighbors. Pressure to convert began with the arrival of the Europeans. The Europeans sought to convert all the Africans to Christianity. They did have some success. In addition to those Lemba who converted out of conviction, there were those who converted out of economic necessity or for social and/or educational benefits. The best schools are sponsored by Christian denominations, for example. Another reason was that the Europeans excluded the Lemba from their traditional areas of trade and commerce and forced them to do manual labor on farms or in mines. Lastly, resent-

Dr. Wuriga’s book is one of three ebooks by African Jewish authors that Kulanu published in conjunction with Dr. Carolivia Herron through her company EpicCenter Stories Publications. They are all available in Kindle format from: kulanu.org/books.

*See Winter/Spring, 2012 issue of KulanuNews Lemba in which leader Modreck Maeresera wrote several articles describing these practices.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17



Dr. Wuriga leads Sabbath services in Mapakomhere
Photo by Sandy Leeder

ment against white racism forced the Lemba to join hands with other Africans against their oppressors. All of these pressures caused many in recent generations of Lemba to disregard their historic distinctiveness.

The author compares the pressures on the Lemba to the effects modernity has had on world Jewry where the intermarriage, assimilation and disregard of Jewish law and ritual is widespread. But what continues to amaze all those interested in the Lemba is their survival in spite of their geographical separation from the heart of Israel, and their religious separation from the worldwide Jewish community.

Dr. Wuriga's major concern is the survival of his unique community, which, he believes, is in danger of losing not only its Jewish heritage but its distinctive Lemba tribal affiliation as well. In the last 100 years, with the advent of modern technology, the move to more urban areas from the countryside and assimilation, the customs and beliefs of many people risk homogenization. This is true in Zimbabwe as well.

Wuriga views the Lemba as Jews and calls upon the Jews of the world to recognize them as such. Although he acknowledges that the Lemba follow a pre-Talmudic Judaism, he believes racism is at the heart of their lack of acceptance. In addition, he is against Lemba conversion to Judaism to achieve acceptance as in his opin-

ion the Lemba are already Jews. He hopes acceptance will come as he believes it would encourage those Lemba who have strayed, especially the youth, to return to the faith of their ancestors.

The book is a fascinating read and one that sheds light on the community from the inside. Dr. Wuriga is a scholar and a committed member/leader of the Lemba community.

Elaine and Irwin Berg, long time Kulanu volunteers, live in New York and have traveled to the four corners of the world to visit isolated Jewish communities.

Some Recent Highlights, Continued from page 8

* In March of 2013, a second seder was held in Mapakomhere with board member Sandy Leeder once more in attendance. In a report to the Kulanu board, Sandy wrote: "As important as I was organizationally and Kulanu financially, I was for the most part only an observer at the actual seder... This year there were 142 people at the Seder 70 adults and 72 children, double the number from 2012. The importance of the seder to the Lemba cannot be overstated. This year elders came from many villages to participate."

* A second synagogue in Harare is now a reality. Jack and Sandy rented a house out of their own funds to serve as a synagogue, community center and guest house to jump start the project. Kulanu has since taken over the rental. (A report written by Lemba leader and congregation president Modreck Maeresera begins on page 9.)

* Rosh Hashanah in Harare had 70 attendees, including 7 elders, Yom Kippur services had 55 attendees including 4 elders.

* A recent Shabbat service in Harare had 32 in attendance although there was a competing political rally.

* A Lemba Jewish Religious Practice Committee has been formed and members are interviewing Lemba elders all over Zimbabwe, documenting Lemba religious practices, traditions and prayers.

* A Lemba musician is adapting Kabbalat Shabbat songs into Zimbabwe rhythms.

Jews of Nigeria: An Afro-Judaic Odyssey

by William F.S. Miles

A review by Margo Nash

By some accounts there are 27 million Igbos in Nigeria. Of those, more than 20,000 call themselves Jews. The Jubos, the name coined by African development scholar William F.S. Miles* to describe those [few thousand] Igbos in Nigeria who have [actually] embraced [rabbinic] Judaism, lead observant Jewish lives in one of Africa's largest countries. Religiously, the country is almost equally divided between the Muslim north and the Christian south, with the Jubos found primarily in the southern part of the country. Miles, who visited two synagogues in the capital of Abuja during Hanukah in 2009 and for a bar mitzvah in 2011, gives a moving and affectionate account of his experiences in his new book "Jews of Nigeria: An Afro-Judaic Odyssey (Markus Wiener; 2012, Hardcover, \$68.95; Paperback, \$24.95.

In describing the commitment and Jewish observance of this community, Miles writes: "References to Torah and Jewish ethics are sprinkled in routine conversation ("I don't want to do lashon hara," says one Jubo, invoking the Jewish interdiction against gossip, as the subject of conversation turns to others in the community.) Men don kipot (skull caps) when entering their homes; some wear their tzitzit (ritual fringes) in public. Their services are full, complete, in Hebrew and daily. Their life, planning, aspirations and achievements center around Judaism."

The Igbo, who have often been referred to metaphorically as "the Jews of Nigeria" because of their business acumen, social mobility and education, are mostly Christian. However, in recent decades, thousands have embraced Judaism. Villagers, businessmen, farmers, royal families, lawyers, rich as well poor, have moved away from Christianity for reasons of "doctrine, logic and faith," Miles writes.

Many of them have learned Hebrew, studied Jewish texts and prayers on the Internet, taken Jewish names and communicated with American rabbis. With research, they came to see a close connection between their own ancient rituals --such as circumcision on the eighth day and blowing a ram's horn--and Judaism. They became convinced that they really were remnants of one of the fabled lost tribes.



*Professor Miles with Bar Mitzvah celebrant Hezekiah Ben Habakkuk
Photo Courtesy of Dr. Miles*

Whether the Jubos do descend from Jews -- and there is much discussion and even controversy about it among Western historians and scholars-- is not so important here. Rather, Miles offers endearing portraits of an eloquent people, in a country of religious seekers, who feel they have found true religion and have a very personal and joyous relationship with God.

"The fact that the individuals you will encounter in this book live as Jews -- practice, worship, study, gather and, yes, dispute as such -- is infinitely more important than whether or not they actually descend from some long lost tribe of Israel. They are vastly "more Jewish" than many Western Europeans or North Americans whose DNA may bear traces of Jewish ancestry but whose lived experience, individual sense of identity and religious practice and group identification is anything but," Miles writes.

* Dr. Miles is a professor of political science at Northeastern University in Boston. His article "Among the Igbos of Nigeria During the Festival of Lights" appeared in the Fall, 2011 issue of KulanuNews

Observing their zeal, Miles takes the measure of his own Judaism. In 2011, Miles prepared to go to a bar mitzvah in the Nigerian capital of Abuja. Hezekiah ben Habakkuk, the bar mitzvah boy, needed tefillin (phylactery worn by orthodox Jews during morning prayer) and instructions on how to use them. But the author, a self-confessed “phylacteryphobe,” had to overcome his “longstanding phylactery allergy” to help out young Hezekiah. He took lessons from the men in his synagogue and learned to wrap them appropriately on his arm, hand and around his head. At the bar mitzvah, the author presents the youth with a new pair of tefillin and the same tallit he wore at his own bar mitzvah.

The Jubo learned much of their Judaism with the help of their “Chief Rabbi of Nigeria.” Rabbi Howard Gorin, rabbi emeritus of Congregation Tikvat Israel in Rockville, Maryland, who “pioneered” the first contacts and remains close to the community, has provided religious instruction and materials. That is why Abuja Jubos named their synagogue Tikvat Israel after Rabbi Gorin’s synagogue. But not all rabbis are so accepting. Miles tells the story of one Rabbi who travelled to Nigeria from the United Kingdom but would not set foot in the synagogue because it was not Orthodox.

At its heart “Jews of Nigeria” is an exploration of just who is a Jew? “The question ties all sort of Jews in knots,” says Miles: “Orthodox Jews reject converts from the Conservative and Reform movements. Israeli rabbis are increasingly suspicious of the status of American Jews, even of Orthodox provenance. In such a world, Jubos have a long way to go before receiving widespread recognition as Jews – even though they practice Judaism more consistently, punctiliously, and earnestly than do, say, the president, prime minister, or most ambassadors of the Jewish state itself.”

When Miles asked someone close to the Israeli embassy in Abuja to explain its general lack of interest in the Jubos, he was told that “the last thing [the embassy] needs is for some rabbi to fly over from Israel, convert them and declare that they are Jews.” There are four or five times the number of Igbos in Nigeria as there are Jews in Israel and a rabbinic decision might, it is feared, make them all convert and eligible to settle in Israel under the State’s Law of Return. Obviously, the country could not accommodate such an immigration.

Yet according to Miles, the Jubos have not expressed any interest in moving to Israel. Visiting, yes. But moving? No. Nor do they seek outside approval, “so secure are they in their Jewish faith and identity,” he

Nigerian Jewish Leaders Visit Rhode Island

By Shai Afsai



From left to right: Elder Ovadiah Agbai, Rabbi Moshe Moscovitz, director of Meor at Brown University, and Elder Pinchas Azuka.

Photo credit Shai Afsai

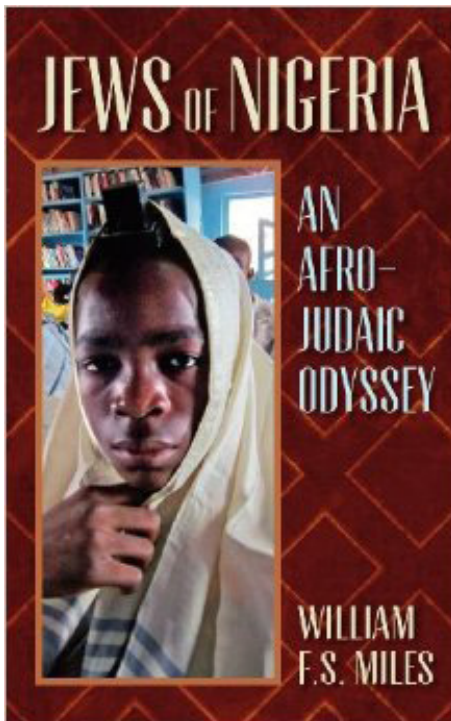
There are some 3,000 to 5,000 members of the Igbo ethnic group practicing Judaism in Nigeria, most of whom identify themselves as members of a lost tribe of Israel. The Igbos who practice Judaism are highly observant and devote a great deal of time to increasing their Jewish knowledge and deepening their religious practice. They have not converted formally to Judaism.

In February of 2013, I traveled to Abuja, Nigeria to meet members of the community. When I realized how isolated the community is from world Jewry, I proposed a reciprocal visit to Rhode Island’s Jewish community. This fall, the Jewish community of Providence hosted Elder Ovadiah Agbai and Elder Pinchas Ogbukaa, of Abuja’s Gihon Synagogue in Nigeria, who came for a twelve-day stay during Sukkot.

The elders’ visit was also spearheaded by Rabbi Barry Dolinger of Providence’s Congregation Beth Sholom, Rabbi Wayne Franklin of Providence’s Temple Emanu-El, and Professor Bill Miles of Northeastern University, who has visited the community twice and written a book about his experiences.

By all accounts the visit was a resounding success. Elder Pinchas noted, “We have seen schools where

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20



writes. They care “remarkably little what the (dominantly white) Jewish world at large thinks about them...”

Nigerian Jew Dr. Lawrence Okah, a civil engineer who changed fields and now has a Ph.D in theology with emphasis in Jewish studies, explains. “Hashem started us to establish ourselves and we are working with Him. From here in Nigeria we can

help Israel. I don’t want to go there and trouble anybody.”

Okah is one of several Jubos who tell their stories in the second half of the book. Dr. Caliben Ikejuku Okonkwa Michael, writes “I always liken my people to that bird that lived for centuries with butterflies and started thinking it is one. But butterfly knows: “No, this is bird!” The best thing is to be ourselves, not assimilate and live with the truth.” Dr. Michael said he spent many years thinking about his Igbo roots before turning to Judaism.

“In 2007 I had a dream. In that dream somebody told me I should go see someone, a certain man who used to renew my vehicle license. I ignored the dream for thirteen days. Then I had the same revelation I should go meet that man where he worships. But I did not know where. So I went to where he works and asked, ‘Where are you worshipping? I would like to go with you...’ It turned out to be the Jewish synagogue in Abuja. “So I said to myself, ‘Okay, this is what is happening. After all my studies into my origins this is where I have been directed.”

The author became close to Sar Habakkuk, Hezekiah’s father, and a founder and leader of the Abuja Jewish community. Dr. Miles, thinking about when he is back home in Massachusetts (where he teaches at North-

students are practicing and studying Hebrew and Judaism alongside their other academic studies. This early Jewish childhood education, which is available here, we must bring back to Abuja.”

For the Rhode Island Jewish community the visit was equally joyous and enlightening. “I was very happy to help the Elders break the isolation they experience in Nigeria, and I was very pleased to join with my rabbinic colleagues in Providence on this fascinating and unique project,” said Rabbi Marc Mandel of Newport’s Touro Synagogue. Rabbi Moshe Moskowitz, director of Meor at Brown University, stated that the Elders “reminded our community that there is not one picture of what a Jew looks like [and] also reminded us of how many resources we have here.”

One of the trip’s highlights for Elder Ovadiah and Elder Pinchas took place at the home of Marvin and Miriam Stark, during their sukkah party. “It was there we saw and experienced for the first time the presence of four rabbis sitting at one table and saw young boys and girls singing with great joy,” said Elder Pinchas. “To see one rabbi is difficult for us. So to see four rabbis at one time, along with people from different synagogues behaving like brothers and sisters – singing, swaying, clapping – we will not forget this.”

One of the recurring themes expressed by Elder Ovadiah and Elder Pinchas during their stay in Rhode Island is the acute need in Nigeria for rabbis to lead those practicing Judaism, as well as for schools where Judaism can be studied from a young age.

Shai Afsai (ggbi @juno.com) is a writer who lives in Providence

eastern University), wistfully predicts, “I shall come to think of Habakkuk every time I wake up on Saturday morning in America and wonder: What time is it in Nigeria? Where in the Shabbat liturgy are the congregants in Habakkuk’s synagogue?” For the Jubos, he says, “put me, as a Jew, to shame; periodically, the thought will even propel me to shul.”



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CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

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Our thanks to all the organizations who hosted Shoshannah Nambi of Uganda during her first U.S. tour! Speaking Tour proceeds benefit Kulanu's work with the Abayudaya Jewish community of Uganda.

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Mitzvah Projects & Fundraising Campaigns – Mazel Tov and Todah Rabah to Kulanu Activists

Max Ingerman raised \$4,145.00 to support the Semei Kakungulu High School which educates and feeds about 350 Jewish, Christian, and Muslim students in the Abayudaya community in Uganda. He celebrated his bar mitzvah at Tamid: the Downtown Synagogue in New York City on October 5, 2013. *Mazel tov*, Max!

President letter, Continued from page 15

thank you so much for raising our hope to move forward into Judaism.

Here are the answers to your questions:

- We keep the Shabbat according to Jews' ways and customs, such as Kabbalat Shabbat (welcoming the Sabbath), Shabbat services, havdalah (service dividing the sacredness of the Sabbath from the rest of the week), which we learned in Siddur books. Honestly, we don't pretend to master what we find in Siddur books, we still have lots of question to ask you about how to deal with them. So your advices will be more than welcome.
- We are keeping the laws of Kosher food. However, we recognize that we mightn't have done them perfectly but be aware that we are eager to practice them in the correct way as possible. As far as I am concerned, I left my job as a Chef in restaurant to learn how to prepare Kosher food in Jewish way. I wish a professional Jewish cook mastering Kosher food could come in my community to teach us in the matter.

And so, in a partial answer to the Pew Report, Kulanu can attest that Judaism and eager practitioners are alive and well around the globe.

Harriet Bograd

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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.

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- Learn about Kulanu self-help business development and women’s empowerment micro-finance projects in remote villages.
- Learn about the ethnic groups, languages, agriculture, economy, as well as flora, birds, and wildlife of Uganda. See the mighty Nile River at its source. Explore ancient Sabinyi Cave. Tour the colorful eastern Ugandan countryside and explore Mt. Elgon National Park.

Best of all, make a personal connection with our friends & family in this remarkable African Jewish community! For more details contact Laura Wetzler: tinyurl.com/laurawetzler