



Mexicali Jews Building an Inclusive Community

By Ron Cohen

Our *Centro Cultural Hebreo Mexicali* is a very unique community in many ways. We not only exist of *Anousim*, but also of Jews throughout the Mexicali, Mexico, area. We pride ourselves as being an inclusive and not exclusive group; amongst us are both Ashkenazim and Sephardim, *Anousim* as well as others seeking their proper truth within Judaism. We cover the gamut from Orthodox to Reform with all stops in between. We have approximately 35 members at this point, with many others waiting until the time we can provide both educational services and a permanent presence here. The good news is that we have excellent lay leadership and with our scant resources try our best to provide access to materials to the best of our ability. The bad news is that we are constantly on the lookout for those required materials in Spanish.

Our community does have a small library with books in both

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Meeting the Jews of Andhra Pradesh

By Karen Primack

After years of emailing, it was thrilling to meet Sadok Yacobi in the flesh. Yacobi is spiritual leader of the Bene Yacob synagogue in Andhra Pradesh, in southeastern India. This Telugu-speaking group, known as Bnei Ephraim by their oral tradition, is separate and apart from the four other groups of Indian Jews Kulanu has been following (the Bene Israel, the Cochini Jews, the Baghdadis, and the Bnei Menashe).

Yacobi has been inviting Kulanu teachers and rabbis to visit for almost a decade, but their village, with the tongue-twisting name of Kothareddypalem, is too isolated for many. We met in February in Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh, where my husband Aron and I were traveling.

The Bene Yacob synagogue was founded only 15 years ago, but this community of India's so-called "untouchable" caste may have ancient Jewish roots. Sadok and his brother Shmuel grew up Christian but they remember their father and grandmother telling them, when they were young, that they were Jews. Their father had fought with

New Delhi Shul Thriving at Age 50 Despite Dwindling Numbers

By Karen Primack

New Delhi's Judah Hyam Synagogue, which recently celebrated its 50th anniversary, was designed by the well-known Bene Israel architect Joshua M. Benjamin, who also designed the Parliament House annex. Its membership at one time peaked at 250-300, but now only 10 Indian Jewish families remain in Delhi.

Despite the dwindling numbers, spiritual leader Ezekiel Malekar says the synagogue survives because "we must keep the light of Judaism burning in this part of the world." Malekar is fond of reminding his audiences that New Delhi, as the capital of the world's largest democracy, cannot be without a Jewish flag flying.

Indeed, the Sabbath eve services are always augmented by diplomats, Jewish resident expatriots and visitors, and visiting Indian Jews from other parts of the sprawling country. (There are about 5000 Jews in India, most in the Mumbai area.)

From Indian independence in 1947 until 1956, there was no synagogue in the capital city. After its construction in 1956, the shul served as the unofficial Israeli Embassy – until 1993, when India and Israel established diplomatic relations and an official embassy was set up. Now the synagogue serves the Israel Embassy community, and the Embassy continues to hold some of its functions there. A highlight of its history is the 1995 surprise visit by Israeli foreign minister Shimon

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From left: Yacob and Miriam Yacobi, Yehoshua Korchi, Sarah, Keziya, and Sadok Yacobi

the Indian Army during WWII, receiving a rare opportunity (for an "untouchable") to learn English and become a teacher. After their father died, Shmuel became a Christian preacher, which enabled him to study the Old Testament and to travel to Jerusalem. There, in the early 1980s, he had a spiritual awakening and decided to leave Christi-

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KULANU ("ALL OF US") is a tax-exempt organization of Jews of varied backgrounds and practices dedicated to finding lost and dispersed remnants of the Jewish people and assisting those who wish to (re)join the Jewish community. Kulanu is undertaking a variety of activities worldwide on behalf of these dispersed groups, including research, contacts, education, conversion when requested, and relocation to Israel if desired. This newsletter is published quarterly by Kulanu, 11603 Gilsan St., Silver Spring, MD 20902.

INSIDE KULANU

A New Kulanu Boutique for Mitzvah-Minded Shoppers

We are very excited to announce the launch of Kulanu Boutique's new website. www.kulanuboutique.com has a whole new face. We've revamped the site to offer easier access and an easier-to-use shopping cart. We also will be able to accept payment via Visa and Master Card as well as Paypal.

The new website features an updated catalog of all of our products and makes it possible for you to indicate color preferences when purchasing kippot from the Abayudaya of Uganda and challah covers from the Jews of Ghana. As always, the proceeds from the sales of crafts and music items benefit the communities that made them. Be sure to check out the new site at www.kulanuboutique.com.

Wise, mitzvah-minded shoppers have used our boutique for unique gifts for weddings, engagements, and bar/bat mitzvahs, as well as hostess or housewarming gifts. Some young supporters have bought Abayudaya CDs to give to friends as "party favors" at a bar mitzvah. One synagogue bought challah covers for all its tables at community Shabbat dinners. Rabbis and bar mitzvah students are proudly wearing brightly colored Kente Cloth tallitot.

Thanking Chaya Weinstein

Chaya Weinstein, who has served as Kulanu's volunteer coordinator for several years, has stepped down to have more time for other pursuits, including her demanding work as an occupational therapist and her professional photography work (see www.joyofcolor.com). She will continue to work with Kulanu on special projects.

Since 2003, when she returned from nine months of volunteer service with the Abayudaya community in Uganda, Weinstein has spent countless hours speaking with volunteers interested in traveling to overseas communities. To facilitate volunteering in Uganda, she wrote the 58-page manual, *Pearls of Wisdom: A Guide for Volunteers with the Abayudaya Community*.

During her first trip, she helped found the Shabbat Women's Study Group, which still continues today, and raises funds for their ongoing activities.

Weinstein returned to Uganda for four months in the spring of 2005. Many of the photographs she took then and in 2003 were included in the Abayudaya slide show that accompanied Aaron Kintu Moses on his tour of the U.S. in the fall of 2006. The slide show can be seen on the Kulanu web site (<http://kulanu.org/abayudaya/index.html>).

During her 2005 visit, she worked with the young people on a digital photo program. She also helped create a vocational guidance program for the high school.

Kulanu will miss Chay Weinstein's leadership of the volunteer program, but we wish her all the best with her endeavors. We thank her for all of her help these past years.



Chaya Weinstein



Susan Schorr



Sarah Stewart

Laura Wetzler Lectures

Laura Wetzler, Kulanu's Coordinator for Uganda, was an honored guest speaker on March 2 at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management Program in Sustainable Development at Brandeis University. She presented a multi-media "no holds barred" teaching seminar for a large international gathering of graduate students interested in Kulanu's unique grassroots work with underserved communities around the world.

The seminar covered over 20 Abayudaya-Kulanu projects in Uganda, prompting lively discussions on the peace-building capacity of multi-faith schools and business projects, the importance of women's empowerment in international development, and the role of a US nongovernmental organization, such as Kulanu, in helping rural African communities gain access to government and international assistance.

Participants, many of whom had worked as officials in their own governments or for other international NGOs, were most interested in Abayudaya and Kulanu's successful cross-cultural facilitation of complex water, electricity, sanitation, education, micro-finance, eco-tourism, child hunger and farmer business development projects. The participants asked indepth questions about Wetzler's and JJ Keki's process in creating and marketing the Mirembe Peace Kawomera Interfaith Coffee Project, and Kulanu's "train the trainer" teenage public health educator teaching model, created by Dr. Aron Primack.

New Faces at Kulanu

It is an exciting time for us here at Kulanu. Our work and our community seem to be expanding exponentially. To support the steady growth and meet new challenges, we are delighted to introduce you to our part-time office staff, Susan Schorr and Sarah Stewart.

Schorr joined Kulanu in October 2005, helping Kulanu's treasurer Harriet Bograd with database and recordkeeping functions. Now that Sarah has taken over those responsibilities, she will be focusing on supporting speakers' tours, managing Kulanu Boutique, public relations, and other tasks. Schorr's background includes more than 20 years of experience in public relations and nonprofit management. In addition to her work with Kulanu, she leads a Torah study group and Oral History project for West End Synagogue in NYC, and, as a crafts-person, makes tallitot, kippot and wearable art.

She also is a gifted liturgist and has created ceremonies for personal occasions (*auf rufs*, birthdays and anniversaries, completion of chemotherapy) and congregational celebrations (building, sanctuary and Torah scroll dedications; rabbinic installations), and is the editor of a siddur for a house of mourning.

Stewart is the newest member of our team, having joined Kulanu this past February. She graduated two years ago from the University of Michigan and lived for one year in Hawaii before moving to New York in January. In addition to Kulanu, she works part-time as Special Events Coordinator for Macaulay Honors College at the City University of New York. For Kulanu, Stewart is responsible for recording and acknowledging donations, and maintaining our database and the Kulanu Boutique website, as well as other administrative functions.

Lots of Exciting News from Uganda

By Laura Wetzler

As Kulanu's Coordinator for Uganda, I would like to thank the American Jewish World Service for an airfare grant in support of my recent work in Uganda. This AJWS assistance helps us continue our 10-year Kulanu-Abayudaya partnership, working hand-in-hand with leaders of the Jewish Community of Uganda on over 25 different projects. As you know, Kulanu (www.kulanu.org) is a small, international grassroots organization of direct-action volunteers, and we think of AJWS as our "big sister." Other organizations pay lip service to organizational collaboration for a common good but AJWS has always been true to this ideal. I am proud to be associated with AJWS and appreciate their help.

Abayudaya leaders and I worked on many exciting Kulanu-funded projects over a 5-week period this winter. Together, we were able to make some plans for the future, monitor and evaluate existing programs, and do some substantive networking and training. *Kol Hakavod* to Rabbi Gershom Sizomu, Israel Siriri, Aaron Kintu Moses, Naume Sabano, JJ Keki, Seth Jonaday, Samson Wamani, Rebecca Nantabo, and Jacobo Mwasuko.

I invite you all to come visit these projects on our "**2008 Jewish Life in Uganda Mitzvah Tour & Safari**" and congratulate Abayudaya leaders personally on their accomplishments. Here is a sample of the projects Abayudaya leaders and I worked on this winter.

With your generous help, Abayudaya and Kulanu. . .

- Joyously commissioned the **first well/running water system** in the Abayudaya community, designed and built under the direction of Abayudaya Chairman Israel Siriri, construction engineer, at the primary school.
 - Planned construction at the primary school of **6 new latrines** and the **first working shower Abayudaya children have ever enjoyed** (already completed!) thanks to a donation from the Otto & Marianne Wolman Foundation.
 - Began construction on **two brand new classrooms** for the primary school.
 - Planned "**Train the Trainer**" **public health education** in the schools and villages with Abayudaya medical officer Samson Wamani, thanks to Barbara Lubran and the Estelle Friedman Gervis Family Foundation. In this innovative Kulanu program, designed by Dr. Aron Primack, high school students are trained and supervised by a doctor to teach disease prevention and proper sanitation in rural villages through music and drama.
 - Assessed the desperate need for a sanitary kitchen at each school for our child hunger breakfast project, currently feeding 400 African students each day with a grant from the Estelle Friedman Gervis Family Foundation.
 - Planned for the new Semei Kakungulu **High School Lunch Program**, under the direction of hunger project supervisor and Abayudaya Women's Association Chairperson Naume Sabano. Thanks to Dora Block for her donation and to Marcy Delbick and Rabbi Gershom for spearheading this project. Kids who are hungry cannot learn. Funds are needed to feed SK High School children more than one meal a day.
 - Developed and facilitated new **Adult Literacy Projects** in 4 villages with primary school headmaster Aaron Kintu Moses and volunteer Hedy Cohen, thanks to a grant from Woodlands Temple, Roberta Roos, and Jeanne Bodin.
 - Celebrated the Howard & Judith Mayer **Micro-finance Small Business Loan Program** pilot project farmer successes in remote Abayudaya villages of Namatumba and Nasenyi. For the first time, farmers formerly growing on a subsistence level can create a "farm business" through these long-term, low-interest loans, acquiring the ability to store their produce for a few months until they can get a much higher price for them. Loan return rate: 98%!
 - Led a lively **Leadership Training Workshop** with Abayudaya members on sustainable development.
 - Met with Abayudaya Women's Association "**Mama in the Schools**" para-professional counselor Rebecca Nantabo. Headmaster Seth Jonaday proudly reports a marked improvement in rural girls' school attendance and a lowered incidence of teenage pregnancy thanks to this counseling program initiated by Abayudaya women, funded by the Estelle Friedman Gervis Family Foundation. Facilitated additional training for Mrs. Nantabo to build on her excellent work with the students.
 - Created a new cooperative, the **Abayudaya Farmer's Association**, bringing together Abayudaya farmers from 4 villages to share resources and fight rural poverty.
 - Established contacts and secured training for a new export business in **solar dried fruit** on an exciting three-day farmers' field trip to international fruit export businesses in Kampala. Toured a high-production poultry farm. We attended a farm technology training session on cost-appropriate rural technologies. We were able to arrange an on-site **drip irrigation training** for the community with an Israeli-trained, Ugandan engineer, through a Kulanu grant from Fran and Bernie Alpert. In addition, working with sister NGOs The Full Belly Project and Nourish International, Kulanu introduced Abayudaya farmers, Ugandan engineers and agricultural officials to a new **hand-pumped peanut sheller** that can dehusk at a rate of 125 lbs per hour (compare with the current finger-shelled rate of 2 lbs per hour). Peanuts are a vital high protein crop in Africa and the husks can be sold as **biofuel**.
 - Explored US international aid resources and **met with US officials**.
 - Met with officials at the **Ugandan Ministry of Tourism**.
 - Planned **Abayudaya Women's Association trainings and conferences** for the coming year.
 - **Reviewed budgets and expenditures, assessed needs and consulted** with headmasters Aaron Kintu Moses and Seth Jonaday on the upcoming year at the Kulanu-supported Abayudaya primary school and SK high school, serving Jewish, Christian and Muslim students studying together in peace.
 - Successfully led the "**Jewish Life in Uganda Mitzvah Tour & Safari**," going into our 5th year, teaching Americans about the beauty of Africa and Abayudaya Jewish culture, and providing training and employment for community members. *When are you coming with us?* (See page 14 for information about the next tour.)
 - Held business meetings on the interfaith "**Delicious Peace**" **Mirembe Kawomera coffee project**, which I created and developed with Abayudaya farmer JJ Keki. Thanks to Kulanu supporters and Thanksgiving Coffee Company, over 500 African farmers are guaranteed the highest fair trade price for their certified organic coffee, and earn a one-dollar premium per bag for coffee co-op development. We are proud that this Kulanu interfaith peace project, bringing together Jewish, Muslim and Christian coffee farmers, has been covered by CNN, BBC and other international news outlets and that the project is soon to be the subject of a documentary film and music CD. Our goal is to have this coffee served on an on-going basis in every synagogue, mosque and church in the US. Please help. Pass the word to your friends, reorder and help keep the peace delicious. Order by calling (800) 648 6491 or order on line www.thanksgivingcoffee.com
- We wish to thank all the synagogues, colleges and individuals in 18 US cities who sponsored an event with primary school Headmaster Aaron Kintu Moses on his Kulanu-Abayudaya Fundraising Tour in the Fall of 2006. It was Aaron's first visit to the US and he had a fantastic time meeting and studying with you. **If you would like to be part of next year's Abayudaya-Kulanu fundraising tour, scheduled for October 8-November 7, 2007, please contact Susan Schorr srschorr@aol.com as soon as possible.**

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KULANU BRIEFS

Web News

Rabbi Stuart Federow of Congregation Shaar Hashalom in Houston, Texas, has had an excellent website contrasting Judaism with Christianity for a while at <http://WhatJewsBelieve.org>. It has now been translated into Spanish, and is up and running at <http://CreenciaJudia.org>. It should be a treasured resource for *Anousim* contemplating a return to Judaism, among others.

A new listserv at www.EmpoweringRuth.org has been launched by the Jewish Outreach Institute to provide recent women converts to Judaism "a safe, open environment for sharing feelings."

Speakers Spread the Word

On May 8 at the Manhattan JCC, **Michael Freund**, founder of Shavei Israel, discussed his work with the Bnei Menashe of India; the Subbotnik Jews of Russia; the Marranos of Spain, Portugal and South America; the Hidden Jews of Poland; and the descendants of the Jewish community of Kaifeng, China.

Laura Wetzler and **Janiece Thompson** gave a joint concert, "Jewels of the Diaspora," featuring songs of struggle, survival, freedom and peace from diverse African-American, African and Jewish sources, sung in English, Hebrew, Ladino (Judeo-Spanish), Yiddish, Luganda (Uganda) and Amharic (Ethiopia). The event was held April 28 at Bnai Keshet in Montclair, NJ.

Dr. Shmuel Refael, director of the center for Ladino Studies at Bar Ilan University, presented "Sephardic Memories of the Holocaust," a lecture and selected readings, on April 20 at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. The event featured selections from Refael's play, *Golgatha*, with Israeli actor **Victor Attar**, and a panel discussion about Greek Jews in the Holocaust. The entire play was performed in English and Hebrew on April 21 and 24 at the JCC of Greater Washington.

Jairo Fridlin, Brazilian editor and publisher, spoke at book launches in Lisbon and Porto, Portugal, on March 27 and 28 of the Hebrew Bible in Portuguese.

Salvo Asher Parrucca of Palermo, Sicily, and **Rabbi Barbara Aiello** of Calabria, Italy, discussed "The Oldest Jewish Group in the Diaspora: The *Anousim* of Southern Italy" at the Manhattan JCC on March 27.

Daniel Lis spoke on "The Nigerian Igbo: Israel's Lost Tribe or Illegal Workers in the Jewish State?" on March 20 at Tel Aviv University. He was presented by the S. Daniel Abraham Center for International and Regional Studies.

Rabbi Jules and Navah Harlow discussed their experiences teaching and learning with committed *Bnai Anousim* of Lisbon at the Manhattan JCC on March 14. (See a comment about this event by Irwin Berg on p. 6.)

Jennifer Abadi, author of, *A Fistful of Lentils: Syrian-Jewish Recipes from Grandma Fritzie's Kitchen*, spoke at the Manhattan JCC on March 14 about Passover rituals and recipes of the Syrian Jews.

JJ Keki spoke and sang on February 22 at an Interfaith Evening of Ugandan Music and Movies at B'nai Keshet in Montclair, NJ. The event was a benefit for JEMGLO's documentary-in-production (see www.jemglo.org). Film makers **Curt Fissel** and **Ellen Friedland** also spoke, and presented footage from the film, entitled *Delicious Peace Grows In Ugandan Coffee Beans*. The documentary will feature the Peace Kawomera Co-op, which interweaves through collective labor the religious and cultural divides among Jewish, Muslim, and Christian farmers. A coffee distributor rewards those efforts with fair wages for the 570 growers, whose energies go appreciated and respected. (The film's trailer can be viewed at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6rw4QcFtWio>.)

Historian **Natalie Zemon Davis**, author of *The Return of Martin*

Guerre, spoke about the contributions of free black Jews to the former South American Dutch colony of Suriname at the University of Arizona on February 7.

Yossi Vassa, an Ethiopian-Israeli comedian and actor, performed "It Sounds Better in Amharic," an account of his 700-kilometer walk from Ethiopia to the Sudan and his flight to Israel, at the JCC of Greater Washington on January 23.

Travel Opportunities

Princeton Journeys is offering "**Jewish Settlements in Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia**" from August 15 to 31, 2007, with Rabbi Julie Roth of Princeton Hillel and Prof. Dan Rubenstein, chair of the Dept. of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology and director of the Program in African Studies. The trip combines wildlife conservancy with visits to Jewish leaders in Nairobi, Mbale, and Addis Ababa. While Princeton Journeys programs are designed primarily for alumni of Princeton University, enrollment is open to "any enthusiastic travelers seeking an educational travel experience." The cost is \$9,995 per person, double occupancy, not including airfare. Contact journeys@princeton.edu or call (609) 258-8686.

When in Portugal, don't forget that Manuel Lopes Azeveda offers **Jewish Heritage Walking Tours in Lisbon and in Porto**. See www.ladina.blogspot.com for details.

Laura Wetzler, Kulanu's Uganda Coordinator, announces the fifth annual "**Jewish Life in Uganda Mitzvah Tour & Wildlife Safari**," to be held December 31, 2007 through January 14, 2008. Led by Wetzler with Abayudaya and experienced safari guides, the tour visits the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda and the many Kulanu projects ongoing in the community as well as national park and riverboat safari adventures. It features the Abayudaya music and dance festival, a visit to the famous coffee project, colorful markets, and two Shabbats in village synagogues. Cost is \$2750 per person, excluding airfare. Contact tours@shoebillsafaris.com or laura@laurawetzler.com.

A Hindu-Jewish Summit

New Delhi, India, hosted in February a two-day dialog between Hindu and Jewish religious leaders. Organized by the World Council for Religious Leadership and the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, its purpose was to promote understanding, tolerance, peace, and conflict resolution through religion. Topics of discussion included the relevance of tradition in everyday life, education, and similarities and differences between Judaism and Hinduism.

Kehila Kedosha Janina Celebrates 80 Years

A special Shabbat service is set for June 2 to celebrate the 80th anniversary of Kehila Kedosha Janina, with festivities extending throughout the weekend. The Greek Romaniote congregation is located on the Lower East Side of New York City.

Condolences

Joseph David Zeller, father of Kulanu founder/president Jack Zeller, died in February after a long illness at the age of 97.

Beatrice (Betty) Moses died in New Delhi in March. Born in Karachi, she grew up in Bombay, and made aliya with her husband, Nissim Moses, in 1966. At the time of her death, the couple was living in New Delhi, active in the Bene Israel community.

Refuah Shleyimah

We wish for a speedy and complete recovery for **Miriam Young**.

BRIEFS

Todah Rabah!

Thank you to **Rabbi Justin David** and **Rabbi Alan & Mrs. Jan Katz** for their fundraising work and for donating their time teaching Jewish Studies in the Abayudaya community this January.

We are extremely grateful for these generous grants: \$16,500 from **The Forest Foundation**, \$14,045 from "Anonymous," \$13,200 from the **Harry & Jeanette Weinberg Foundation**, \$4,500 from the **Madav IX Foundation**, and \$4,500 from the **Efron Family**.

And to these high-rolling donors: **Rockdale Temple** (\$2924), **Harriet Bograd & Kenneth Klein** (\$2500), **Estelle Friedman Gervis Charitable Foundation** (\$1800), **Ronnie Williams & Suzanne Arnpolin** (\$1500), and **Tenet Healthcare Foundation** (\$1464). *We would like to point out that this year's gift of \$1500 from Ronnie Williams and Suzanne Arnpolin is the fourth of a 10-year commitment to help fund a science teacher for Semei Kakungulu High School in Uganda. It was given in memory of Victor Arnpolin and Isabel Williams, and in honor of Judith Arnpolin and Harry Williams, "who instilled in us the value of education, and are responsible for much of the success our lives have seen."*

And to these generous members of the \$1000 Club: **Marvin Wolf, Gerald Slavet, Peggy & Mark Zilbermann, Dr. Jules & Josephine Harris, Lauri Donahue & Rabbi Barry Leff**, and the **Karsten Family Foundation**.

And to these generous donors of \$500-\$750: **Morris Feder, Bnai Keshet, Bernard & Frances Alpert, Smith College Hillel, Louis Blumengarten, Debbie & Mark Glotter, Cape Cod Synagogue, and Jane & Harvey Susswein**.

And to these wonderful donors of \$108-\$360: **Congregation Shomrei Torah, David Holtz & Diane Glatt, Lenore & Morris Levin, Karen & Barry Spergel, Martha Kahn & Simeon M. Kriesberg, Hope & Matthew Feldman, YM-YWHA of North Jersey, Alan Bowser & Sarah Matthews, Gary & Elisabeth Schonfeld, Howard Rosenbloom, Terrence D. Kalley, Shomrei Torah Synagogue, Marcia & Robert Kaplan, Marta Lev, Marshall & Sabina Primack, Belinda & Howard Berman, Rabbi Bob Sacks, Diana Blum & Bill Scott, Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, Eric M. Weiss, Francine Levy, Ira & Marilyn Polon, Judith Rosenthal, Jewish Reconstructionist Congregation, Ron Guritzky, Steve & Aviva & Shoshan Waldstein, Rabbi Scott L. Glass, Elliot & Lori Yadin, Fair Lawn Jewish Center Men's Progress Club, Eddie and Rachel Eitches, and Jim Michaelson**.

And to our great \$100 Club: **Cary W Goldstein, Michael Cook, Nancy B. Wolfermann Honig, Jordan & Sarah Hymowitz, Mr. & Mrs. Michael Gold, Rabbi Peter Tarlow, Samuel Amster, Laz & Ellen Schneider, Harold Raiklen, Daniel Y. Sachs, Mr. & Mrs. Frank Bachrach, Barbara Birshtein, Harold Goldberg & Alisa, Israel Goldberg, Blu & Rabbi Yitzhak Greenberg, Michael Risman, Judge Edward Avadenka, Carol & Dexter Hines, Marilyn & Frank Seiden, Audrey Asher, Bernard & Rena Shapiro, Bettina and Stephen Winter, Sara Krulwich, Janet & Sidney Quint, Marlene & Samuel Halperin, Jonina Duker, Gene & Esther Herman, R.G.S. Silten, Rabbi P. Michael & Israela Meyerstein, Jeff & Sue Chanin, Laura L. & Arthur S. Brecher, Theodore C. Kram, Daniel & Cindy Kassman Paisner, Michael & Mary Baron, Lorna Penelope Hopf, and Julius & Barbara Shair**.

New Delhi Shul (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)
Peres.

Malekar, 62, grew up in Pune, India, where he studied Economics and earned a degree in Law. He worked for the Ministry of Health for 25 years, transferring from Pune to Hyderabad and then to Delhi. Then he spent a decade with the National Human Rights Commission. His current work with the National Commission on Religious and Linguistic Minorities involves assisting the socially, economically, and educationally backward and downtrodden in claiming their legal rights. He notes that many so-called "Untouchables" converted to Christianity to escape Hinduism's caste system, but they are still experiencing discrimination in that they are not allowed to pray together with upper-class Christians or to be buried in the same cemetery.

As the spiritual leader, Malekar welcomes about 10,000 visitors to the synagogue each year. Outside the synagogue, he has frequent opportunities to represent Jews and Judaism. He was invited to blow the shofar on the president's birthday. He was present, wearing his tallit, at the cremations of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. (He once heard Indira Gandhi recite Psalm 23 in Hebrew!) He attends memorial prayers for Nehru. He was asked to represent Judaism in conferences when the government was developing a uniform civil code. He says Congress Party president Sonia Gandhi greets him personally, recognizing him from his appearances at memorials and interfaith gatherings.

Malekar figures he has attended 5,000 conferences representing Judaism over the past 30 years, speaking about various aspects of the religion. He has contributed over 100 articles in the major newspapers about Judaism. Although he is not following the majority of the Bene Israel in making aliya, he has been to Israel 4 times. He took special courses at Kibbutz Shefayim to learn about Torah – and how to protect synagogues from terrorism.

Malekar presided over the synagogue's Golden Jubilee celebration on January 23. He cited the synagogue's Shabbat services, Hebrew classes, interfaith meetings, and library. He said that the congregation began recognizing women in the minyan last year, declaring, "If I want Judaism to survive in India, I must shed all the religious beliefs which are not practical in today's world." Indeed, the next spiritual leader may well be Malekar's daughter, Shulamith.

Certificates and gifts were distributed to major figures in the com-
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Portrait of a Congregant: Nissim Moses

Nissim Moses is a large presence, tall and avuncular. Fluent in Hindi, Hebrew, English and Marathi, he also speaks a little German and French. Maps of Israeli cities hang on the walls of his small office in New Delhi, and a lot of high-tech equipment sits on its desks and tables.

A Bombay-born citizen of Israel, Moses moved temporarily to New Delhi in 1993. In the past 14 years, he has been a fixture at Delhi's Judah Hyam Synagogue. He participates regularly in the services, gives talks about the Bene Israel Jews of India to outsiders, hosts holiday celebrations in his home, and has donated generously to make shul renovations, including a new water system, air conditioning, carpeting, and furnishings. He has done all of these things with the support and help of his wife Betty, who died suddenly in March.

Moses was born in 1942 and lived in Bombay until the age of 25.

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A Rebirth in Portugal

By Irwin M. Berg

About 18 months ago, the Jerusalem office of Masorti Olami/World Council of Conservative Judaism asked Rabbi Jules Harlow and his wife Navah to go to Lisbon. There had been a plea from a group of Lisbon residents to send a rabbi to them to instruct them in the Jewish religion and its customs and ceremonies. They were, they said, *Bnai Anousim*, descendants of Jews who in 1496 were forcibly baptized by order of Manuel I, the King of Portugal, and prevented from leaving Portugal after their “conversion.”

The *Bnai Anousim* described themselves as belonging to families who, through the long 500-year night of paying lip-service to the Catholicism, remained faithful in their hearts to the Jewish religion. Now they wished to declare themselves Jews and to reunite with their religious compatriots. With some apprehension as to what they might encounter, Rabbi Jules and Navah Harlow proceeded to Lisbon. What they found has preoccupied their energies for the ensuing 18 months and has uplifted their own spirituality. They recounted their experience at a recent, well-attended meeting of the Manhattan JCC. On their first trip to Lisbon, they met 15 people, most of them in their twenties and thirties, at a Friday night *Kabbalat Shabbat* service in Ohel Yaakov, one of Lisbon’s two synagogues. Ohel Yaakov was established by Polish Jews in the 1920s in the second floor of an apartment building that was falling into disrepair. In time the Polish Jewish community dwindled and the few remaining families welcomed the *Bnai Anousim* to their space. Last Hanukkah the *Bnai Anousim*, led by Harlows, dedicated the synagogue in a new location.

The only other synagogue in Lisbon is Shaare Tikvah, a Sephardic synagogue established by Moroccan and other North African Jews. Unfortunately, Shaare Tikvah did not welcome the *Bnai Anousim* into their synagogue, which should naturally have been their home. (My own research has indicated that there may be an historical reason for this rejection. In 1492, when Spain expelled half of its Jewish population, those who left to avoid converting to Catholicism – especially those who fled to Morocco where they suffered greatly – had great disdain for those who, in their opinion, took the easy way out by staying in Spain and converting.)

Rabbi Jules and Navah found that one of the *Bnai Anousim*, a linguist, had taught the congregation to read Hebrew, so that they are

familiar with the Hebrew of the Siddur. Also, Rabbi Harlow made a tape of the melodies for Kiddush, havdalah, and major parts of the Shabbat service. They made copies and distributed them, so some members of the group now lead services and chant Kiddush, havdalah, etc. When Harlow attempted to teach them the tunes and the Torah and *haftorah* chants of the Sephardim, the *Bnai Anousim* insisted on learning instead the tunes and chants of the Askenazim because “the Polish Jews took us in.”

The Harlows stayed for a week. During the week, they held classes from 7 to 10 p.m. At the end of the week the *Bnai Anousim* begged them to return and not to abandon them. They declared that they had always been Jews, but now they wish to be reunited with their co-religionists even if they must accept conversion to Judaism. They recited family traditions to show that they had never abandoned Judaism: two sets of silverware; candles lit on Friday nights; no shellfish or pork; and cleaning rooms by sweeping dirt to the middle rather than out the door – a custom of Spanish Jews when their homes had mezuzot on doors which *Bnai Anousim* continued to follow even though their doors no longer had mezuzot.

The Harlows have returned to Lisbon many times since their first journey 18 months ago. During each of their visits, they followed the same teaching schedule. To date, seven members of the congregation have formally converted to Judaism by a Massorti Beit Din in London. Each of the prospective converts had to fulfill the ritual requirements of immersion in a mikveh, and each of the men, who had been circumcised surgically, completed the ritual requirements of *brit milah* by undergoing *hatafat dam brit* (in which a drop of blood is drawn). This was in addition to their satisfying the *beit din* with their knowledge of Jewish texts and traditions, and their commitment to lead Jewish lives, including their obligation to fulfill *mitzvot*. One couple had been married civilly in Lisbon three years ago. At the conclusion of the formal conversion in London, they were married under a chuppah according to Jewish Law with Rabbi Harlow officiating.

One member summed up her feelings as follows: “We have always felt alone. Now we know that we are no longer alone.” For the Harlows, it was a humbling privilege to assist in their Jewish “Rebirth” and to experience the intensity of their emotion.

BIDDING FAREWELL TO RABBI SALAS

By Manuel Lopes Azevedo

It is six in the morning and I am at the Porto airport, bleary-eyed, waiting for Rabbi Elisha Salas, who is on his way back to Israel. He has been in Portugal on business overseeing kosher olive oil production, which he developed while he was the rabbi of the Marranos (his words) for more than three years. He wants to build a Portuguese kashrut organization to promote Portuguese products in the Jewish world.

A former accountant from Chile, Salas developed an extraordinary relationship with Portuguese small businesspeople during his stay in Portugal. He says they are all Marranos and acknowledge their heritage. They want to work in the Jewish world. However, they and other Marranos are fearful of assuming their identity. It’s in the genes, he says.

During his stay in Portugal he ministered to the historic *Anous* community in Belmonte and became the first rabbi of the Kadoorie Mekor Haim synagogue in Porto, built by captain Barros Basto in the 1930s as hundreds of synagogues were being destroyed in Europe. In Portu-

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BOOK COMMENT

Lisboa 1506, O Massacre Dos Judeus (*Lisbon, 1506, The Massacre of the Jews*)

By Susana Bastos Mateus and Paulo Mendes Pinto,
Alêtheia Publishers, Lisbon (2007)

Reviewed by Manuel Lopes Azevedo
(From www.ladina.blogspot.com)

This is the first nonfiction book in Portuguese about the Lisbon massacre of 4,000 Marranos (*Anousim*) during three days in April 1506 (Nisan, 28, 29, 30, 5266). The killing of innocent men, women, and children, Jews who had been forcibly baptized by King Manuel in 1497 (described by the king and Church as New Christians) was included in Samuel Usque's 1553 canonical *Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*, which was written in Portuguese and published at Ferrara with the support of Dona Gracia Mendes Nassi. Apart from some reference in Alexandre Herculano's classic *Origins and Establishment of the Inquisition* in the second half of the 19th century, there has been virtually nothing written by Portuguese authors on the subject. This dark, bloody stain in the history of Portugal and the Catholic Church has been concealed by the collective amnesia suppressing Portuguese Jewish history. However, that is slowly changing.

This well organized, small book by two instructors at the Alberto Beneviste Centre for Sephardic Studies at the New University of Lis-

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Sicilian Anous in America

By Rabbi Barbara Aiello

"*To sono in paradiso!*" (I am in heaven!) That's what Salvo Asher Parrucca had to say as he traveled from Palermo, Sicily, to Washington, DC, and then on to New York City. Thanks to the efforts of many, Parrucca came to the United States to study in an intensive English language program, to speak about the challenges facing the *Anousim* in Italy, and to visit the Academy of Jewish Religion in Riverdale, NY, where he hopes to study for the rabbinate.

Parrucca's adventure began with hospitality's open arms in the home of Kulanu supporter Barbara Gervis Lubran, who donated his transportation and English study after meeting him in Sicily. During his three weeks in the Washington area, Parrucca had the opportunity not only to study English, but also to speak at a special Kulanu gathering hosted by Karen and Aron Primack. He shared the joys of Shabbat at several Washington area synagogues, experiencing both Reconstructionist and Conservative approaches to worship services. Because he hopes to become a rabbi, he was especially interested in learning more about streams of Judaism not found here in Italy.

"We are not *numerosi*," says Parrucca when he speaks about our small Progressive (Reform) congregation in the deep south of Italy (Sicily and Calabria—the "foot of the boot"). Indeed, our tiny synagogue, Ner Tamid del Sud (The Eternal Light of the South), boasts a membership of only 40, many of whom travel six to seven hours by train to gather for Shabbat and festival services. During his presentation for Kulanu, Parrucca spoke passionately about the difficulties faced by Italian *Anousim*. His story dates back to Inquisition times, when the long arm of Torquemada reached into Sicily and Calabria and systematically destroyed Jewish life there -- a monumental accomplishment given that in the 1500s historians say that more than 50 percent of the Calabrian and Sicilian population was Jewish!



Parrucca began a search for his Jewish roots several years ago. As a teenager he was drawn to Judaism, and only later did he discover that both his father's and mother's ancestors were Jewish. "My mother's surname is Taibi," he says, "which originates in North Africa and which derives from the Hebrew name Tobias." The surname "Parrucca" means "wig" in Italian and also has Jewish roots. Historians have established that when Sicilian and Calabrian Jews wanted to identify themselves secretly to one another, especially when to do so openly would mean punishment for "Judaising," they often adopted surnames that were names of things (such as a wig, trumpet, or chair) or of flowers, towns, or villages.

Following two years of study at synagogue Lev Chadash in Milan, Parrucca joined a group of students for whom I recommended the Beit Din experience. Since that time, he has served as my rabbinic assistant, leading Shabbat services and two wonderful Passover seders. In fact, the seder that he and I led in 2004 was the first rabbi-led Passover seder in Sicily in 500 years!

Challah, candles, wine, Kiddush -- all of these are part of Parrucca's Shabbat, which he makes regularly, even when he is completely alone. Visitors to Palermo who have met him and experienced Shabbat with him are impressed with his devotion, his facility with the Hebrew language (completely self taught), and his warmth as he shares the joys of Judaism that come straight from the heart.

"New York is *meravigliosa*... wonderful!" says Parrucca. And he should know. After his stay in DC, he traveled to the Big Apple to meet with Rabbi Francesco Tamburello (an Italian-American rabbi

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Jews of Andhra Pradesh (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

anity and live as a Jew. Sadok agreed to join him, and they convinced 30 families in their village to follow their example. The House of the Children of Yakob (Bene Yacob) was founded in 1992.

Now the brothers live in separate cities, with little contact. Sadok Yacobi's flock at Bene Yacob numbers about 200, and there are an additional 150 outside Kothareddypalem who come in for Shabbat. They have no Torah scroll, but on Shabbat they read the *parsha* from a Hebrew-English *chumash*. They recite blessings in Hebrew and readings in Telugu, using an Ashkenazi siddur transliterated by hand into Telugu. They need an additional 40 *chumashim*.

His family of five lives in the synagogue since their hut was destroyed in a storm. The huts of other congregants weren't so badly destroyed. Yacobi ministers to his flock like a social worker, he says, visiting and talking out problems. He is unsalaried but some make donations. Like other "untouchables," he and his congregants survive primarily by toiling in the fields of landlords for very low pay. He sends his children to college using high-interest loans. The community is sending 25 of its children to an English-medium school (Hindu), costing \$180/year/student. His goal is to one day start an English- and Hebrew-medium school. (An English-medium school conducts its classes in English rather than the local Indian language.)

It is the hope of his children, and indeed all of the congregation's children, to make aliyah and apply their computer and other education in Israel. Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail of Jerusalem visited the community in 1994 for three days. According to Yacobi, he taught them some Hebrew songs, advised them to practice carefully, and told them "when the time comes the Lord will arrange for aliya."

Aliya could not come at a better time. Two years ago, Yacobi saw a headline in a newspaper that members of a Pakistani Muslim terrorist group, Laskar E Thoiba, had orders to kill all local Jewish communities, as well as visiting Jews from the US and Israel at the Hyderabad airport. The terrorists were arrested and the police check on the community's welfare every day. But the Jews have stopped wearing their kippot on the street because they are afraid of Muslim terrorists.

That day of aliya may be closer. Rabbi Marvin Tokayer of New York has taken an interest in the group, and he, together with Kulanu, may be on the verge of locating teachers and rabbis for the community.

Meanwhile, there are a few modest steps that can be taken to alleviate some of the poverty-related suffering. The community needs buffalos for selling the milk. They could also use capital for supplies to make kosher candles. Also on their wish list are a sewing machine, cassettes of Jewish music, money for a musical keyboard (\$175), laptop computers (there are NO computers in Kothareddypalem), and bicycles for selling vegetables in the city, as well as investment money to buy the vegetables. And sponsors for the 25 students in school would also be accepted extremely gratefully.

Yacobi left with a parting gift. He was accompanied at the interview by his wife Miriam, his three grown children, and another member of the congregation. (His son Yacob attends an engineering college in the village, while daughters Sarah and Keziya and congregant Yehoshua Korahi happened to be in Hyderabad on a three-month academic program for their Masters Degrees in computer applications). The six of them agreed to tape some of their religious songs for Kulanu. The hotel lent us their business lounge, Aron appeared with his videocam, and they sang away -- beautifully and with heart. Hopefully, we will have this music available on the Kulanu website before too long.

(Contributions to Kulanu can be earmarked for the Telugu Jews.)

LETTERS TO KULANU

Jew Assumes Igbo Leadership

For the first time since probably 120 years ago, an Igbo man professing the Igbo religion (Judaism) is the overall leader of all the Igbos.

Dozie Ikedife, MD, is the president-general of Ohanez, the premier Igbo organization. Ohanez took the place of the great Ibo State Union and has the last word on all Igbo matters. Last week I sent him congrats on my personal behalf, and on behalf of the Igbo Israel Union.

The man's sleeves are already rolled up. We can already see some important movements and changes. In our quest to reconnect with our brethren, the Jews, Ikedife, who spent time in a college in Galilee in 2005 (at age 74), told a visiting rabbi, "We need to work with intelligence, and some speed, so that in the near future some Israelis can come to Igboland and resettle."

If you want to do something, you can send him a congratulatory message.

*Remy C. Ilona
Abuja, Nigeria*

A Coffee Tour with JJ

The last few months have been a whirlwind of travel, speeches, and events for the Mirembe Kawomera "Delicious Peace" Coffee Project. On February 14, JJ Keki and I embarked on a month-long tour of the US. We met hundreds of people, and visited dozens of communities. Many of you reading this newsletter were a part of one of these gatherings. Together, you all are a part of the beautiful story that's unfolding across the country: people of faith, churches, synagogues, and mosques, com-

ing together to build a market for coffee grown by a cooperative of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim farmers. This was JJ's dream, he imagined it in his mind, and we're all making it a reality.

*Ben Corey-Moran
Ft. Bragg, California*

A Message from JJ's Blog

I'm now speaking to my people who read this blog. For those people who took care of me here, who received me here, I tell you that I have had a wonderful time here, talking to people who are very welcoming, and who are responding positively. I only request that those friends who we met from interfaith, fair trade, and others, remain friends, to be bound to what we reached out with, so that it becomes a reality, our dream of bringing peace in the world. I request that you now become good ambassadors for promoting peace in the world. That is it.

We have sown the seeds, and I request that these seeds be multiplied by you who have received them, so that they can be spread to every corner of the world. This is what we are seeking.

The relationship between us has been very good, and I only pray that this relationship goes forward, from strength to strength. So that our seeds grow ever more fertile, so that we have, like our coffee, healthy, productive, and beautiful blossoming.

*JJ Keki
Mbale, Uganda*

New Delhi Shul Thrives at 50 (cont.)

(Continued from page 5)

community, and a special International Distinguished Leadership Award was presented to Rabbi Marvin Tokayer of New York, who was present with 45 fellow travelers. Tokayer was recognized as an "honorary member of the Indian Jewish community" who began coming to India in 1963 and leads annual tours. In fact, prior to his stop in New Delhi, Tokayer had been to Alibag, where he donated a Torah to a synagogue to replace one damaged in the monsoons of 2006. In the reception there, the Torah scroll was carried under a red and gold huppah, while men sang and danced on a street carpeted in white cloth on which rose petals were scattered.

In his acceptance speech, Tokayer recognized the Judah Hyam group as "a small but high-quality Jewish community." He went on to recall some of its distinguished past members, including architect Joshua Benjamin, a doctor who treated Mahatma Gandhi, the founder of a zoo, a poet laureate of India, a woman who founded a Muslim girls' school, another woman who developed a mobile kindergarden "crèche" for street children, and the "greatest living military hero of India sitting right here – General Jack Jacob."

Nissim Moses inaugurated the shul's latest feature, the Bene Israel Jewish Inter-Active Heritage & Genealogy Kiosk. This kiosk has a touch-screen to enable visitors to learn about the community, including family trees of the Bene Israel. In fact, Bene Israel visitors will be able to contribute their family data and even be photographed for incorporation into the family tree data bank.

Following a *maariv* service, the crowd adjourned to a festive pavilion tent for an elaborate Indian dinner. At the meal it was announced that Rabbi Tokayer was enabling the congregation to make the evening's temporary tent a permanent feature, to be known as the Jerusalem Pavilion. Thus, despite its demographics, the synagogue continues to grow.

Nissim Moses (cont.)

(Continued from page 5)

Although his family was active in the Bene Israel community, he attended Christian schools and studied the New Testament, Judaism, Hindu philosophy, and a little Koran. In 1959 he took the top prize for Christian religious knowledge at his school, and the Bishop of Bombay bestowed the award.

Moses emigrated to Israel in 1966 and studied for a Master's degree at Technion in electrical engineering. He spent most of his career with Israel Aircraft Industries, as the founder and head of the Acoustic Department specializing in the control of aircraft sound and noise. In parallel he established the Acoustic Department of the Israel Ministry of the Environment and taught Environmental Acoustics at the Masters Level at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He fought in the Yom Kippur war at the crossing of the Suez Canal in Egypt, receiving injuries that still remind him of that time.

In 1993, when India and Israel re-established diplomatic relations, Moses was selected to open and establish a liaison office for Israel Aircraft Industries to do marketing and sales of defense projects. In its first 4 years, the company won \$450 million in contracts from the Government of India. (Today, Israel has more than \$2 billion per year in defense contracts with India, second only to Russia in the defense market share.)

One of his passions is the history of the Bene Israel community. In his spare time in Delhi, he has compiled a 5-CD "book" titled *The Heritage of Bene Israel in India*, with separate disks devoted to Synagogues (in India and Israel), History, Recipes, Habadalah, and Prayers and Songs. (For information on ordering the book, contact Ralphy Jhirad at ralphy-jhirad@hotmail.com or tel. 91-9821344259.)

There were 31 Bene Israel synagogues in Bombay from the 1800s through modern times. (Today that number has dwindled, but there are more than 50 Bene Israel synagogues in Israel.) In 1890 there were 10,000 Jews in Bombay and Hebrew was designated an official second language of study in Bombay. All the pioneers of education and some of the best schools in the Bombay area in the 1930s thru the early '60s had Jewish principals. He loves to speak about the myriad of accomplishments of the BI community in India in fields ranging from law and medicine to the arts and the military. The *Padma Shree* (the highest national decoration to acknowledged Indian leaders in their respective fields) has been awarded to Jews four times. He is compiling a "Roll Call of the Gallant BI Soldiers in the Indian and British Army."

Another of Moses's passions is genealogy. The Integrated Family Tree he is compiling will shortly be available for general viewing through interactive kiosks to be located at several synagogues and later online. The current databank of the Bene Israel community, which has 9,517 names and more than 7,000 photographs, prints out on several thousands of pages. His own family tree, with entries dating from the 1600s, fills 132 pages. He laments the fact that men were often chauvinistic and did not write their sisters' and wives' names in the genealogy records.

With all his contributions to his tiny congregation in Delhi, one wonders how it will survive when he moves back to his home in Israel, within 2 years. When I asked him about this, he answered, "God will provide. God is great."

Peaceful Co-existence

Moses's fondest prayer is that the religions of the world exist together in peace. He cites the Jewish experience in India as proof that this is possible. The Jews, he said, never experienced anti-Semitism there (except for Portuguese-occupied Goa).

Growing up in India, he had friends from every community. He had Christian and Hindu girlfriends before he met his wife Betty. His best man at his wedding was a Muslim; that same Muslim sat *shiva* in his place when his sister died and he was far away

"I feel no animosity to anyone," he states. "That's how we grew up."

This approach is possible, he believes, when one realizes that there is a kernel common to all religions. "The philosophy of all religions is basically the same," he says, "and religions differ only in their explanation of the existence of the Holy Being." But this is understandable, he insists, since different groups have different needs.

He points out that Hinduism and Judaism are very similar, with Adonai and Brahma occupying the same position as Creator. He notes that Jews have the prohibition of a graven image to encourage people to go to a higher plane.

"But we say we have a God of love, of justice, of anger – qualities of God, and you superimpose these qualities to create a mental image from that. But not all societies can understand in that way, and you cannot explain to people more than they can understand."

He reminds his audiences that Jews pray to God for rain, while others may pray to their rain god. We pray to God who brings sun, and they pray to their sun god. Despite its appearance of worshipping thousands of gods, "Hinduism's ultimate teaching is to become one with the all-powerful God and is very much monotheistic," he says.

He notes that Jews have the light of Shabbat candles as a way to focus on our abstract God, and we recognize different facets of our God – a God of justice or love or anger. Hindus also have representations of God, and at certain seasons they worship a certain facet of their God.

Moses notes that "Judaism is a very progressive religion that has evolved slowly," but he warns, "You cannot bring an abstract God...to some people; they wouldn't understand."

Therefore, we need to be more tolerant in understanding our neighbors – not to adopt their religion, but to understand their ways and form of worship

He believes that "for the past 700 years our rabbis made a great mistake in not studying the religion of our neighbors. Christian scholars have always studied Judaism."

We should, he believes, point out where our religions are similar and differ, and make them understand *why* they differ. We should make them understand it's not that they are wrong, but that their people have a certain type of need. We merely have different concepts of God. We should be able to dialog with each other.

Moses believes it is not a coincidence that there has been no anti-Semitism in India. According to their oral history, the Bene Israel have been in India for 2,000 years. He states, "We did not eat beef in India for 2,000 years (respecting the Hindu prohibition on eating beef). And we invited vegetarian Hindus to our homes and easily accommodated them. We should never refuse to eat in their houses because eating creates a reason and active environment for dialog and leads to understanding."

He believes Jews should still follow our traditions when we can and notes that one of the reasons the Bene Israel were accepted as Jews in Israel was because they could identify kosher fish and knew how to cut away the non-kosher portions of lamb.

However, he says, "You can be yourselves and still dwell peacefully among others."



El Paso and Ruidoso: Centers of *Anous* Learning

By Leonard Martinez

As I was called to an *aliyah* at El Paso's B'nai Zion synagogue, Rabbi Stephen Leon stepped back from the bimah. His place was taken by a New Mexican grandmother, Lupe Ramos. She proceeded to chant the *parashah* with skill and confidence. Lupe Ramos is one of a group in America's Southwest known as *Anousim*, Hebrew for "the forced ones." She is a descendant of Spanish and Portuguese Jews forcibly converted to Catholicism during the Spanish Inquisition in the 15th and 16th centuries. After more than five centuries, she and others like her have returned to Judaism.

In the 17th century, *Anousim* or Crypto-Jews hoped to secretly practice their religion away from Spain and Portugal. They sailed to Mexico as colonizers, eventually settling in the remote mountains of New Mexico, far from the grasp of Spanish authorities and the Inquisition. It was a practice followed in Spanish and Portuguese colonies world-wide, wherever Crypto-Jews sought to escape the prying eyes of Church and Crown. Over the centuries, knowledge of their heritage faded. But a few still clung to some forms of Judaism through symbols and rites, vaguely conscious they were Jews. In the last two decades, however, many *Anousim* have stepped forward, publicly acknowledging their roots but not necessarily converting. They sift through centuries of family histories, curious about Judaism and their relationship to the Jews around them.

I was invited by Sonya Loya to participate at a joint meeting of *Anousim* held in El Paso, Texas, last August. Loya, a single mother with a ready smile, runs the Bat Zion Learning Center in the mountain town of Ruidoso (it means "noisy"), New Mexico, situated between Albuquerque, New Mexico, and El Paso, Texas. She, like Lupe Ramos, has returned to Judaism.

"At Bat Zion I help *Anousim* who are interested in learning more about their backgrounds and Judaism. Once a month I invite lecturers to a Shabbat service, to introduce Judaism to those who are reluctant to go directly to a rabbi or a synagogue. Often it's the first step back," she told me.

Loya also sponsors the Sephardic Anousim Conference, which is in its third year and was held a few days before the 16th annual meeting of the Society for the Study of Crypto-Judaism. In a flooded El Paso, the rainy weather could not dampen Loya's enthusiasm for her work with *Anousim*, who almost always begin the journey back to Judaism with curiosity and some confusion. "Those who seriously examine Judaism call it 'the Journey.' Those who convert call it 'Returning,'" she explained. For Loya the "journey" began when she was 18, in 1978, and ended in her "return" 27 years later.

The floods also failed to daunt the Society for the Study of Crypto-Judaism, made up mostly of academicians and serious students dedicated to the investigation of the historic and social aspects of Crypto-Judaism. Their sessions were held at a hotel in El Paso's Sunland Park, a short drive from B'nai Zion synagogue.

During four days I made presentations at the two conferences and met men and women who had returned, most converted by Rabbi Leon. There were others not converted, examining their feelings, trying to understand where they fit in, if at all, with Judaism. Some were making the first hesitant steps towards "the Journey." Certain threads, however, run through the lives of most *Anousim*. They recall being "different" from those around them; they remember candles lit on Friday nights without understanding why; they recall fast days, not eating pork, eating special bread during the spring, and mezuzahs on doorposts, and grandmothers slapping the hands of children who tried to pry mezuzahs loose. A few were told by parents or grandparents, usually in secret, that they were Jews. Many sought to verify that family names like Rodriguez, Garcia, and Martinez have Jewish roots -- no easy task as medieval Spanish and Portuguese Jews assumed the same

family names as their Gentile neighbors. The journey for many of them is filled with family indifference, antagonism, and rejection.

Sonya Loya's story is typical: "I felt as if I was home the first time I entered the synagogue," she told me. She was pleased when I advised her that I had traced a branch of the Loyas to the legendary Sephardic city of Salonica, Greece. Her home, her facility for *Anousim*, and her shop are a 2.5-hour drive down the New Mexico mountains to Rabbi Leon in El Paso. It was here that she received her religious instruction and was "returned."

Loya, who reads some Hebrew and peppers her salutations with biblical blessings, now helps guide her 22-year-old daughter Rachel and others down the same road to "return."

One feature of the *Anousim* is their innate secretiveness, even in 21st century America, where no punishment is associated with being a Jew. One woman cornered my wife, Barbara, and asked her in a low and conspiratorial whisper, "Can you help me find a book that will help me to be a good Orthodox Jew?" Others ask what would happen if neighbors and friends in their community learn that they are openly Jewish. "When they come to Bat Zion, they are not ready to discuss their backgrounds. It is a long process to get them to think about their past and then to do something positive about it," says Sonya Loya.

I asked Dr. Stanley Hordes, a professor at the University of New Mexico, an expert on Crypto-Jews, and this year's moderator for The Society for the Study of Crypto-Judaism, about this phenomenon. He said: "Secrecy is an integral part of the religion as they perceive it." Hordes, a native of Silver Spring, Maryland, is the author of *To the End of the Earth*, an in-depth study of his many years investigating the Crypto-Jews of the Southwest. He is broadening his studies to unearth Crypto-Judaism in Cuba, Santo Domingo, and Puerto Rico, all of which have similar histories as the Southwest's *Anousim*.

Dr. Hordes chaired a full three-day program on Crypto-Judaism, which included a DNA lecture by Dr. Bennett Greenspan, a genetics expert from Houston, and a paper read by Dr. Abraham Lavender, a professor at Florida International University and President of the Society, titled: "Why the Reluctance to Accept Spanish-Portuguese Returnees to Judaism?" The slender, white bearded Lavender, a native North Carolinian, is investigating his own Sephardic roots. He believes his family name may derive from *lavandar*, to launder.

If all of this stunning information was not enough, my wife and I breakfasted one morning with Cary Herz, an outgoing professional photographer who has been taking photos of gravestones with Jewish symbols in the Catholic cemeteries of New Mexico for years. Some appear in Stanley Hordes' book. "I'm doing a new book on these special gravestones," she told me. She pulled out a photo from her shoulder bag, saying, "This is for you." It was a black and white photograph of a tall gravestone standing beside a steel cross. Carved into the top of the stone was a cross, set above four lines of Hebrew script. The picture was one of a series called *Crypto-Jewish Burial Sites*.

The facilities at B'nai Zion were perfect for Sonya Loya's conference. The synagogue's large social hall doubled as a conference and dining room where participants enjoyed a bagel and lox breakfast and lunches. Rabbi Leon led religious services in the smaller circular chapel, with arena-style stadium seating for about 200. The *bimah* is located in the center. Services were well attended and enhanced with B'nai Zion's young cantor, Marc Felipe De Rocca, who chanted many Sephardic liturgical melodies. When I mentioned how much I enjoyed them he thanked me and added, "My parents are both Spanish and French. The melodies come easy to me." After services Lupe Ramos and I spent some time talking about the cantor's music and Ladino *romanzas*, songs and melodies with origins in medieval Spain. She is introducing them to other Crypto-Jews who have taken the "journey" with her.

Yet despite the facilities and enthusiasm, there are still problems for those who have already "returned" and others interested in going

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PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE

Lauren Seidman has written *What Makes Someone a Jew?*, a children's book that portrays Jews from all backgrounds and ethnicities. Geared toward children aged 3-6, it was recently published in paperback by Jewish Lights Publishers.

Dan Wyman Books, Inc. has issued "From Golden Age to Golden Medina," a catalog of over 200 offerings in Sephardic and Mizrahi history and thought. See www.DanWymanBooks.com.

Xu Xin's piece, "Chinese Open New Chapter with the People of the Book," ran in the April 20 *Forward*. It details the study of Jewish subjects by Chinese scholars at his Center for Jewish Studies at Nanjing University and invites contributions of books and scholarships (contact xuxin49@jlonline.com).

"Local Shuls Sell Humanely Grounded Coffee," by **Richard Greenberg**, appeared in the April 12 *Washington Jewish Week*. It reports on three Washington-area synagogues that are selling Mirembe Kawomera Coffee from Uganda to their congregants to benefit that inter-faith coffee cooperative.

"Black Jew Illuminates Diversity of Judaism," by **Dianna Marder**, appeared in the *Inquirer* on April 5. It tells about Lewis Ricardo Gordon, a Jamaica-born, Yale-educated professor and founder of Temple University's Institute for the Study of Race and Social Thought and its Center for Afro-Jewish Studies.

Michael Freund's "Echoes of Egypto in India: A Bnei Menashe Passover," was published on April 2 in the *Jerusalem Post*. It details the preparation of 81-year-old Mendel Kingbol and other Bnei Menashe immigrants for Passover in Israel.

A feature by **Elana Ringler** ran on Reuters on March 27. "Squalor and Shrinking Hope for Ethiopian Jews" discusses the thousands of Ethiopians with Jewish roots who are stranded in a squalid camp in Ethiopia, waiting to join relatives in Israel.

"Thirst for Judaism Binds Group Together Across Border," by **Roberto Loiederman**, appeared on March 16 in the *Jewish Journal*, reporting on California Rabbi Daniel Mehlman's visit to a warm congregation in Mexicali, Mexico.

Esther J. Cepeda's article, "Hispanic Jewish Culture Explored in Film, on Stage, in Class" appeared on February 11 in the *Chicago Sun-Times*. It describes a new DePaul University class in Jewish Latin American Culture being taught by Cuba-born writer-in-residence Achy Obejas. The course is "starting with the Spanish Jews who sailed to the Americas with Christopher Columbus in 1492 and covering Jews who settled in the Caribbean and South America and Hispanic Jews living biculturally today. They are studying historical tracts and a rich body of works by Jewish Latin American writers and filmmakers."

A February 4 JTA feature by **Brian Harris**, "In Caribbean, Conversion Offers a Lifeline for Small Communities," discusses the necessity of tiny Jewish congregations in the Caribbean and Central American of accepting converts as members in order to survive.

"Ladino Class at Penn Tries to Resuscitate Dormant Language," by **Rachel Silverman**, ran in the *Jewish Exponent* on February 1. The class is being taught by Daisy Braverman, a visiting professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

Anthony Boadle's January 22 Reuters feature, "Mass Jewish Wedding in Havana," details the 21 weddings, preceded by 70 conversions, that were performed in Cuba by three rabbis from Argentina.

"Miracle at Iquitos," by **Ben Krull**, appeared in the *NY Jewish Week* on January 19, describing the author's participation on a tour with the American Jewish World Service and Rabbi Marcelo Bronstein to a Jewish community in the Peruvian Amazon.

The *Alamogordo Daily News* carried "The Lost Tribe of New Mexico" by **Elva K. Osterreich** on January 10. It profiles Delfino Sanchez, who is on a "mission" to educate Hispanics/Latinos who may not know about their Jewish lineage. He told a group of 50 in Tularosa, New Mexico, that there could be 66 million such people, and "they are waking up to historic Jewish roots."

"China Renovates Jewish Cemetery Ahead of Israeli PM Visit." was published by Xinhua news agency in Beijing on January 9. It details China's expenditure of \$385,000 to repair the Jewish cemetery in Harbin to coincide with the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Olmert's grandparents moved to Harbin from Russia in the late 1800s, fleeing persecution. Some 25,000 Jews lived in Harbin in the 1920s, and the Jewish cemetery has 600 graves.

"Ethiopian Jews Struggle in Israel," by **Amy Teibel**, appeared in the *Chicago Sun-Times* on January 7. It discusses culture clashes, economic pressures and racism experienced by Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in Israel 20 years after their arrival.

Taking "Igbo and Jewish Studies" Seriously

By Remy C. Ilona

The growing Igbo thirst for information about the Jewish religion, Israel, and the Jewish people has entered an interesting phase. Igbo academics and students of tertiary institutions have started signing on.

When Daniel Lis, the Swiss-Israeli anthropologist who is investigating the Igbo-Israelite link, came to Nigeria, we visited the Abia State University. There we had serious discussions with the staff of the Departments of History and Igbo Studies. The university team was led by Emezue Sidney, PhD, who is presently the Director of the Igbo Studies Centre in the university.

Daniel and I discussed with the lecturers the Igbo conviction that the Igbos are descendants of ancient Israelites. Before leaving we gave them a few copies of my book *The Igbos: Jews In Africa, vol.1*, which is a work in progress. We continued to communicate. After a while Emezue, with whom I have since become friends, informed me that the Igbo Studies Centre needs as many Jewish academic sources as it can get. He asked for assistance.

Another Igboland-based university, the Imo State University, has started building up a Jewish library, with the generous assistance of a Rabbi Howard Gorin of Tikvat Israel Congregation in Rockville, Maryland. The university has named a section of their library after him.

These academic institutions are joining those of us who have studied and compared the Igbo religion and Judaism, and have observed that Igbo Studies really becomes meaningful when studied with Jewish Studies. The following illustration will help: As we know, all Igbos are circumcised on the 8th day. But why? Nobody knew, or let's say, we had forgotten. This was at least how early 20th century European scholars who studied the Igbos saw it. But now, with the revival of the Igbo religion, Igbos know why they were/are circumcised on the Covenant Day. That Igbo religion, whose name is Omenana, has gone by the names Hebrewisms, Mosaism, Israelism and now Judaism because it has a direct correlation with some Deuteronomical provisions. That is why the academics see the introduction of Jewish Studies into the Igbo curriculum as a good strategy for reviving Igbo culture and, by extension, the Igbo people.

Outside of academia, many Igbos operating independently have drawn inspiration from Jewish studies in their quest for tools that could

(Continued on page 12)

Jewish and Igbo Studies (cont.)

(Continued from page 11)

be used to revive Igbo culture. Here are some examples:

* An Igbo lawyer, Adolf Chigozie, is trying to build up the momentum for a standardization of the Igbo language.

* A University of Ibadan student who is comparing the Igbo and Hebrew languages for her graduate thesis has sent me her preliminary report, concluding that the two languages are genetically related (that one influenced the other).

* Sam Ozoekw and I are setting up the Igbo Israel Institute Ozubulu, which Sam is directing.

* Agummadu Onuoha, an Ultra-Orthodox Igbo Jew with side curls and much Judaic knowledge, has an Israelite Study Centre at Ama Atta near Owerri. Interested persons can have access to Jewish books at his centre.

* To further strengthen all these developments, an Ashkenazi Jew named Dean Malik has suggested that Jews with knowledge about micro-finance and business should help the Igbos in Judaism have access to micro-credits and small business knowledge and know-how.

* In order to make sure that the great contribution that Dean made is followed up, Beth Knesseth Siyahh Israel, my synagogue, has formed the Igbo Israel Multipurpose Society, with the aim of starting various small businesses. My belief is that a full stomach is very necessary for Torah studies.

You can follow these developments on our very active Discussion List by contacting ibo-benei-yisrael@yahogroups.com or rcilona2000@yahoo.com.

Italian Anous in America (cont.)

(Continued from page 7)

who hosted him), and joined me as we visited the Academy of Jewish Religion in Riverdale. Rabbi Aryeh Meir welcomed him, treating him to a tour of the campus and an opportunity not only to observe classes but to interview as well. Later that day, thanks to the efforts of Harriet Bograd and other Kulanu friends, Parrucca and I led a discussion about Italian *Anousim* at the Manhattan Jewish Community Center, where a group of nearly 50 learned about one of Judaism's best kept secrets.

The history of the Italian Jews is a complicated mix. For those who have seen Italy through Jewish eyes, that glimpse usually went no further south than Naples. Yet, the Jews of Sicily and Calabria are the oldest Jews in the Diaspora, as evidenced by the excavation of a synagogue at Bova Marina that some say predates a similar antiquity found near Rome.

As rabbi of the emerging IjCCC, the Italian Jewish Cultural Center of Calabria, (an effort funded by the Vuolo-Bernstein Family Foundation in the US) and synagogue Ner Tamid del Sud, I can say with certainty that it is Jews like Salvo Asher Parrucca who make our work so satisfying and remind us how necessary it really is. In these days and times, when population surveys indicate that our numbers are diminishing, it is important to remember that the more we reach out to lost and isolated Jewish communities like ours in the south of Italy, the more Jews we will have -- today and tomorrow.

(To learn more and/or to help Salvo Parrucca realize his dream to become a rabbi, contact the author at www.rabbibarbara.com.)

Mexicali Jews Building An Inclusive Community (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

Spanish and English, some materials provided by the generosity of Shavei Israel, National Jewish Outreach Program, Bat Tzion Hebrew Learning Center, and the generosity of people who have sent us books, materials and Judaica. Because we are the northernmost city in all of Latin America and some of our membership can read English, we accept all books in English about Judaism, except for prayerbooks and *chumashim*. Those books we need in Hebrew/Spanish and have been trying to obtain them. Of course we can always use items such as mezuzot, menorahs, Shabbat candleholders, and kiddish cups -- almost any form of Judaica, things people have lying around the house and are no longer using. We also, as part of our tzedakah, pass excess materials along to other emerging *Anous* communities throughout Mexico and Latin America.

Our community goals are very simple. We are trying to establish a permanent community here in Mexicali, one that adores God, and that can serve the needs of our membership in their path within Judaism. That being said, we know that simple things are usually complex, and we are no exception. Fortunately, we have a membership that is working hard to attain those goals. Unfortunately, without many resources we are not moving as rapidly as we would like to, nor are there easy-to-assemble directions in forming and building a community such as ours. But we will succeed.

We are starting to accomplish one of our primary goals in building a Jewish community. As we all know, the primary ingredient in a Jewish community is Jews. Fortunately, Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn (from the Reform Movement) and Rabbi Daniel Mehlman (from the Conservative Movement) have recently sponsored conversions here, and for those who can cross the fence and prefer to convert/return in the Orthodox current, we have established contacts in San Diego to help them in their conversion process. We have also set up an *association libre* (nonprofit organization) as an umbrella group. The reason for this is two-fold. In Mexico all religious buildings and materials become property of the state after a period of time unless they create a nonprofit organization. The second reason is in the pursuit of grants and donations.

I hope this has given you a bit of information about our community. Of course, members of Kulanu are welcome at any time. Thanks again for the hard work that your organization have done on behalf of communities such as ours. You will never know how much it is appreciated. Readers who have books or items to donate can contact me for instructions at cisraelita.mexicali@gmail.com. Visit us on the Web at <http://groups.msn.com/CentroCulturalHebreodeMexicali>.

Be sure to see the Boutique information on page 15. Visit our new Boutique website at www.kulanuboutique.com

Uganda News (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

Many good things are happening, but there is so much more to do! Supporting two schools, feeding 400 hungry students, helping Jewish farmers and their neighbors learn to read, preventing disease, granting micro-finance loans that fight poverty, all need your sustaining support. At the two Abayudaya interfaith schools, we still don't have enough classrooms, or a school kitchen, or a rain shelter to feed the kids, or decent dorms to house them, or even enough latrines yet to



An Abayudaya family on the tour

preserve their health. Home living conditions in four rural Abayudaya villages are so poor that we lose lives every year due to lack of clean water, malnutrition, dehydration, and poor sanitation.

We live in a difficult world. When you celebrate your family joys, we hope you will consider sharing them with others. Please think about celebrating your Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, weddings, anniversaries and any occasion by making a donation and asking your guests to donate to Kulanu. If you can, make a multi-year pledge, make a bequest to Kulanu in your will, or help connect us with family foundation support.

We need your help to do this work. Your gift creates immediate results. We stretch every dollar. We have ten years of experience working in Africa and we have a record of success. Experience the thrill of being part of Kulanu's *tikkun olam* work. Thanks!

Kulanu Loves Teenagers!

Kulanu congratulates Cara and Max Hedgepeth, Blake High School students in Silver Spring, Maryland, who decided to take on a community service project together. "Not just any project," they said, "but a project that is meaningful to us, and that we can relate to ourselves. It is for this reason that we have teamed up with the Kulanu organization. This organization supports many different people and communities. One group supported by Kulanu are the Ugandan Jews of the Abayudaya Jewish Community."

The teens developed a fundraising letter (Kulanu supplied sample copies of fundraising letters written by other teenagers) and sent it to friends. The donations came pouring in -- a total of \$3,218 so far!

Kulanu treasurer Harriet Bograd points out that "teenagers have been among our most effective fundraisers lately, especially when it comes to finding us new donors. And any fundraising expert will tell you that the most costly part of fundraising is identifying new donors. At least some of these donors may renew their donations for years to come." Bograd added, "I think the letter was particularly appealing because the Hedgepeths said that, as interracial kids themselves, they felt especially connected to the Abayudaya community."

Book Comment (cont.)

bon is a welcome addition to a growing body of recent books on Portuguese Jewish history. An excellent bibliography and extracts from contemporary sources, as well as explanatory notes in highlighted sections, make the book highly useful to both the specialist and the general reader.

The book starts with a much-needed, succinct overall history of Iberian Jewry and ends with a historical and political analysis of the consequences of the massacre. There is also a review of Jewish and non-Jewish literature about the massacre. The occasional black and white image, mostly of Inquisitorial scenes (there is only one known contemporary image of the massacre itself) lends the work an aura of authenticity and somberness.

For a fictional account of the Lisbon massacre, see Richard Zimler's 1998 novel, *The Last Kabbalist of Lisbon*, available in several languages.

Bidding Farewell to Rabbi Salas (cont.)

(Continued from page 6)

gal, Salas did not once encounter a single act of anti-Semitism even though he constantly wore his kippa. He says the Portuguese people have respect and *carinho* for Jews; that is why a small group of Sephardic Jews could return from North Africa in the beginning of the 19th century and establish an enduring community in Lisbon, protected by the government even during the darkest period of Jewish history.

Salas has no problem with the term Marrano. He says it no longer carries the pejorative connotation of the past. He uses the term to identify a group of persons with a common past. A Marrano, according to Salas, is a Jew in his soul who is still afraid to assume his Jewish identity in public. It is the same problem faced by Captain

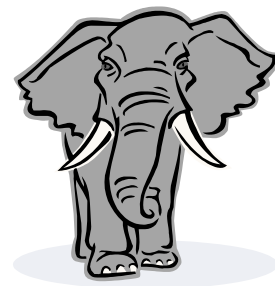


Rabbi Elisha Salas (left) with Manuel Lopes Azevedo

Barros Basto in the 1920s and 1930s, but instead of dealing with people from the hinterland of the northern provinces such as Beiras, Tras Montes and Minho, the Marranos of today are to be found in cities such as Porto. They are professionals and small businesspeople, writers, artists, doctors, lawyers, and teachers. It is because their parents continued the Jewish precept of education, he says.

Salas made many good friends during his stint in Portugal, all *Anousim*. He says it is much easier to establish communication on an individual level. Marranos are not suddenly going to flock to yeshivas, he says. What is necessary is the cultivation of individual relationships to establish confidence and trust so that the genetic fear is once and forever eradicated. Then, it will be possible to create a Jewish civil society in Portugal as existed 500 years ago.

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For more information, please visit us online at www.kulanuboutique.com

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Abayudaya: The Jews of Uganda Photojournalist Richard Sobol and Rabbi Jeffrey Summit take a fascinating look at the Jewish community of Uganda **(includes CD)**

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Jews in Places You Never Thought Of A compilation of stories from Jewish communities around the world; edited by Karen Primack

Journey to the Vanished City: The Search for the Lost Tribe of Israel Author Tudor Parfitt sets out in search of answers to an ethnological puzzle: is the Lemba tribe of Southern Africa really one of the lost tribes of Israel?

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

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

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El Paso and Ruidoso (cont.)

(Continued from page 10)

forward with the various stages of the "journey." Most *Anousim* live so far from El Paso that Rabbi Leon often works with them by telephone with lengthy 90-minute sessions. Other congregations in the region are not as sympathetic to Crypto-Jews as B'nai Zion. Sonya Loya lacks the funds to carry on the programs and all the facilities she wants to provide. "I need a good library with more books on Judaism and money to invite speakers to orient those interested in returning," she told me.

A large, affable man with a full dark beard surrendering to grey, Rabbi Stephen Leon, despite his family name, is not Sephardic. He told me, "I was born in Brooklyn of Eastern European parents. I believe the family name may have been De Leon at one time." He has been the spiritual leader of this Conservative congregation on the Mexican border for 20 years. El Paso is separated from Mexico by the sluggish Rio Grande River. On the river's southern side sit Ciudad Juarez and some of the Jews he has converted over the years. As we talked over coffee, Rabbi Leon explained that his biggest obstacle is the lack of help necessary to go forward in assisting those interested in learning more about their roots: "Few people know the work we do

here and we need people and funds to develop strong programs." The rabbi's comments were echoed in Dr. Lavender's paper concerning the Jewish community's general reluctance to help and accept *Anousim*.

Despite the indifference, Rabbi Leon has converted 40 Crypto-Jews over the past two decades and has hosted many more who are seriously thinking about return. Although I heard no personal complaints from him, Loya and others at the conference told me that the dedicated rabbi works hard and long as spiritual leader to his congregation and shepherd to the *Anousim*.

Because of the storms and flooding during our stay, we could not visit the city, its other congregations, or Ciudad Juarez. El Paso had not experienced such heavy rains since 1888. There were even fears of the collapse of an earthen dam. Rain closed the airport when we arrived Friday afternoon, causing our plane to re-rout to Phoenix, Arizona. After refueling we made another, successful try at an El Paso landing, but the delay prevented us from attending Shabbat services. Even the puny Rio Grande threatened to rise above its banks. But when we left on Monday, the sun was finally shining -- hopefully a good omen for Rabbi Leon, Sonya Loya, and the journeys of return for New Mexico's *Anousim*.

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