



Rabbi Aiello Making a Difference in Italy's South

By Karen Primack

Rabbi Barbara Aiello lives in a 400-year-old house in Serrastretta, a small mountain town in Calabria, in the extreme South of Italy. She has converted the bottom floor into a synagogue (*Ner Tamid del Sud*) and a Jewish culture center in order to pursue her life's work – to serve returning *Bnai Anousim* (descendants of victims of the Spanish Inquisition forced to convert to Roman Catholicism) in Calabria and Sicily.

My husband Aron and I visited Aiello during Passover, anxious to meet some of the members of her community returning to Judaism after a 500-year interruption.



Aiello, left, with friend in Timponi

Aiello, an Italian-American whose family members were among those *Anousim*, has been serving as a Liberal rabbi in Italy for five years, first in Milan and then in Calabria. She is Italy's first and only female rabbi.

Aiello was delighted to be able to

buy a portion of her house in Serrastretta, for it has been in her family for most of its 400-year history. Although she was born and raised in the US, she has a large family in Italy – some 70 relatives.

Serrastretta is near the city of Nicastro, a town with a once-flourishing Jewish community. In the 1920s her father would ride down the mountain from Serrastretta in a horse-drawn wagon filled with artichokes to study Bible and a little Hebrew with a scholar in Timpone, the Jewish quarter of Nicastro. When Aiello took her father back to Timpone in the 1970s, after a decades-long absence, he kissed the ground and cried.

Aiello likes to bring visitors to Timpone, emphasizing that the place was similar to so many other areas in Southern Italy. She says, “Timpone was a Jewish quarter, meaning that, unlike a ‘ghetto,’ where Jews were locked in from the outside, in Calabria and Sicily Jews lived in ‘quarters,’ which were open and offered free passage.” She pointed out signs pasted to walls in the quarter announcing “*Ricorrenza il tredicesimo della scomparsa di Rosario Bandiera*” or “*La cena doppio sette giorni per Aprile Pasquale Bagnato*.” (Thirteenth anniversary of the death of Rosario Bandiera; The meal after seven days for Aprile Pasquale Bagnato.) She cites these surnames – Bandiera, Bagnato, and Aprile – as examples of common Jewish names and says the continuation of practices such as remembering the anniversary of a death or having a meal after the seven-day mourning period are remnants of Jewish traditions of which few Calabrians are aware.

There are two streams (*torrenti*) running through Timpone. The Jews, who brought the silk and leather trades there in the 12th century,

(Continued on page 13)

Kulanu Shares Jean Mayer Award

By Barbara Vinick

Five years ago, Laura Wetzler, Kulanu Coordinator for Uganda, and JJ Keki, Abayudaya coffee farmer and community leader, sat at her kitchen table in western Massachusetts at the beginning of JJ's first lecture trip to the US. There they discussed the possibility of a venture that would benefit the farmers of all faiths – Jews, Christians, and Muslims -- in JJ's local area, where fluctuations in coffee prices, the basis of the local economy, had made living conditions precarious. Little did they dream that in a few years their ideas for a coffee cooperative would become reality and be held up as a model of successful interfaith cooperation at a major award ceremony. But that is what happened on the evening of March 4th, when Laura, JJ, and five others received the prestigious Jean Mayer Global Citizenship Award at a moving ceremony at Tufts University.

Named for Dr. Jean Mayer, former president of Tufts and world-renowned nutritionist, the award (whose past recipients include Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, humanitarian Dr. Paul Farmer, and economist John Kenneth Galbraith) honored members of three organizations -- the Mirembe Kawomera “Delicious Peace” Fair Trade Coffee Cooperative of Uganda, distributor Thanksgiving Coffee Company of Ft. Bragg, California, and our own Kulanu. Sherman Teichman, Executive Director of the Institute for Global Leadership at Tufts, which sponsors the award, cited the organizations’ “wonderful, innovative and powerful efforts on behalf of alleviating poverty, creating accountable and sustainable trade practices, encouraging community peace and promoting interfaith harmony.”

The presentation of the award was preceded by images of coffee production and life in the Abayudaya community by photojournalist Richard Sobol, whose 2002 book helped to bring the community to public awareness. The pictures were accompanied by music of the coffee farmers recorded by ethnomusicologist Rabbi Jeffrey Summit of Tufts Hillel, whose CD of Abayudaya music was part of the 2002 book, and who narrated the slide show. Rabbi Summit, who for many years has supported the Abayudaya community, especially its students, was instrumental in bringing the coffee project to the attention of the Jean Mayer award committee. Earlier in the evening, Tufts Hillel hosted a festive dinner for the award recipients and their guests in conjunction with their Merrin Distinguished Lecture Series “Moral Voices” program.

Among the honorees were representatives of Thanksgiving Coffee Company -- Ben Corey-Moran, Director of Strategic Partnerships, and Holly Moskowitz, Mirembe Kawomera Project Coordinator. Laura Wetzler related that she had approached dozens of coffee distributors throughout the US until she found a company who “got it.” Paul Katzeff, CEO of Thanksgiving Coffee (whose motto is “not just a cup, but a just cup”) and his wife Joan, president of the company, responded enthusiastically to Laura's quest, committing their fair-trade company to buy all of the organic coffee that the cooperative produces for ten years. After the ceremony Paul spoke extemporaneously to a small group of supporters, remembering his desire to help a struggling community without realizing how much he would benefit personally from his exposure to the project and its builders.

Also honored were four coffee farmers from the area of eastern

(Continued on page 14)

CALL TO ACTION!

Announcing a New Bar/Bat Mitzvah Initiative

By Elliot Yadin

As we embark on a new bar/bat mitzvah initiative, currently entitled *Sharing Your Bar/Bat Mitzvah With Jews Around The World*, Kulanu needs your help identifying synagogues, Jewish community organizations and professionals within your local communities that connect with Jewish teens and their families. Materials which describe how meaningful and simple it is to adopt Kulanu as a mitzvah project are available as downloads and in hard copy.

In reaching out to these organizations our near-term goal is to increase the number of bar/bat mitzvah students who choose to adopt Kulanu as their mitzvah project. These bar/bat mitzvah projects not only help raise crucial funds for Kulanu, but as important, they increase awareness of the lives we touch and the communities around the world positively affected by our efforts.

In the longer term, we hope to build upon these nascent relationships within each community. The bar/bat mitzvah project concept can be adapted by religious schools, social action and adult education committees, and community-wide mitzvah projects. As Kulanu strengthens relationships within each community, we will be in a better position to engage their members and involve them in Kulanu's mission.

Please send an email to Kulanu's Mitzvah Project Coordinator, Elliot Yadin, at mitzvahprojects@kulanu.org to tell us that you can help. Provide your contact information and the congregation/community/region in which you reside. We will be in touch. Thank you.

In Loving Memory of Sarah Horowitz

By Chaya Weinstein

Sarah Horowitz, a Kulanu volunteer with the Abayudaya Community in 2005, died unexpectedly of unknown causes on March 7, 2008, at the age of 44.

Sarah, a native of the San Francisco Bay Area, was a cornerstone of her Jewish community. I first met her in 2004, studying meditation at Makor Or with Rabbi Alan Lew and Norman Fischer, and attending *minyanim* and Shabbat services at Congregation Beth Sholom. With her gentle nature, unassuming manner, spiritual presence and commitment to *tikkun olam*, it was not long before she became my friend, and we spent many engaging Shabbat afternoons at Makor Or Meditation Center.



A poet and activist, she was multifaceted. When I met her, she already had an MFA in creative writing and was giving readings of her short stories and poems. She was also pursuing a second Masters degree in Early Childhood Education (since completed), and was

working as a teacher of special needs children. She was a published author, and wrote a novel which her mother is trying to publish posthumously.

I spoke to Sarah about my trip to Uganda, and she was very interested in learning about the community. She had visited the developing world, and knew she wanted to make a longer trip.

(Continued on page 14)

HOST COMMUNITIES SOUGHT Israel Siriri to Visit U.S. In the Fall

Kulanu is currently planning a visit to the U.S. by Israel Siriri, chairman of the Abayudaya Congregation of Uganda, to inform American audiences about the Abayudaya and to raise funds for the community. The tour will extend from October 28 to December 2.

Siriri will present an updated and upbeat multi-media program sharing the latest news of joint Abayudaya/Kulanu sustainable development projects to alleviate child hunger, provide health education, and bring clean drinking water, electricity and sanitation to the community. He will update audiences on the Kulanu-supported primary and high schools in Uganda as well as the community's self-help efforts through the micro-credit loan society, crafts, music CD, coffee, dried fruit, and tourism projects.



A construction engineer by profession, Siriri has directly supervised the many public works projects the community has accomplished with Kulanu's help, including additional water catchment tanks and the first water well in the community; construction of new classrooms, latrines, a science lab and working showers for the schools; and bringing electricity to the main village center at Nabagoye Hill.

The educational program will be age-appropriate for all and include a slide presentation and recorded African Jewish music. When appropriate, a CD of Abayudaya music and hand-crafted kippot will be sold in conjunction with the presentation.

For this tour, we are particularly hoping to identify areas in which several presentations can be scheduled over a two-, three- or four-day period. What is required of host locations?

- ◆ An honorarium of \$1000 per event plus sharing the in-country travel expenses.
- ◆ A main contact to be responsible for Siriri while he is in your city plus a second contact to manage the product sales.
- ◆ Accommodations and meals for Siriri (home hospitality is great!). He keeps kosher and is *shomer Shabbat*.

If you would like to host the speaker, what should you do next?

- ◆ Identify three possible dates
- ◆ Be in touch with Susan Schorr, Kulanu's speaker tour coordinator, at speakers@kulanu.org, letting her know of the interest and the possible dates.

This is an opportunity to perform a very special multilayered mitzvah—educating your community about the Abayudaya, helping the Abayudaya form relationships with the wider Jewish community, and helping to strengthen the world Jewish community.

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, and conversion information if requested. This newsletter is published quarterly by Kulanu, 165 West End Ave., 3R, New York, NY 10023.

An Anousi Path of Return in Puerto Rico

By "El Colibri"

Let me be clear, I was not introduced to Judaism by way of faith. I was raised Catholic, but on my mother's side of the family they knew that we were *judios* (Jews). When I was 13 years old, my grandfather sat me down in his kitchen when he was making garlic bread and he told me, "Listen son, we're Jews, and way back our family came from Jerusalem." That was it. He continued with his bread, then he added, "Do not forget it." I was so excited about his famous fresh bread that I didn't ask what he meant, or if that meant anything at all.

Later on I asked my mother what Jews were, and she said that our family were Jews, from Jerusalem. "From Jerusalem, mom?" My mom said yes, that her mother knew more than anyone else about it but she'd never bothered to ask her, and my grandmother had passed away when I was just a couple months old.

My grandmother and my grandfather were first cousins on their mothers' side; my mom explained that in our family, they'd married among themselves for generations. We came from Spain, but we were *really* from Jerusalem and when we arrived in Puerto Rico we settled in the mountains of the Cordillera Central, in the towns of Utuado and Hatillo, where for many years the family administered a coffee plantation. A small but very united family of intellectuals with liberal political views, we now mostly live in San Juan and spread over the East Coast suburbia of the United States, with extended relatives in Hawaii.

My grandfather's last names were: Villafane-Miranda, and my grandmother's last names were Ongay-Miranda. The Mirandas were very Jewish, said my mom. And she added there were other "very Jewish families in our lineage," the Medinas and the Isaacs. She told me that the Church knew about this, they had records of *sangre manchada* (stained blood) that the Americans had burnt --or they were burnt by the fire from the war itself-- when they'd arrived in 1898 and that for many years we had to get an approval letter from the Pope to get married amongst close members of our own family. I still have not been able to corroborate this but this is what she told me. My grandfather had also mentioned our lost relatives from Spain who went to Cuba and Colombia.

Then my grandfather died a few months later of a heart attack. I was devastated, as we were very close. He was a grandfather who would always receive his grandchildren with coconut icicles and affectionate kisses and then read us stories or secretly tell us all his misdemeanors when he himself was a little rascal. In our family grandparents are called Papa and Mama, never *abuelo/abuela* (grandfather/mother). Papa's funeral was strange; we never went to church services for his soul, and his body was not kept at a proper funeral home. It was done in my grandfather's own house, as it was the tradition. My family did not dress up in black, but in color. My mother explained to me that we must dress "like nothing had happened" since "the wake must be carried all the way to where the heart is, but not in the clothing." He was buried faster than what I thought was normal, in just two days, and was placed right next to my grandmother and the rest of the family.

I was supposed to be named Regalado. This I learned by further nagging my mom about anything else she'd known from our Jerusalemite roots. Regalado and Pedro, those are the two names passed in the family; it is very important to pass on these names. My brother's name is Pedro, named after my grandfather. It was that important. Usually the first-born males will carry the father's name, but not with my brother, no, he was not named after my father. Instead I was named after my father. And ever since I can remember, I felt uncomfortable with that name. So I latter on, I changed it.

Here's a knot-tied observation, read carefully: my mom taught me that my great-great grandfather was named Regalado, a Jewish name

(Continued on page 10)

Young Judaea Explores Lost Jewish Communities

Young Judaea is the Zionist Youth Movement of Hadassah. YJ's renowned 50-year-old Year Course in Israel is a 9-month program for recent high school graduates who volunteer and study in Israel.

YJ has recently introduced "Olami," a new extension to the Young Judaea Year Course program. Olami brings the youth into contact with the people, politics, history, and culture of the countries that played a pivotal role in the development of the modern state of Israel. Kulanu is proud that Molly Sonenklar, a former Kulanu volunteer, made a *shidduch*, and that Kulanu helped Young Judaea plan some of these trips.

Olami participants can choose from five different themed Olami tracks, allowing them to explore the history of world Jewry from a point of view that is most intriguing to them. These three may be of particular interest to Kulanu readers:

The Lost Jewish Communities - Visits regional Jewish communities that have been cut off from the outside Jewish world, including Portugal, Uganda, South Africa, and India,

Israel, Africa and the Jews - Exploring the various relationships between Israel and the African continent with visits to communities in Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Tunisia.

Sephardic Judaism and Zionism - Delving into the rich Sephardi heritage in such countries as Spain, Turkey, Greece, and Holland.

For further information, see www.youngjudaea.org and www.yearcourse.org.

Here is an excerpt from a report originally published in the Young Judaea Year Course Newsletter describing a visit to the Bnei Menashe:

Dear Family, Friends, and Fans of Year Course Olami II,

We would like to share some of our amazing experiences during our India Trip.

In the state of Mizoram, in northeast India, in a land mass that lies between Myanmar (formerly Burma) and Bangladesh, there lives a small group of people who have been practicing Judaism for more than 27 years. They have not taken on a "new" religion. These people, in fact, have returned to the religion of their ancestors. They call themselves Bnei Menashe, descendants of the Tribe of Menashe, one of the ten lost tribes. Also known as the Shinlung, the Bnei Menashe relate their history of exile from the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C., across the silk route, finally ending up in India and Myanmar. The story of these people is an amazing one. After thousands of years of exile they have rediscovered their roots and are returning to Judaism.

As a "Lost Jewish community" Course- isn't it a perfect community for us to visit? Entering the state of Mizoram is not an easy task. We had already arranged a special permit to enter, but it was canceled a day before our arrival, so our first day was dedicated to a lot of bureaucracy and traveling. After an extremely long travel day we arrived in Kolosib -- where the Bnei Menashe community was waiting for us. We entered someone's home and met excited members of the community that were waiting for us with Kiddush and Shabbat dinner.

For the rest of the weekend we joined them in Shabbat prayers in the Synagogue; we sang along with their enthusiastic voices to different Jewish songs; we ate together in the same home, and we said the "Birkat Hamazon" together. It was truly amazing to see how we come from such extremely different backgrounds (we don't even speak the same language) and yet we had so much in common!!!

One of the highlights was the cultural show they prepared for us. We walked about 20 minutes to the town hall (of course they told us it is a 5 minute walk) and when we got there we were shocked to see that about 200 people from the town were waiting for us! A professional dance group performed some beautiful local dances for us. To our surprise, they told us that we needed to perform one of our cultural dances as well. Needless to say we are not as professional as them but we proudly sang and danced "Shavtem Maim" and they really laughed at - we wonder why ☺.

(Continued on page 9)

KULANU BRIEFS

Help Wanted

Kulanu is growing and has plans to grow further to help more communities around the world. We need resources to do this and are seeking experienced and energetic individuals who can take us to the next level in fundraising. We welcome fresh and proven ideas. The Board of Trustees invites anyone interested in volunteering to submit a letter via email to volunteers@kulanu.org telling us a little about yourself and your interests, and we will send you a brief follow-up questionnaire.

Children's Book Now Available

In *Always an Olivia*, longtime Kulanu friend Carolivia Herron, a Jew of African descent, retells her own family history, which she first heard from her great-grandmother in 1957. The remarkable tale begins in 15th century Spain and continues to Portugal, Italy, and America. The family finally settles among the Geechees, free black people from West Africa, living off the coast of Georgia at the beginning of the 18th century. This delightful picture book will be thoroughly enjoyed by children and adults of all ages. Very appropriate for birthdays, holidays, and other special occasions. The US cost is \$18 plus \$5 shipping and handling. To order, visit www.kulanuboutique.com.

Reading the Newsletter Online

If you would prefer to read the Kulanu newsletter (with color photos!) online, we will be happy to take you off our newsletter mailing list. Please send a note to database@kulanu.org and we will alert you whenever a new issue is available online.

San Diego Jewish World Initiative

A global Jewish online conversation is being proposed by the publisher of *San Diego Jewish World* (www.sdjewishworld.com), Donald H. Harrison. Noting that his online daily newspaper regularly is publishing donated news and commentary from authors in the United States, Israel and Australia, Harrison invites writers in other countries to join in the forum. He welcomes stories about Jewish communities all over the world, and invites writers to share their commentaries not only on local matters but on international Jewish issues as well. In this manner, he suggests, a worldwide Jewish discussion may develop about numerous topics. Harrison can be reached via the email sdheritage@cox.net. Harrison has already reprinted several articles from the Kulanu Newsletter. We are delighted that the word is getting spread farther!

Annual Jewish Multiracial Retreat

The Jewish Multiracial Network has announced that its annual Retreat, featuring artist-in-residence Maya Escobar, will take place June 6-8 at the Isabella Freedman Jewish Retreat Center in Falls Village, Connecticut. The event will feature services, learning, community-building activities, a youth program for preschoolers to teens, kosher food, and opportunities for hiking, canoeing, and other sports. For information or to register go to <http://jewishmultiracialnetwork.org> or call 1-800-398-2630 x307.

Annual Sephardic Anousim Conference

The fifth annual Sephardic *Anousim* Conference will take place at Congregation B'nai Zion in El Paso, Texas, August 1-3. For upcoming details on the speakers and concert, contact Sonya Loya at tav_22@yahoo.com.

Speakers Spread the Word

Abayudaya musicians **JJ Keki, Rachel Namudosi, Seth Jonadav, and Gershom Sizomu** will be headliners at the Greater Chicago Jewish Festival on June 15. The outdoor showcase includes seven hours of continuous entertainment (music, dance, theater, and storytelling) on four stages. In addition, the festival includes a children's stage, a hands-on activity area, an art fair, a craft fair, an ethnic food fair and organization information booths. The Ugandans will be performing at 2 and 5 pm. For info, see www.jewishfestival.org.

Film-maker, speaker, and dancer **Adam McKinney** is scheduled to speak at Toronto's Congregation Darchei Noam, on his new oral history documentary, "We are All One: The Jews of Sefwi Wiawso" on May 15. The film (produced along with Daniel Banks) is to be aired at the event.

"Jews of Color: Wrestling with the Angel of Identity" was the title of **Joel Sanchez's** talk on April 30 at the Manhattan JCC. He appeared as a representative of the Jewish Multiracial Network along with a panel of Jews of color.

Gil and Lil Zinn have recently spoken at the Rockland County, NY, section of National Council of Jewish Women, as well as at a JCC in Washington Township, NJ, a Hadassah-JCC in Rockland County, NY, and a Bnai Brith chapter "down at the Cranberries in NJ." Their talks are based on a slide show they prepared from their visit to Uganda with Laura Wetzler in 2006.

Dr. Samuel Gruber and photographer **Vincent Giordano** spoke on March 6 at the opening of an exhibition of Giordano's photos of Romaniote Greek Jewish communities and their synagogues. Entitled "Before the Flame Goes Out - The Romaniote Jews in Ioannina and New York," the exhibit can be viewed through June at MOBIA (Museum of Biblical Art) in NYC.

Karen Primack spoke about Kulanu communities at Hadassah meetings in the Washington area on March 16 and March 24.

On April 17, **Dr. Stan Hordes** was keynote speaker at a symposium at Texas A&M University on the topic "The Carvajal Family and Crypto-Jewish Studies." (<http://cushing.tamu.edu/symposium/program.htm>)

Bryan Schwartz spoke on February 24 at Boston University Hillel in connection with a traveling exhibit compiled by Scattered Among the Nations entitled "Jews of Color: In Color!" The exhibit features photographs by Bryan Schwartz, Jay Sand, and Sandy Carter. A video clip of a beautiful slide show about the exhibit, narrated by Jay Sand, can be viewed at <http://www.bu.edu/today/arts-entertainment/2008/02/12/faiths-diverse-faces-display>.

Anthropologist **Tudor Parfitt** spoke at Harvard University on links between the Ark of the Covenant and the Black Jews of Africa on March 3. The talk relates to Parfitt's new book, *The Lost Ark of the Covenant* and a television documentary on the subject.

Anthropologist **Daniel Lis** spoke at a conference of the Australian Association of Jewish Studies in Melbourne on February 17-18 on the topic of "Who is a Jew and the Case of Judaizing Igbo in Israel" and presented his video clip entitled "Are the Igbo Jews? Two Jews, Three Opinions." Also, on February 25, Lis gave a similar presentation (in German) at the Institut for Jewish Studies, University of Basel, Switzerland.

KULANU BRIEFS

Aglaia Balta, Consul General at the Greek Consulate in NYC, presented an evening in memory of the Greek Jewish victims of the Holocaust at the consulate on February 21. The event included a special showing of "A Song of Life," a film on the saving of the Jews of Zakynthos.

Cantor Shayna Peavey explored the musical and physical journey of the Ethiopian Jews (her senior recital and thesis topic at Hebrew Union College-JIR) on April 12 at Rodeph Sholom in NYC.

Turkish Ambassador **Nabi Sensoy** and **Rabbi Joshua Maroof** participated in the March 9 opening of an exhibition on the historic synagogues of Turkey at Sixth and I Historic Synagogue in Washington, DC. Extending for more than a month, programming associated with the exhibit included a Turkish cooking class, a bazaar, a dessert tasting, and a policy panel discussion on Israeli-Turkish relations. Also, on April 2, director **Victoria Barrett** showed and discussed her award-winning documentary, "Desperate Hours." The film tells of Muslim and Christian Turks who worked to save Jews from Hitler's concentration camps.

From February 28 to March 27, Thanksgiving Coffee's national interfaith speaking tour visited 22 cities across the United States. The delegation included four farmers who are members of Peace Kawomera's Board of Directors: **JJ Keki**, **Margaret Bunihizi**, **Samuel Ngugo** and **Sinina Namudosi**, as well as Thanksgiving Coffee Company's **Ben Corey-Moran** and **Holly Moskowitz**. They visited interfaith communities in Boston, New Jersey, Washington D.C., Baltimore, Chicago, Sacramento, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Olympia.



Madagascar Update

Hery Masoandro, our correspondent in Madagascar, reports that the Club Shalom Madagascar just celebrated its 15th anniversary. The group celebrates Jewish holidays to the extent of their education. Any donations of Jewish ritual items and educational materials (preferably in French) will be appreciated. Send items by US Postal Service to: M.RAHERIMASOANDRO ANDRIAMAMONJY, Lot A 27 Alasora-Antananarivo, 103 Madagascar.

An Interesting New Website

Jonah Lissner has set up the Israelite Research Foundation (IRF) to promote and support scientific and scholastic inquiry into claims of new and 'lost' Jewish and Israelite communities across the globe. His website is at <http://joe3998.tripod.com/israeliteresearchfoundation>.

Shavei Israel in Poland

For the first time in seven decades, Poland's rabbis united under one organizational roof when the Rabbinical Association of Poland was re-launched at a special ceremony February 23 at the JCC in Lodz, Poland. Organized by Shavei Israel, the event included Israeli Chief Rabbi Yona Metzger and Polish Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich as well as all of the community rabbis currently serving in Poland (in Warsaw, Krakow, Lodz and Wroclaw).

The ceremony was part of Shavei Israel's annual conference for "Hidden Jews," and brought together 150 participants from across

Poland, many of whom only recently learned that they have Jewish roots.

Condolences

To **Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail** on the death of his grandson **Segev Avichayil**, one of the eight murdered students at Yeshivat Mercaz HaRay in Jerusalem.

Mazal Tov

On three consecutive days in March in Uganda, babies were born to the wives of Abayudaya leaders Israel Siriri, JJ Keki, and Aaron Kintu Moses. Keki was on the US coffee tour at the time and missed the birth of his daughter. On a Thursday, Keki's wife, Miriam Keki Wooma, gave birth to a girl named **Ellen Nabigo**. The following day Tehila Birungi, Siriri's wife, gave birth to a girl, **Yashar Kayendek**. And Kintu Moses's wife, Naume Sabano, gave birth to a son named **Rosh** on the third day. Triple Mazal Tov!

Mazal Tov to **Gershom Sizomu**, who will receive his rabbinic ordination on May 19 from the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies of the American Jewish University in Los Angeles.



Rosh with mother, Naume Sabano

Todah Rabah

We are deeply grateful to these donors of \$5,000 and above:

Irene & Abe Pollin

And to these donors of \$1,000 to \$4,999: **Anonymous**, **Lynne**

Elson, **Sandy Leeder**, and **Marvin Wolf**

And to these donors of \$500 to \$999: **Agency for Jewish Education of San Diego County**, **Anonymous**, **David Holtz & Diane Glatt**, **Debbie & Mark Glotter**, **Larry E. Paul**, **Valley Beth Shalom**, **Ellen H. Singer**, **Christine Smith**, and **Ziv Tzedakah Fund**

And to these donors of \$101 to \$499: **Bruce Aaron**, **Glen & Marci Koblenz Cornblath**, **Drs. Roberta Glick & Terry Unterman**, **Dr. Samuel & Marlene Halperin**, **Stacey Johnson**, **Martin & Susan Kozak**, **Malcolm Rich & Lise Weisberger MD**, **Harriet Schiffer**, **Amy Schuman & Larry Stoler**, **Mark & Rhonna Shatz**, **Jeffrey Simons**, **Sisterhood Congregation Ohev Shalom**, **Rabbi Gerald & Bonita Sussman**, and **Saul Weiner & Suzanne Griffel**

And to the \$100 Club: **Am Kolel Sanctuary and Renewal Center**, **Hana & Terri Binder**, **Lisa Burnstein**, **Rabbi Richard Camras**, **Stuart & Charna Cohn**, **Marguerite & Raymond Cross, Jr.**, **Michael Cook**, **Susan Dickman**, **Mitzi Redke Eisenberg**, **Elizabeth Feldman & Jay Shefsky**, **Gail Harris**, **Mark Hausmann**, **Amichai & Shana Heppner**, **Bernd Kiekebusch & Lucy Steinitz**, **B'nai Israel Congregation**, **Adina Kleiman**, **Theodore Kram**, **Lawrence & Judy Teibloom Mishkin**, **Jennifer Napoli & Gregg Tager**, **National Council of Jewish Women, Rockland Section**, **Karen Pierce**, **Aron & Karen Primack**, **Dennis & Lillian Rawan**, **Leonard & Ruth Rothenberg**, **Louise Sanseverino**, **Judith Schlaeger**, **Dr. Claudine Schweber**, **Barbara & Julius Shair**, **Drs. Karen and Fred Sheckman**, **Shomrei Torah Synagogue**, **Michael Slutsky & Susan Agate**, **David Tabad & Denise Eichhorn**, **Joel & Deborah Weissman**, **Sandra Weitz**, and **Julie Wilchins**.

Rabbi Howard Gorin's Third Trip to Nigeria

Rabbi Howard Gorin took an 18-day journey in March to the five Igbo states in Nigeria – Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo – as well as Rivers State and the Federal Capital Territories around Abuja. Gorin is rabbi at Tikvat Israel Congregation in Rockville, Maryland.

This was the rabbi's third trip to Nigeria and perhaps his most successful. He states, "I can only say that this trip to Africa was the most productive and most rewarding since my first trip ... in 2002." On that first trip, he led a Beit Din to Uganda, where 300 Abayudaya were converted to Judaism.

According to Gorin, the primary purposes of this most recent trip were: (1) to raise the spirits of those Nigerians who practice Judaism and who look to him for moral and material support (books, etc.); (2) to identify the needs of Nigerian Jewish communities with the hope of addressing those needs; (3) to raise the awareness of Nigerian political leaders that there are Jews in Nigeria -- by appearing on TV, being interviewed for the press, presenting books to various universities; and (4) advocate on behalf of Nigerian Jews for opportunities to travel to Israel (Christians and Muslims participate in government-sponsored pilgrimages).

Nine touching video vignettes of Gorin's experiences can be seen at <http://www.motionbox.com/folders/show/5481382>. In addition, his seven videos of Nigerian Jewish life are at <http://www.youtube.com/user/rovingrabbi>.

See also the Roving Rabbi's Travel-Blog at <http://tikvatisrael.org/blog/>. This small excerpt from his blog demonstrates his wit and wisdom: *...It took me a while to realize that these guys were my security detail. And boy did they take that role seriously: they ordered Shmuel to taste my food before allowing me to eat it....To paraphrase Rabbi Israel Salanter, rabbis who do not have their detractors are not really rabbis.*

Gorin works independently, and his trips are self-funded. He notes, "I am not working for, sponsored by, or representing any agency or organization; I assume all costs and responsibilities."

For more information, see the rabbi's website, which will undergo a major update this summer, at www.rabbihowardgorin.org. For those who would like to learn more about Rabbi Gorin's work, please contact him at hdgorin49@yahoo.com.

Rabbi Gorin at Abia State University

By Remy C. Ilona

On March 4, 2008, Rabbi Howard Gorin visited the Abia State University (ABSU) in Igboland, Nigeria, and laid the foundation of Jewish Studies at the University.

This visit was his third to Nigeria. His two previous trips were devoted to visiting, teaching, aiding, and learning with the (re-)emerging Jewish communities in Nigeria. He has also strived to visit some of the influential leaders of the country, to enlighten them about the needs of the Nigerian Jews. He has also sent huge quantities of educational materials to the Igbos. Rabbi Gorin also focused on providing immediate poverty reduction materials to needy Igbos. In 2006 he sent a 40-foot container filled with computers, books, bicycles, bed sheets, towels, clothes, shoes, etc., to the Igbos, completely free of charge.

He has now started equipping some Igboland-based universities with much needed information about Israel and the Jews. We see an acknowledgement of Rabbi Gorin's efforts in the naming of a facility after him at the Imo State University.

It was during a 2005 visit of a Swiss-Israeli anthropologist, Daniel Lis, that the seeds of this successful visit were sown. Lis, who was examining the development of Judaism among the Igbos as part of his doctoral work, toured several Igboland-based universities. Among them was ABSU, where we encountered Igbo historians, anthropologists, etc., all of whom were familiar with the theory that the Igbos are descendants of the ancient Jews. However, being professional academics, they said that the Igbos really need to know more about the Jews, from the Jewish perspective. Colonialism, especially the type that the Igbos passed through, robs a people of virtually everything, including identity.

A very beautiful relationship has developed between ABSU and the interests that I have represented. With sponsorship from the Forest Foundation and Kulanu, I was able to hold a Purim party for ABSU students in the Humanities Faculty. From such encounters I have learned many important lessons, and principal among these was that an extremely great majority of Igbos really want to have connections with the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

Thus I decided to call for Jewish assistance for educational institutions based in Igboland so that history, anthropology, and religious studies are complemented with Jewish Studies. Rabbi Gorin heeded

my cry for assistance. He swung into action and got very important and valuable Jewish texts, and designated some of them as contributions to ABSU.

At the presentation on March 4, the university team was led by no less a person than Vice Chancellor (V.C.) Nkpa Agu Nkpa, and included other dignitaries, the head of Uturu clan, (the clan that hosts the campus), and scholars of Igbo Studies, anthropology, history and religion. The V.C. welcomed the visitors with an erudite speech about the Igbos' descent from Israel. He also gave examples of some cultural and linguistic similarities between the Igbos and the Jews. Lastly, he expressed the belief Igbos have so much to gain from learning about the Jews, Israel, and Judaism.

Then Rabbi Gorin took the floor, looking quintessentially Igbo in his Igbo dress and black fez. He saluted the assembled dignitaries and explained that he was in Nigeria to visit his brethren, and to help in whatever way he could in the Igbo quest to reconnect with the people Israel. He observed that he has been following the Igbo-Jewish story with great avidity and interest, and hopes that historians and anthropologists will continue to work to tie up the loose ends.

He went on to introduce me to the august gathering as a Kulanu representative, and stated that the Jewish organization Kulanu helped a great deal to make the presentation of the books to ABSU feasible. Intermittently the rabbi was interrupted with clapping of hands in appreciation of his eloquence.

He presented two books to the V.C., with the promise that the other volumes will follow immediately. The V.C., beaming with smiles, took both books, and showed them around to the dignitaries. He again saluted the rabbi and advised that Jewish Studies be included in the curriculum. Rabbi Gorin then presented two copies each of my latest books to the University. He was greeted with loud cheers, and the V.C. thanked us.

When the V.C. began to speak again, he showed that he has a fair knowledge of Jewish ethics by telling the audience a story of the ancient rabbi, the rumor monger, and the pillow case filled with fine feathers. He was cheered, and the rabbi informed the audience that the V.C. did a very good job with the story, and that the story is in fact in one of the books that will reach the school in the shortest possible time: *Jewish Literacy* by Joseph Telushkin.

A Bene Israel Educator in Andhra Pradesh

The Teacher's Perspective

By Sharon Galsulkar

On March 10th I reached the village of Kotha-Reddy-Pallem in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India. I was warmly welcomed by the family of Sadok Yacobi along with some other members of the community. I was accompanied by a young film maker named Jonas from France with his assistant from Mumbai. Jonas was following me with his camera, as I am one of the characters in his documentary film on the Bene Israel.

Mr Sadok briefed me on the community in terms of the history and the economic status of the overall community members. We made plans as to how the community could benefit from my presence in terms of the Jewish education. The same day we visited a few families in the community.

In the evening the community gathered in Sadok's house, which also serves as a small synagogue, for the prayers (*Shema* and some other songs) and I was introduced to the community. After a brief talk about the purpose of my visit, we decided upon times to meet on regular basis in order to interact and learn more about Judaism. So every day kids had sessions with me at 6 PM while with elders it was at 8 PM.

Next day, after shopping for supplies (wax crayons, markers, white paper sheets, etc) and lunch, we came back to the village to Sadok's house. In the evening we had sessions with the kids and then with elders, the same till the last day. During the day we would try to visit the families or meet them in the fields, where they worked. For Shabbat we were joined by Sadok's elder brother, Shmuel Yacobi, who is quite learned. In terms of the activities with elders, I would give a formal *shiur* / session in English and Sadok would translate it in Telugu. Each session was followed by the prayer session. The topics covered were: Mitsva, Foundations of Judaism, Parasha Vayikra, and Jewish Festivals.

For the children, we had coloring on paper and songs and games. More songs were recorded so that they can be learnt and retained. We had a nature tour to observe the variety in nature in terms of colors, shapes, music etc. I had my pair of binoculars which enhanced observing colourful birds and butterflies, which are in abundance in their village. The whole theme of the session was to help them see Hashem as the greatest Creator and using Nature to connect to Hashem and praise Him. We always brought snacks for kids during the sessions so they would say the *berakhot*.

Impressions of the Community

I am very touched by the faith shown by the community. The majority of the families look poor – the farmers need to earn daily for their livelihood and in spite of that they won't work on Shabbath. During the sessions, most of them were fully attentive and eager to learn more. The level of Jewishness in terms of education is extremely low, but faith-wise it is rich.

In terms of assistance, the community needs a good Jewish educator – preferably from their own community, who will also speak their language. And a motivated social worker to have a case study of each family. During the months of April and May these farmers do not work on farms, so they must get loans with heavy interests and then have a tough time repaying them.

Working with kids was quite an experience. Some kids go to school, and some do not. I found most of the kids to be smart and very good at grasping and retaining what was said and taught.

I got from Sadok some packets of candles made by the family and some Challa covers with some embroidery done by Sadok's wife, for selling in Mumbai to the Bene Israel community. If it works then that can generate some income for the family.

Possible Future Steps

Somebody from the community needs to be educated in Judaism, preferably at a yeshiva in Israel, and sent back to the community.

(Continued on page 16)

The Film-maker's Perspective

By Jonas Pariente

Editor's note: "Next Year in Mumbai" (www.NextYearInMumbai.com) is Jonas Pariente's documentary project about the contemporary story of the Bene Israel, a Jewish community settled in India for more than 2000 years. Here are excerpts from his Blog (see <http://nextyearinmumbai.blogspot.com/>):

Last week we followed one of our main characters, Sharon Galsulkar, on his journey to meet with the Bene Ephraim community, settled for generations in the central state of Andhra Pradesh.

Last summer, the American organization Kulanu sent a rabbi and his wife (Bonita and Gerald Sussman) to visit the Bene Ephraim. They met Sharon on their way back as they were stopping in Bombay, and told him about this community, lost in the plains of the Deccan. For Kulanu, finding out about an Indian Jewish educator, fully qualified and living a few hours away from the Bene Ephraim, was a great opportunity. He agreed to go on their behalf, they paid his trip. His mission was to develop the contact with the community and try to understand better their socio-economic needs on one hand, spiritual and religious ones on another hand. On our side, we wanted to follow this Bene Israel educator going to help a community reconnecting with their Judaism, a process through which his own community underwent. The challenge for us was to not be swallowed by the interesting story of the Bene Ephraim but rather focusing on Sharon's approach to the situation.

Sharon, 33, is married to Sharon, the mother of his two young daughters. He is in charge of the Jewish Education department at ORT India, which agenda is to provide professional training to needy Jews. He had the same kind of job at A.J.D.C., the other American Jewish organization holding office in Bombay. He also gave Torah classes in several synagogues in the city. Sharon enjoys a special authority in the community as he is one of the very few Bene Israel who studied in a yeshiva (Talmudic class) in Jerusalem and came back to India afterwards. He and his wife follow Orthodox customs, making it often uneasy to lead an integrated life in Bombay. They want to do Aliyah to Israel, where their daughters will have the chance to receive a proper Jewish education. But Sharon is strongly attached to his city and country, developing a true passion for the fantastic Indian wildlife. On another note, his professional prospects in Israel are still uncertain.

The Bene Ephraim community counts around 30 families, and most of its members work in the surrounding fields of chili and cotton, or in the buffalo farms, which milk is used in the preparation of curd (plain yogurt) or lassi (sweet yogurt to drink). Sadok Yacobi, the leader of the community, his wife and three children, are the only English-speakers. In Andhra Pradesh the main language is Telugu. None of the Bene Ephraim can speak Hindi, an Indian official language; Sharon had to communicate with them through Sadok or his daughter Kezia.

This community lives 30 Kms away from Guntur, a growing city, about which nothing could be said beside that it is located 300 Kms from Hyderabad, itself 700 Kms East of Bombay. Their village, Chebrole, is basically a bunch of cheap businesses along the main road, from which smaller tracks go towards the fields and farmers' houses. While commercial and residential constructions are common and a bit ugly, the landscape is gorgeous, offering to the spectator a great variety of greens, yellows and oranges. Animals, vegetation and women's multicolor saris animate this relaxing décor.

As for Jewishness, the Bene Ephraim would be Jews settled in the Telugu region for generations. Like Bene Israel, they would have lost almost all the Jewish rituals, but not the belief in their belonging to a people whose origin is not in India. It seems that for a while they followed Christian customs, without forgetting their roots. For instance, they would have always circumcised their first-borns and would have

(Continued on page 10)

LETTERS TO KULANU

Young Judaea Shabbat in South Africa

After five hours of driving up north, our group was warmly welcomed by 60 Lemba community members (50 youth and 10 adults) to spend Shabbat with them. Part of our kids volunteered already in Israel to prepare different activities throughout the Shabbat. They had some fun icebreakers, prayers, and Kiddush, and later on some Lemba joined them for the Shabbat meal. For their *Oneg Shabbat*, the Lemba taught our group their song "We Are One Family," which comes along with a tribal dance. Then the kids on our end taught them "David King of Israel" accompanied with body movements from Young Judaea camp.

During Shabbat day, the group invited the Lemba kids to join them for a swim in the hotel's swimming pool, which was very successful until one of the Lemba kids almost drowned. Thank God our Rachel was there to fish him out of the water in time (no CPR was needed).

No doubt Shabbat's biggest highlight was the walking tour of the village, which was an excellent opportunity for our group to really see and understand how the Lemba are living. Some staff members insist that the biggest highlight was the Israeli dancing session at Motzaei Shabbat, led by Keith Berman.

It has been a very interesting Shabbat with long, intense conversations about who is a Jew and should we accept this community as part of the Jewish people, although they vary from us in their customs and way of life.

*Ayana Adler, Director of Special Programs
Young Judaea*

Kaifeng Artifacts in Canada

Some time ago, in one of your bulletins, you discussed the situation of the Jews of Kaifeng, China, who were trying to reclaim their heritage and be attached to the larger Jewish community. You may not be aware that a number of artifacts from their former synagogue are prominently on display in the Chinese section of the Royal Ontario Museum of Toronto, Canada.

Bishop White amassed a huge collection of Chinese objects, which he shipped to the Royal Ontario Museum. Among other things, the collection includes several large stone tombs, several sets of porcelain funeral processions, a huge amount of old porcelain, ancient bronzes and temple figures, making up the finest and largest collection of Chinese art and artifacts in the Western Hemisphere.

When Bishop White learned of the flooding and destruction of the synagogue in Kaifeng, he managed to save most of the reclaimable objects and shipped them to Toronto. They are currently displayed in a section devoted to Islamic and Jewish objects from China. The material from Kaifeng includes a scroll in Hebrew relating how the synagogue was rebuilt after being inundated by a previous flood and a number of stone architectural details from the synagogue. I suspect that, as is the case with many of their other collections, they probably have additional material from Kaifeng in storage.

*Alan Mora Dobry
Chicago, Illinois*

Update from Rabbi Avichail

Thank you so much for the much-needed grant for "Amishav." There is need, however, to update the details of the grant proposals submitted on our behalf. "Amishav" does not deal only with Bnei Menashe. We support those who are already in Israel, and they turn to us with any problems they may have. However, most of the activity with Bnei Menashe in India is currently being handled by an offshoot organization called "Shavei Israel."

"Amishav" has progressed to the next stage of contacting the descendants of the tribe of Ephraim, the Afridi Pathans. They originate in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and are also found not only in Northern India, but also in Western countries. It should be noted that according to the scriptures, the tribe to be redeemed after Menashe is the tribe of Ephraim. We are currently in contact with Afridis in Lucknow, India, and are planning to visit Uttar Pradesh state in northern India to meet Afridis, and to try and organize a visit to Israel. The cost of this activity is estimated at \$2000.

Also, we are in contact with a group in Japan who claim spiritual descent from ancient Israelites, since no physical groups exist any longer. We visited Japan for two weeks in July 2007 in order to confirm these claims. This visit was paid by a group which invited us, but a follow-up is expected which is likely to cost over \$3500.

So our activities are expanding, as are our financial needs, and we hope that these needs can be reflected in your generous support.

*Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail
Jerusalem, Israel*

(Editor's note: Donations to Kulanu may be earmarked for Amishav.)

Remembering Judy Frankel

Learning about the passing of Judy Frankel leaves me with a sense of loss and sadness. Like her beautiful Ladino songs, she was beautiful, sensitive and kind. It was Judy's music I fell "in love" with long before I was fortunate to meet her in person.

I am so grateful for the time we shared over dinner in San Francisco. May her memory be for a blessing and may her family, friends and loved ones be comforted with all those who mourn for Zion and Jerusalem

*Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausenbaum
Johannesburg, South Africa*

Black Jews in DC

We are looking for Black Jewish families in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area that may want to attend a Black/African American shul. Rabbi Capers Funnye from Beth Shalom in Chicago is interested in forming a synagogue in Washington, DC. He would like to initially come down once a month and as the congregation grows commit to forming an official synagogue.

If you would like more information about Rabbi Funnye or Beth Shalom see <http://www.bethshalombz.org>. Or you may contact me at epostdev@yahoo.co.uk or tel. 202-210-2751

*Dev Hillman
Washington, DC*

Good News from Zimbabwe

I have some very good news from Mapakomhere, one of the Lemba villages in Zimbabwe, which I would like to share with you. Following is the text of a letter I just received from the headmaster at Mapakomhere Secondary School. The care we have taken in selecting the highest quality books, both in terms of content and condition, clearly was worthwhile. I am just thrilled that this is happening.

*Relly Coleman
Westport, Connecticut*

Dear Mr. & Mrs. Relly & Andrew Coleman,

On behalf of the parents, students, teachers and the community at large of the above school, I would like to extend our sincere and deepest gratitude for the consignment of books we received in December 2007. Oh! It was quite a large one. It is our hope that all the boxes have arrived. As a result, many developments are taking place since

(Continued on page 9)

Birobidzhan: Yiddishkeit Beneath the Surface

By Michael Gershowitz

It was a dark November evening, cold and windy, and the streets were icy. I was hungry and looking for someplace to eat. Unperturbed by the weather, people scurried by. I had passed two or three restaurants, all dark. Finally a neon sign beckoned to me. Its writing was not Russian, but Chinese. Undoubtedly it indicated a restaurant. As a Jew who avoids non-kosher foods, I generally avoid Chinese restaurants, whose menus are permeated with pork and shrimp – definitely not kosher. But the weather and my stomach drove me inside. A waiter ambled over and handed me a menu – one of those intimidating Russian cellophane-wrapped multi-page affairs with prices to the hundredth of a ruble.

I started flipping pages, looking for a familiar word – *ryba* (fish), for instance. When the waiter came over to take my order, I was perplexed. “*Ata yehudi?*” he asked (are you Jewish?). “*Ani yehudi,*” I responded (I’m Jewish). I established that I wanted a meal that was kosher. The waiter pointed to a few items with comments such as “*zeh kasher*” (this is kosher) and “*zeh tov*” (this is good). Not knowing what I was ordering, I agreed. I ended up with a large steaming bowl of seaweed soup and a whole grilled whitefish in a piquant red sauce – both kosher and delicious, washed down by a nice Russian beer.

Thus started the unfolding of Yiddishkeit in Birobidzhan, capital of the Jewish Autonomous Region in Far Eastern Russia. My *Lonely Planet Guide to Russia* had given the impression that most of the region’s Jews had left for Israel or elsewhere, leaving a shell – a prototypical Russian city with a few remaining symbols of Judaism – a large menorah in town and a bilingual Russian-Hebrew sign at the train station. My three days in Birobidzhan showed otherwise. But without my rudimentary Hebrew, I never would have known.

My education in Judaism, Birobidzhan-style, continued at breakfast the next morning. A man at the next table, hearing me struggle to order, learned over and assisted – then joined me at my table. He introduced me as Andre, a Russian Jew who had migrated to Israel and was on an assignment for the Jewish Agency. We managed to converse in his limited English and my limited Hebrew. He told me that a recent influx of Jews from Central Asia, principally Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, had swelled the Jewish population from under 10,000 to around 13,000.

Birobidzhan, a city of 90,000 people, was founded in the 1920s by Josef Stalin for two purposes – to get Jews out of European Russia, and to provide a first line of defense against Chinese attack; it’s about 25 miles from the border, some 4,000 air miles east of Moscow. At first, 40,000 Jews came to this Jewish “utopia” from all over the world, including America and Palestine. But as a malarial swamp by summer and at 40 below by winter, most failed to see the utopia and moved on. Today, Birobidzhan is an attractive and manageable city with old leafy trees, wide streets and nice downtown architecture. On the periphery, however, the ugly concrete apartment buildings are identical to those in Moscow or anywhere else in Russia. The main drag, Sholom Aleichem Street, has been turned into a pedestrian mall and is lined with shops on one side and a cinema and public buildings on the other. One of the shops, an upscale deli (think Zabar’s), is named Tzimmes, written in Hebrew-stylized Russian. Its cheeses, smoked fish (lox, \$3 a pound), blintzes and borscht provided much of my sustenance.

A block off Sholom Aleichem Street, on Lenin Street (how’s that for contrast?), are a spanking new synagogue and the Jewish Community Center, named *Freid* (Yiddish for happiness). I spent a fascinating hour in the company of *Freid*’s executive director, 80-year-old Lev Grigorovich Toitman, and his English-speaking secretary, **Kseniya Malyarskaya**. There’s no gift shop, but they have a closet packed with tourist items. I left with a gift-pack of three bottles of locally-distilled vodka, t-shirts with the words “Jewish Federation of Russia” in Russian and Hebrew superimposed over a map of Russia and a menorah, a Hebrew primer, and an illustrated book of Jews in Birobidzhan.

Kseniya had been so helpful that I asked her to join me for lunch,

an offer that she accepted. On the way to the restaurant, we met a friend of hers, Yelena Belyaeva. Standing on a street corner, she told me, in good English, that she had a degree in Yiddish from Columbia University in New York and was a professor of Yiddish and Hebrew in the Department of Jewish Studies at the local university. I would have liked to get to know her better (and hope that I will), but it was windy and freezing, so it was not the time. We did, however, exchange email addresses; hers is <yelenabell@hotmail.com>.

Another potential source of information is the local Chabad house. The way to contact them is by telephone. From America, dial 011-7-42622-20402; fax 42622-60193.

I was in the Russian Far East on business, and just had to make a side trip to see Birobidzhan. If you want to go there, the best route from the US is on Korean Air to Seoul. From there, Korean Air makes the three-hour flight to Khabarovsk, the Russian Far East’s major hub, a few times a week. You can probably save a few hundred dollars flying Aeroflot from one of its US gateways to Moscow, then connecting to Khabarovsk, but it’s a longer distance and the flights are not as comfortable. There are frequent buses and trains for the three-hour ride to Birobidzhan. The best place in town is the Hotel Vostok, which cost me about \$25 a night.

I would be happy to discuss Birobidzhan with you; write to me at <gshowitzgrants@yahoo.com>.

LETTERS (cont.)

(Continued from page 8)

you left. The school has applied for a High School status to offer science subjects due to the books you sent us. Over and above, we have employed a full-time librarian to ensure that all the books you are sending are well kept. We have also introduced computer studies at the school. All these developments were a result of your initiative especially the books you are sending us. It is really wonderful. Students are really happy and thankful of your generosity, especially of remembering Mapakomhere Secondary School.

The books you sent are very useful to our students and we promise it is greatly going to improve the quality of education at the school.

Sincerely yours,

Madzingo J.S. (Headmaster)

Young Judaea (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

On Sunday we left Kolosib for Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, where we met with some more members of the Jewish community in the local synagogue and we had interesting session of Q&A.

The days we spent in Mizoram weren't easy. This is not a tourist state; the conditions were quite difficult and many of us got sick. However, we know we did something special and we did have an exciting experience. Mizoram is a beautiful state full of mountains and greenery. The people there are very nice and welcoming and we were privileged to get to visit this isolated area!

(To see the entire report, including photos and videos, go to

<http://www.yearcourse.co.il/newsletters/300408OlamiIndia.html#LETTER.BLOCK11>)

An Anousi Path of Return in Puerto Rico (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

(??) and later on I learned that only the second-born males are to have that name, passed through their oldest brother. But my grandfather was an only child, that's why mom didn't have her own uncle named Regalado. My grandfather had six girls and one boy, so that boy was not named Regalado. My mother had two girls and two boys, I was her second male, by the family rule, I should have been Regalado. Later, when I learnt that Regalado meant Natan, I changed my last name to Ben-Natan. This felt good. My name, my true name.

This whole time I thought Jewish meant nothing else than descending from a particular city, Jerusalem, having odd little things we did differently, and being related to the people in the Old Testament. I thought Jews had vanished, that I was the only one left (bear in mind I was a child living in a place without much religious or ethnic diver-

My first book to be read in English was a copy of Anne Frank's Diary

sity) until Jews were mentioned in my Catholic school by my teacher.

I must have been 15 or 16. By this time I'd already known, from my aunt, not my mom, that we had been forced to be Christians. This did not bother me at all, for Jews are a thing of the Old Testament and I was just part of an "extinct-species." Remember, even though we knew we were Jews, we were nominal Catholics.

Then one day my (Catholic) theology teacher mentioned that Jews had "killed Christ" and, to my surprise, she mentioned that Jews still don't believe in his godliness. I was greatly offended by this remark. Even after extensive questions (in a classroom where I was literally the only child asking), I never did understand the whole reason why Jesus died for us and I found the whole story cheesy. And I really asked, but one answer just led to another question and in the end my questions would be answered in a "because it is like that" way, so eventually, in my early teenage years, I lost all interest in Catholicism. Ever since, I've considered myself an agnostic person. Great, now I consider myself an agnostic Jew.

Soon after I took some books from my mother's huge personal collection, and some from the library, and I started learning about the Jews, learning about the Spanish Inquisition and about the Holocaust. However, one of these books, and my first book to be read in English, was a copy of Anne Frank's Diary. I was the first one in my grade to take such an ordeal, to read a book for a presentation not from

My roommate took me to Hillel's synagogue for me to see Shabbat services. I immediately felt something. . . like joy

school...and in English! I read it, with a dictionary in one hand and the book on the other hand, and it changed my life. I had to learn more! Somewhere, I found a copy of the Alef-Bet and I memorized it. Why? Why not?! I don't know! Of course I couldn't read anything in Hebrew, but I learned to recognize the letters. By this time I was 16 or 17 years old.

I didn't go to an English-speaking school, but I was accepted at a school in Boston, because of my grades and my college examination results. My first roommate was Jewish. I asked him many questions and I learnt plenty. My next-door neighbor was also Jewish, a skinny,

shy girl "raised as nothing." When I told her my family said we were Jews she exclaimed: "Oh, so your family came from Latvia!" Everyone else I met was Jewish. Soon all my close friends from college were Jewish. The connection was not made in their religiosity, or in common family roots. I liked Jews because I finally found a majority of people who got my subtle sarcasm! I remember one day I was explaining this to some Jewish friends, laughing on our way to a party, and they even had a name for it! "Yeah, it's called *schtick!*" Wow, there was a name for it! I was mesmerized. But I had to constantly explain, that no, my family is not from Latvia, or Poland, or Russia or Lithuania. I had to explain, yes, my family is Jewish but I was raised Catholic – no, I don't practice it; no, I don't go to church – it's a long story... wait, don't call me a goy! Hey, listen, my family is Jewish; I just know -- what do you want?!" My roommate took me to Hillel's synagogue for me to see Shabbat services. I immediately felt something. It was because of the delicious smell of chicken coming from the kosher kitchen, but I also felt something else, like joy, not faith, not a calling, but joy. And there was something that felt like coming home.

Since then I've been twice to Israel. Once through *Taglit* (Bright Israel) and another time by my own initiative. I formally converted to Judaism. (Yes, it was Orthodox, for those who care.) My mother and sister wrote a letter to the State of Israel, so there's a file somewhere in Haifa with our contribution to world Jewish history. I spent about two years in Israel, where I had a great experience working at a kibbutz, learning Hebrew, and later on studying for some time at a Sephardi yeshiva. I've met many other *Anousim*, Marranos, throughout my travels in Greece (where I met a returning Donmeh) and in Israel and through Southern Spain, and I've had the opportunity to meet many other *Bnai Anousim* in Puerto Rico, where there is a rich, invisible and unacknowledged history of Crypto-Judaism. But that's more of a follow-up story. Now I'm back in Puerto Rico, and back home every Shabbat.

Film-maker's Perspective (cont.)

(Continued from page 7)

always eaten beef, which is a great sacrilege in a Hindu country. For several generations they have been put apart of the majority and have lived side by side with the untouchables. Last but not least, they don't work on Saturdays, although most of them are very poor farmers. Their Jewish rebirth seems to have started by Sadok's grandfather onward.

We stayed at Sadok's house, renovated in 1991 thanks to American funds, and which is also used as the community synagogue. Every evening Sharon met with the kids, aged 5 to 15, and taught them basic elements of Judaism through drawing, singing but also bird watching. At 8 pm adults came to listen to lectures about monotheism, the Jewish mitzvot (prescriptions) or the Jewish calendar.

It would have taken more than six days for Sharon to really understand the community's needs, and even more to start figuring out solutions. However, during an interview on camera he declared that the ideal solution would be to send the whole community to Israel. It is definitely far from happening as their Jewishness is not recognized by the Hebrew State. But more importantly, one can doubt about the chances of social promotion for Telugu-speaking farmers.

On a personal note, this trip was unforgettable. We were welcomed with great hospitality and generosity. Sadok's family treated us as if we were part of them, cooking breakfast, lunch and dinner for us – and the several chai (tea) it takes to spend a normal day in India. Still, these people are far from being wealthy. Listening to their *Shema Israel* resonating and reaching heaven was another illustration of their sincere and hopeful faith, leaving us moved and speechless.

PUBLICATIONS OF NOTE

✍ *New Mexico's Crypto-Jews: Image and Memory*, by photographer **Cary Herz**, with essays by **Ori Z. Soltes** and **Mona Hernandez**, was published by Univ. of New Mexico Press in 2007. Following a 20-year search for descendants of Crypto-Jews, the photographer produced the book to pay homage to them.

✍ **Violette Shamash's** *Memories of Eden* was published posthumously in March. Born in 1912, the author describes Jewish life in Iraq through Ottoman and British rule, the discovery of huge deposits of oil near Kirkuk in 1927, the advent of Westernization ("bobbed hair on women, the first cigarettes, cinemas showing Chaplin"), her arranged marriage, a pro-Nazi coup in 1941, and more.

✍ *The Lost Ark of the Covenant*, by **Tudor Parfitt**, was published by Harper Collins in February as an E-book. It concerns the author's hunt in Lemba territory (Zimbabwe) for a sacred drum that might have replaced the lost ark, and was the subject of a televised documentary film.

✍ "Eastern Cape AmaXhosa Convert to Jewish Faith" appeared on DispatchOnline on April 14. It describes Ananyah Ben Israel, head of the Eastern Cape branch (South Africa) African Hebrew Israelites. These 165 Xhosa speakers are part of the Bantu people, whose oral history tells of their descent from Hebrews who fled Palestine in Roman times. They are related to the Lemba and peoples in Burundi, Kenya, and Tanzania, among others.

✍ **Yair Sheleg's** article "I Worried Customs Would Disappear," appearing in *Haaretz* on April 10, profiles Dr. Hofalam Miluy Lantang, an Indian physician who described Bnei Menashe customs and beliefs in Mizoram and Manipur in the 1940s, just as Christianity was starting to spread among the Kuki-Chin-Mizo tribe.

✍ "How to Reverse the Decline in Aliyah," by **Michael Freund**, appeared in the April 2 *Jerusalem Post*. The author suggests marking Israel's 60th anniversary by recommitting the nation to encouraging and promoting Jewish immigration, especially of "lost" Jews such as the Falash Mura, the Subbotnik Jews, and the Bnei Menashe.

✍ **Judith Fein's** feature, "Some Like Haroset Hot," appeared in the April 2008 *Hadassah Magazine*. It describes Rabbi Jacques Cukierkorn's idea to have a competition for the most Guatemalan Haroset on one of his frequent trips to Guatemala City (a recipe with hot peppers won). The rabbi tends to the needs of the 35-member Casa Hillel Jewish community there, whose members he converted over the last few years. His students study for three years via video-conferencing and read assigned books on Judaism. Although they have no evidence of descent from Crypto-Jews from Spain, several describe feeling like they have Jewish souls. Cukierkorn tried to involve the would-be converts with the mainstream congregation, Centro Hebreo, but they were refused. Centro Hebreo's Orthodox rabbi does not accept these Reform conversions. Cukierkorn teaches weekly Torah classes on the Internet, and members of his Kansas City congregation, New Reform Temple, have bought the community 200 Jewish books in Spanish, donated a Torah scroll, and contribute half the group's rent.

✍ On March 30, the *Jewish Ledger* carried **Stacey Dresner's** story, "Massachusetts Musician Aids Jewish Community in Uganda." It profiles Laura Wetzler, who leads annual Jewish Life in Uganda Mitzvah Tours, helps build schools, fights child hunger, aids adult literacy, and founded a coffee cooperative.

✍ A March 27 item in the *Washington Jewish week*, "Kosher in Kazakhstan, tells of a new kosher meat restaurant in Almaty. The predominantly Muslim Central Asian country has 30,000 Jews, a Chabad House, and an Israeli Embassy.

✍ **Niko Kopel's** *NY Times* article, "Black Rabbi Reaches Out to Mainstream of His Faith," appeared on March 22. It profiles Rabbi Capers C. Funnye of Chicago's Beth Shalom B'nai Zaken Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation. The African American rabbi makes it a point

to reach out to mainstream Jewish groups, serving on the boards of the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs and the American Jewish Congress of the Midwest and becoming the first black member of the Chicago Board of Rabbis

✍ "Chief Rabbi Amar: We Have Done Ethiopian Jewry a Grievous Wrong," by **Tani Goldstein**, appeared on YNet on March 18. The article says Amar is calling on Israeli officials to send rabbis to Ethiopia to allow the 8000 Falash Mura to quickly convert and make aliyah. Many have parents. in Israel.

✍ "Gold Scroll Discovered" appeared in the *ScienceDaily* on March 18, describing an archaeological find of an amulet inscribed with a Jewish prayer in a 3rd century Roman child's grave in Halbturn. The find indicates a Jewish presence in Austria earlier than originally thought.

✍ A March 12 article in the *Washington Jewish Week*, "Multiracial Gathering Honors Jewish Diversity," by **Richard Greenberg**, reports on a Havdalah celebration sponsored by the Jewish Multiracial Network that attracted 80 Jews of various races and ethnicities.

✍ "Reclaiming China's Jews" by **Lorne Bell**, was in the March 11 *Jewish Advocate*. It discusses Shi Lei, of Kaifeng, China, a descendant of Kaifeng Jews, who spoke at a synagogue in Massachusetts. Shi Lei described his spiritual rediscovery and his studies in Israel. He is back in Kaifeng now, teaching his fellow Jewish descendants about their history and their religion.

✍ "A Biblical Connection," in the March 11 *Times of India*, announces that the city of Malihabad, India, which houses 650 Afridi Pathans, is about to be marketed as an international Jewish tourist destination. Although the Afridi Pathans are Muslims, they have some customs similar to Jewish ones and are considered by some as members of a Lost Tribe of Israel.

✍ **Sergio Caldarella's** article "The Jews of Sicily – A Unique Culture" appeared in the March 2008 issue of *The Philadelphia Jewish Voice*. It notes that Jews played an important role in Sicily's history until 1492, when Jews were expelled from territory controlled by Spain (including Sicily). It also notes that the Sicilians did not share the anti-Semitism of Spain. In the Middle Ages, Jews were prominent in astronomy, mathematics, and poetry.

✍ **Josh Scheinert's** February 12 *Jerusalem Post* article, "Meet the Abayudaya: A Shabbat with Uganda's Jews," carries this quote: "Words cannot aptly describe what followed. In fact, it is still a blur for me. The service was half-Hebrew, half-Lugandan. The songs, to the same Conservative tunes I had been brought up on in Canada, were sung with the passion of African soul that grips and almost paralyzes you."

✍ "A Nice Chinese Jewish Girl Finds True Love on Kibbutz" is an article by **Shelly Paz** that appeared in the January 25 *Jerusalem Post*. It reveals that Shoshana Rebecca Li, a descendant of the Jewish community of Kaifeng, China, married Ami Emmanuel, who immigrated from Florida two years before. Li was recently converted back to Judaism with the Chief Rabbinate. The couple met at an ulpan.

✍ In a March 6 JTA op-ed piece, "Conversion Deal with Israel Hurts Jews by Choice, Families," Orthodox **Rabbis Marc Angel** and **Avraham Weiss** react to the Israeli Chief Rabbinate's agreement with the Rabbinical Council of America that it will only recognize US conversions from a list of about 15 approved RCA rabbinic courts and 40 rabbis. Here are some excerpts:

This agreement is deeply disturbing. Most troubling is that conversions, done years ago with the informal backing of the RCA, are now being scrutinized. This strikes at the very ethical fabric of Halacha, Jewish law. Over the years, thousands of people have been halachically converted and now they and their children, and for that mat-

(Continued on page 16)

Introducing Andrée Aelion Brooks

British-born Andrée Aelion Brooks stands before mainstream Jewish suburban audiences and argues that they are taught only a fraction of the real story of the Jewish people – an accusation that immediately jolts them into wakefulness. And that they probably hear nothing about the richness and creativity of Jewish life during the long span of 1900 years from Herod to Herzl. If the Jews did anything more than make chicken soup and live in poverty in the muddy villages of Eastern Europe, she says, they are likely to be unaware of it.

And then she explains that this has happened because most of the activity took place in the Mediterranean countries – in places like Italy, Provence, Spain, Portugal, Holland and even the Caribbean. Places that American Jews rarely associate with Jewish life.

Welcome to the new world of lectures and mini-courses on Jewish history as it is being redefined by Brooks, a former contributing columnist to the *New York Times* and an Associate Fellow at Yale University. Brooks is using her journalism, research, and communication skills to tell audiences “the untold stories of Jewish history.”

Her topics are regularly updated and expanded for such publications as *Hadassah Magazine* and daily newspapers. Right now her numerous offerings include such titles as “The Ancient Origin of Merchant Jews and Their Impact upon Jewish History,” “The Jews in the Renaissance,” and “The Strange Story of the Conversos: the First Jews in the Americas.”

She talks about the incredible but forgotten life of Doña Gracia Nasi, the 16th century international banker who built an escape network that saved hundreds of the victims of the Inquisition, as well as the ways in which the newest DNA studies are expanding our knowledge of Jewish migrations

over the centuries.

It was only after a cousin introduced her, in the 1990’s, to the forgotten world of Judeo-Spanish history and culture at a conference in London that she decided to turn her attention to her own Sephardic background – her father had originally come from Salonika and her mother from a Parisian family.

When the discussion at the conference turned upon why this history was being ignored when it came to teaching Jewish children in Hebrew Schools, the delegates were candid. “They said they could not teach any of this history because their teachers hadn’t any meaningful materials to work with,” she said. So she set about the task herself.

She started by offering some seed money to her own Reform synagogue, Temple Israel in Westport, Connecticut. An exploratory committee was formed consisting of experts in Mediterranean Jewish history and pedagogy. This enabled them to win a sizeable grant from the Maurice Amado Foundation of Los Angeles. Brooks could then hire specialists to create detailed lesson plans, a video, and a music CD that would provide an instant blueprint for teachers to use. The overall title was “Out of Spain,” a name that today has been carried over to its dedicated website, www.outofspain.com. Some 500 schools have purchased the multi-media materials.

But to do what it took to lead the effort, Brooks immersed herself in this history through reading, taking courses and attending academic conferences. Ideas for spin-offs started to emerge immediately. The first that she chose was to write a comprehensive biography of the life of Doña Gracia Nasi that would be based upon the original 16th century documents, something that had not been done. Only novels and accounts based upon questionable second-hand histories of Nasi’s life had ever been published. “The academics told me there was nothing

much in the archives,” she said, “but this turned out not to be true.” The result was *The Woman who Defied Kings*, which was selected as a finalist in the 2003 National Jewish Book Awards

That work, in turn, led to an interest in further exploration. She signed up for the Jewish historical seminars led by Yom Tov Assis, a senior professor at Hebrew University who focuses upon medieval history of the Mediterranean countries, and his colleague, Shalom Sabar, a specialist in Jewish folklore. Taking their tours through France, Spain, Italy (including Sicily), and Turkey teased out even more under-explored stories.

These were then expanded upon by Brooks in articles and books. Her second book, *Russian Dance*, looked at the Jewish involvement in the Bolshevik Revolution through the eyes of the affluent Jews outside the Pale. Others have examined the contemporary phenomenon of the returning *conversos* – the *Bnai Anousim* of Central and South America who are reclaiming the Judaism of their ancestors; a topic she is increasingly being called upon to explore and explain.

“It is time for the mainstream Jewish world, particularly the Americans, to look at our history through a broader lens,” she said. “I hope I can become a catalyst.” Then she added, “Now all we need is a major motion picture on one of these topics and we will really enter their consciousness.”

For her lecture topics, lecture schedule, and publications, see www.andreeaelionbrooks.com.



Recognizing Rashbi Community School

Kulanu salutes the Rashbi Community School, a religious public school in Beer Yaakov, Israel, dedicated to absorbing immigrants from Ethiopia. Some 94 percent of Rashbi’s students are from Ethiopia and, of these, seven in ten have come to Israel quite recently.

With a commitment to intensive, small-group learning, the school addresses the complicated and difficult task of absorbing these immigrants from a very different culture, helping them through the difficult transition, and giving them tools they need to succeed in Israeli society -- tools they frequently do not receive at home. The school develops curricula and work plans to meet the unique needs of each student and to keep pace with the rigorous government standards all Israeli children are expected to meet.

In addition to standard academics, Rashbi offers a program called “Another Way to Learn” that, in weekly two-hour workshops, teaches social skills and psychological development. The program aims to improve students’ self-image, their sense of belonging, and their pride in their heritage and religion. All the school programs involve families to a degree rarely seen in other schools, and the “Another Way to Learn” program engages parents and siblings most of all. The goal is to strengthen the students’ link to the past while providing them tools to integrate into modern Israeli culture.

In addition, Rashbi offers reading enrichment programs and a school museum of Ethiopian culture that they hope will develop into a media center devoted to the rich heritage of Ethiopian Jews. The school also offers skills workshops for immigrant parents.

Kudos to Tzippi Masori, principal, and to Ezra Shaltiel, the superintendent!

Rabbi Aiello Making a Difference in Italy's South (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

needed the moving water for their work. Aiello noted that Jews were taxed separately, that they were sometimes money-lenders, and that Jews started the institution of banking in Naples.

Church Relations

Aiello's experience with the Catholic Church in Nicastro has been mixed. When she speaks, she refers to the spirit of dialogue espoused by Pope John Paul II, who referred to the Jews as "big brothers" of the Catholics. She says her purpose is to help *Bnai Anousim* understand their past, since this leads to a better future – whether or not they choose to return to Judaism. When she first arrived in Nicastro, two years ago, local priests were eager to have their congregants learn more about their Jewish heritage. In recent months, however, this has changed. Some say that the bishop is less than enthusiastic about discussing what has become the well-publicized historical Jewish presence in the area and has passed on this attitude to his parish priests.

Aiello identified a small church in Timpone that modern historians such as Prof. Vincenzo Vilella, author of *La Judecca di Nicastro*, document as once having been the local synagogue. One clue is its rose window, in which the remnant of a Star of David can be seen. She also points to the squat shape of the building, typical of medieval synagogues but atypical of churches. There were also rumors of Jewish artifacts being found there. Interestingly enough, after Aiello suggested that the Jewish community might rent the dilapidated church for occasional synagogue use, the diocese suddenly commenced a grand renovation project, now complete, even though there is no active parish or priest assigned to the church and a symbolic mass is held only once a week.

Near the church is a garden with a structure Aiello suspects was a *mikveh* (Jewish ritual bath). The owner of the *mikveh* garden, whose 90-year-old mother remembers parts of her Jewish past, was once supportive of the rabbi and her Jewish visitors. He even opened the garden to a Shavuot service two years ago. Unfortunately, he has now asked Aiello to make other plans, having been told that his local business might suffer if he continues to promote the Jewish presence in Timpone. Aiello's reaction to the situation is philosophical. She recalls that recent European history has included incidents where local communities were asked to return confiscated property to its rightful Jewish owners. "It could be that the locals are fearful," she says.

Conversions

Aiello also occasionally serves Liberal congregations and *havurot* in other parts of Italy. Among them is Turin's Congregation Or Chadash, where she is official rabbi. She is responsible for 54 conversions in her five years in Italy. These are accomplished through the World Union of Progressive Judaism, which holds one *Beit Din* each year in Italy or elsewhere in Europe. Aiello is proud of her accomplishment in winning for *Anousim* a "Status Recognition" certificate, which includes the same study requirements as those for converts, but which affirms a Jewish heritage that had been stolen or nearly erased by the Inquisition or other persecutions.

Aiello says that her work is inspired by Gary A. Tobin's 1999 book, *Opening the Gates: How Proactive Conversion Can Revitalize the Jewish Community*. From Tobin she learned how to extend the hand of Jewish welcome to newcomers and she counts Tobin among her supporters.

One of her favorite topics is extremism in religion, including Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. She recently participated in a conference on Physical and Mental Abuse of Women Hidden in Religious Extremism, together with a Catholic nun and a Muslim woman.

Aiello is dedicated to teaching her new Jewish congregants that *tikun olam* involves the whole world, and not just Jews. To that end, her congregants work with her to organize *La Scuola sul Marciopiede*

(the Sidewalk School) so that the children of Rom (Gypsy) mothers can learn to read, write, and count while their mothers beg for money on local street corners.

The Seders

On the first seder night, we found ourselves in the Serrastretta shul, *Ner Tamid del Sud* (Everlasting Light of the South), with 23 other participants, six of whom had arrived unexpectedly. Aiello led, assisted by Salvo Parrucca, one of her *Anous* converts, who hopes to become a rabbi one day. (Parrucca was in the US and spoke before Kulanu gatherings in Washington and New York last year.)

Aside from seven guests from the US and Australia, the group was composed of Italians with a Jewish family background who are exploring the religion. (One of the guests was Enrico Tromba, an archeologist who has done excavating of a Roman-era synagogue in Bova Marina.) We used a Liberal haggadah printed in Italian and Hebrew, with some Hebrew transliterations.

In addition, Aiello, a former puppeteer, created a script for the Passover story (*Maggid di Pesach*), written in such a way that the character can choose to read his/her part in either Italian or English. It was a delightful mishmash, as guests read in English and the locals responded in Italian. Characters were suited to children and adults and included a narrator, Yocheved (Moses's mother), Baby Moses (who at different times said "Waaa!!!" or "Gooo...gooo"), Moses, Sheep ("Baaa"), the Voice of God, the pharaoh, and Miriam. Sound effects (fingers tapping on the table) were prescribed for the gallop of pharaoh's horses.

After we were seated, the Passover platter made a grand entrance, and was passed around from guest to guest, held up over each head to demonstrate that in Egypt we carried heavy burdens on our heads. This is an ancient Passover tradition specific to the South of Italy. Centerpieces consisted of large bowls of charoset beautifully decorated with pine nuts. Ingredients included oranges, dates, figs, almonds,

and apple.

Another custom new to us was the use of scallions to "whip" the next person during the singing of the chorus of *Dayenu*, to recall our days of slavery. This was a real crowd pleaser and ice-breaker.

Aron and I contributed one of our favorite seder rituals – reading the Four Questions in Luganda, the language of the Abayudaya – as a reminder that Jews everywhere celebrate the holiday at the same time.

The seder meal consisted of chicken rice soup (rice is kosher for Pesach in Sephardic cultures), roast lamb with salad, and a fruit cup.

Aiello led a second-night seder for her congregants at the Progressive Or Chadash synagogue in Turin, several hundred miles to the North. Held at the local children's theater venue, 62 parents, children and *Nonni* (grandparents) were in attendance.

We rejoined her on the fifth night for a more intimate seder in Selinute, in the South of Sicily, where we met a delightful family of four. The rabbi explained that there is a custom for a fifth-night seder among *Anousim* in Italy, who knew Inquisition authorities would be watching them on the first two nights. There is a double meaning, since *hamishi* means five, and its derivative *hamishe* means friendly (coming from the five fingers on the hand of friendship). Legend has it that Christian friends helped the Jews plan that event and kept it secret from Inquisition authorities. The tradition of the Hamishi Seder continues to this day, and it proceeded like the first night's seder, except that it was completely in Italian and Hebrew (Aron and I have been studying Italian for a few years). The two young children couldn't get enough of *Dayenu*. The menu consisted of matzah bruschetta with chopped tomatoes, garlic, basil, and olive oil (a delicious custom we will adopt every year), roast lamb with potatoes, and fruit. We have already been corresponding by email with that lovely family.

(To be continued in the next newsletter.)



Passing the Pesach Platter

Jean Mayer Award (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

Uganda where the Abayudaya live, three of whom were on their first trip to the United States. (When asked what had most impressed them so far, they were unanimous in saying “snow.”) In brief remarks to the audience, Sinina Namudosi, age 22, a diminutive Muslim woman with an incandescent smile, noted that her community had helped to make the kippot that the Abayudaya produce for sale, and that this cooperation helped to make people realize that a coffee cooperative could work. Margaret Buhinzi, a young, calmly poised Catholic woman, told how she had first convinced the women in her community that a cooperative could be beneficial for their families. For Anglican coffee farmer Samuel Ngugo, the cooperative has been a boon for his family and neighbors, who can now send their children to school and purchase items to make life better. In a heartfelt address, Abayudaya leader JJ (Joab Jonadab) Keki, on his eighth visit to the US, expressed his hope that cooperation between neighbors of different religions could spread beyond this one small project to other places in the world where peace and positive connection could supplant war – in places like Israel, Iraq, and neighboring Kenya. From Boston, the Uganda farmers traveled to New York, New Jersey, Washington DC, Chicago, California, and Washington State.

Representing Kulanu, Laura Wetzler received some richly deserved acknowledgment of her efforts on behalf of the Abayudaya community. In her self-effacing way, she has spearheaded more than 20 community projects, including micro-finance, adult literacy, women's empowerment, youth counseling, health education, math and science development, solar dried fruit, eco-tourism, crafts, and farmer development, as well as the "Delicious Peace" inter-faith coffee project. With support from Kulanu and others, the Abayudaya community supports a primary school and a high school, feeding 500 Muslim, Christian and Jewish children per day.

In his blog concerning the Jean Mayer award, Ben Corey-Moran of Thanksgiving Coffee wrote, “To Laura Wetzler, and the whole Kulanu family: you are bridge builders and matchmakers, a new kind of *shiddach* for our changing world. We thank you for your tireless efforts on behalf of the Abayudaya, and their Muslim, and Christian neighbors in Uganda. None of this would be without you. We are proud to share this honor with you... (T)o the farmers of Peace Kawomera: you are a light in this world. Your example has taught us so much. I thank you for your strength, and for the courage it took to step into the unknown together. You have so much to teach us. We are in the business of creating a different kind of business, so that business can create a different kind of world.”

To date, more than 700 farmers have joined the Peace Kawomera cooperative. Sales of “Delicious Peace” coffee (which really is delicious) have doubled every year, and recently Laura Wetzler helped the cooperative secure a substantial business development grant from the U.S. government through USAID

For more information about Mirembe Kawomera (“Delicious Peace” in Luganda, a native language of Uganda), please visit www.deliciouspeace.com. The site gives information on purchasing the coffee. And for more information about Thanksgiving Coffee Co., please visit www.thanksgivingcoffee.com.

Sarah Horowitz (cont.)

Sarah had a heart condition and severe arthritis, and it would be very difficult to travel in the rugged terrain and hot sun. She also had a severe hearing impairment. Yet she was resolute in her convictions. In Spring 2005, she served for three months as a teacher and advisor at the Hadassah Infant School, and as a mentor to the Abayudaya Women's Association. She kept a blog to keep her community at home abreast of her work and the needs of the community.

About her experience with the Abayudaya, she stated, “It's really inspiring to see, and it was wonderful to be a part of it. Africans have this very highly developed sense of hospitality. They're just really wonderful to be around. When I left, I told them that I hope they come to America and help us develop hospitality, stronger families, community and vibrant religious life because they're so rich in those things.”

Upon her return, she maintained her high level of involvement. I remember her contacting me to acquire some Kulanu materials for a presentation. I only learned after her death that she had made a book of photographs of the Abayudaya community which she presented to her kindergarten students.

Sarah joined an AJWS social activist training to further develop her skills. According to a close friend, Katherine Hollander of Congregation Beth Shalom, groups Sarah was affiliated with included Religious Witness with Homeless People, a local interfaith activist group advocating on issues of homeless in San Francisco (<http://religiouswitnesshome.org/>) and Death Penalty Focus (<http://www.deathpenalty.org/>)

In her eulogy, her father David Horowitz described Sarah's devotion to *tikkun olam*: “I never knew a kinder person with a bigger heart than my sweet Sarah...she crusaded for the equality of all people, for sexual and racial minorities, and for women in Judaism and beyond. She was an opponent of war, while recognizing that there is evil in the world and sometimes nations are forced to defend themselves. She protested against capital punishment, standing vigil outside the gates of San Quentin, in the bitter cold Bay nights, whenever an execution took place, believing that even though the condemned had committed heinous crimes it was wrong for the state to take a human life. She also corresponded with several inmates.

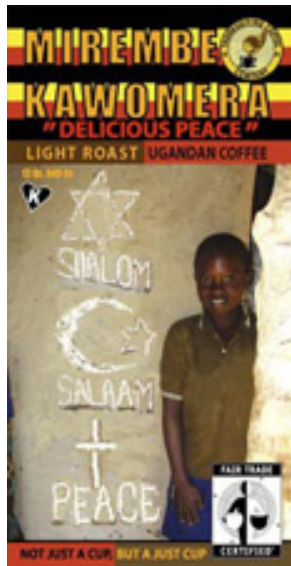
“Every month for years she got on a bus to go crosstown to feed the homeless at Hamilton House, an obligation her congregation at Beth Shalom had undertaken, and which she organized. Every month she cooked a meal for 60 homeless people, learning how to make meat dishes on the Internet even though she was a vegetarian, because that was what the people she was there to serve wanted.

“Despite the enormous difficulties she faced getting anywhere, she traveled to far-away places—to El Salvador to build homes for poor Catholics and halfway across the globe to Uganda to live in a mud floor hut without electricity or running water, to teach the impoverished children of the Abayudaya tribe of African Jews. She took her mother with her to India to the slums of Bombay to seek help for sexually abused Hindu girls. While there she became violently ill, to the point that her mother, a professional nurse, became fearful for her life and insisted that a doctor visit her bedside. But experiences like this could not dissuade Sarah from her mission. When the end came, she was already planning trips to distant lands to help others in need.”

Sarah's vision can best be expressed in an interview with Nextbook shortly before her death. “At the heart of Judaism is Abraham's vision of oneness, the idea that we're all deeply connected,” she said. “What we do affects others across the globe.”

Sarah, we miss you dearly. May your memory be for a blessing and inspiration, always.

A interview of Sarah entitled “Vision of Unity” can be found on <http://www.nextbook.org>. Sarah's brother Ben created a website to honor her memory, which includes her own writings and testimonials of family and friends: <http://sarahhorowitz.ning.com>



The Kulanu Boutique

Proceeds from these items benefit Kulanu and the communities that they represent.
Order by mail or online at www.kulanuboutique.com

BOOKS/MUSIC

NEW! Always an Olivia Charming children's book retelling the family saga of one Jew of African descent

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

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

Make Joy Not War CD Alula Tzadik's CD of Ethiopian and traditional Jewish songs with a world beat

Jews in Places You Never Thought Of Stories from Jewish communities around the world; ed. Karen Primack

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

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

Under One Canopy: Readings in Jewish Diversity Our latest book, edited by Karen Primack, of reflections, essays, and poems by Jews worldwide

JUDAICA/JEWELRY

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

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

Challah Covers Colorful, embroidered challah covers from Ghana

Four-Strip Kente Cloth Tallitot Magnificent Jewish prayer shawls from Ghana

	#	Cost	Total
A Short Story from African Israel		\$10.00	
Abayudaya Kippah		\$15.00	
Abayudaya: The Jews of Uganda		\$52.00	
Aish Chai Lapel Pin		\$34.00	
Aish Chai Tallit Clips		\$86.00	
Always an Olivia		\$18.00	
Challah Cover		\$30.00	
Four-Strip Kente Cloth Tallit		\$180.00	
Make Joy Not War CD		\$15.00	
Jews in Places You've Never Heard Of		\$29.50	
Shalom Everybody Everywhere! CD		\$15.00	
The Igbos: Jews in Africa?		\$15.00	
Under One Canopy: Readings in Jewish Diversity		\$15.00	
		TOTAL	\$

U.S. Shipping Costs:
 \$0.00-\$15.00 add \$5
 \$15.01-\$49.99 add \$9
 \$50.00-\$99.99 add \$13
 \$100.00-179.99 add \$16
 \$180.00 or more add \$24
International orders:
 Add an additional \$15 per order (\$5 for Canada)

Shipping _____ GRAND TOTAL \$ _____

Name _____
 Address _____
 City/State/Zip _____
 Telephone _____
 Email (please) _____

MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO "KULANU"
 MAIL FORM AND CHECK TO:
 KULANU BOUTIQUE
 C/O HARRIET BOGRAD
 165 WEST END AVENUE, APT 3R
 NEW YORK, NY 10023

PLEASE ALLOW FOUR WEEKS
 FOR DELIVERY

Teacher's Perspective (cont.)

PUBLICATIONS (cont.)

(Continued from page 7)

An expert is needed to work on community financial projects. I think it is important to interact with each family and find out what will work best for them based on their talent and skills and of course their inclinations.

Some good Jewish Hebrew/English books should be translated; everyone can read their language – Telugu.

I am not sure if anybody can be brought to ORT in Mumbai as I did not find anybody qualified to get a course in ORT. I will look into this and see how somebody can be brought here to study.

One of the ideas I thought was of myself and my wife (who is also a Jewish educator plus a modern Hebrew teacher) spending a month with them in their village – the month of May is when most of the people have no work in the fields and are free all day, though that is also the hottest period here.

Another idea was to bring the kids to Mumbai during their summer vacations and keep here for some period and give them a Jewish experience of Mumbai.

It was quite an experience for me. It felt so great to experience a Jewish community other than the three established communities here in India.

(Continued from page 11)

ter, their marriages, will all be questioned. The pain that this will cause the convert will be unbearable....

The policy sends a clear message that rabbis who have Orthodox ordination and are not among the chosen 40 do not have sufficient knowledge, judgment and wisdom to perform conversions – and they never have.

Ironically, it is the synagogue rabbis who are “in the trenches” with the potential converts who have a unique understanding of the situations and conditions that affect their respective constituents. This decision undermines their mission....

The criteria on conversion as drafted by the RCA/Chief Rabbinate are the most stringent and do not reflect the range of legitimate halachic opinions. The approach insists, for example, that parents converting an adopted child commit to 12 years of yeshiva education. But suppose parents are only prepared to make an eight-year commitment; suppose they are committed to sending their child to a community day school; suppose, as is a growing trend in our Jewish world, they simply cannot afford tuition; and suppose their child has a learning disability and must be sent to a secular school?

SUPPORTER APPLICATION

I/WE SUPPORT KULANU'S WORK. (DONATE ONLINE AT KULANU.ORG OR MAIL CHECK WITH THIS FORM TO KULANU, C/O BOGRAD, 165 WEST END AVE., 3R, NEW YORK, NY 10023)

NAME _____ DATE _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

PHONE(S): () _____ EMAIL _____

INTERESTS AND AFFILIATIONS USEFUL TO KULANU'S WORK _____

___ \$36 ___ \$72 ___ \$100 ___ \$500 ___ \$1000 ___ OTHER \$ _____

Deadline for next issue: July 15, 2008

Recycled Paper

Edited by Karen Primack

Kulanu

Helping Lost Jewish Communities

C/o Harriet Bograd

165 West End Ave, 3R

New York, NY 10023

**Address Service
Requested**

Nonprofit Org.
US Postage Paid
Suburban MD
Permit No. 05107