



KULANU

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Birthday Blessings Teaching Hebrew in Quito, Ecuador

*By Elana Gerson**August 2014*

It was mid-July. My birthday on August 18th loomed ahead like an impending summer storm. It was going to be a big one-- the kind that makes you stop, take stock, count the remaining years, and consider your priorities. I wanted to mark the occasion with something more than a pint of Ben & Jerry's. Something that, from the perspective of the rear-view mirror a decade down the road, would both make me smile and mean something. But what?

Having spent the first two years of my life in Italy, I was infected early on with chronic wanderlust and a fascination with foreign languages and cultures. That, and Ari Ben Canaan, Paul Newman's character in the classic movie Exodus, are responsible for my having made aliyah to Israel alone at the age of 17 and my eventual lifelong career as a foreign language educator and Hebrew linguist with the U.S. Department of Defense.



Students in Quito, Ecuador show off their new Hebrew name bracelets- a gift from Morah Elana Gerson in recognition of their astounding accomplishment- the mastery of Hebrew reading and cursive handwriting- in only a few sessions!

Photo by Elana Gerson

IN THIS ISSUE

Birthday Blessings in Quito, Ecuador	1
Bnei Anousim in Brazil	5
Judaism in Cote d'Ivoire and Gabon	6
Madagascar: Gan Eden Rediscovered.....	12
From Cameroon to Israel	13
Zimbabwe with Love	17
Volunteer Opportunities	21
Igbo/Jewish Connection: Reviews	23
President's Message	24
Thank You Donors	25
Jewish World Music CD	26

Pondering the options, I realized that the experiences I've found most enjoyable and satisfying over the years have been those that centered around travel combined with volunteer work and mitzvot (good deeds). Volunteering my services as a Modern Hebrew language instructor with one of Kulanu's communities seemed the perfect choice! But only a few precious weeks of my summer break remained. If I was going to plan a "meaningful birthday adventure," I'd need to move quickly.

Kulanu staff members sent out a flurry of emails querying communities on their needs, and within a few days presented me with several exciting options.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



*Packed in with Avraham and Hannah Reyes and their family
for a “cozy” day trip to Mindo. Not pictured: 3 more passengers!!!
Photo by Elana Gerson**

In the end, I decided on the Sephardic community of Quito, Ecuador as the best match, for both practical and emotional reasons: the airfare was affordable, no visa was required, the community was excited to host me, my Spanish is passable (as long as I’m speaking in the one tense I know), and since many community members are planning aliyah, I felt my skills were truly needed. It also didn’t hurt that the weather in August was projected to be a cool and comfortable 65-75 degrees.

My soon-to-be hosts were Hillel Batioja, a professional “computer guy” chosen in large part because he is one of the few community members whose English is better than my Spanish, and his wife, Haviva, homemaker extraordinaire (the Sephardic equivalent of what we Ashkenazim call a “balabuste”) and stay-at-home mom to the couple’s two adorable young children. Haviva is herself the daughter of Avraham Reyes (a former Christian minister) and his wife, Hannah, patriarchs of one of the large families (all related) who together established La Sinagoga Sefaradita del Ecuador about 7 years ago.

**Ellyn (“Elana”) Gerson has won numerous awards for her innovative work with U.S. military linguists at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. She is currently the Hebrew Language Educator at Temple Ahavat Achim in Gloucester, Massachusetts.*

At the helm of “La Comunidad,” as it’s affectionately known, is the warm and dynamic Yosef Franco, whom congregants respectfully address as “Moreh” (Teacher). The Community, which meets on the bottom floor of Moreh Yosef’s large apartment in the Kennedy Sector of Quito, currently numbers about 40 members, predominantly professionals and small business owners. A few were raised Jewish, or were aware that they had a Jewish parent or grandparent. Most were brought up in another religion but came to believe that they are descended from Bnei Anousim, Crypto Jews who were forced to convert to Catholicism during the Spanish Inquisition. Still other members became intellectually and spiritually dissatisfied with Christianity and

felt themselves drawn to Judaism.

The entire community (each family at a different time, sometimes months or years apart) underwent what they call a “community conversion” under the supervision of a local Orthodox rabbi, complete with brit milah (circumcision) and immersion in a river, which served as a the required ritual bath (mikvah). The majority completed this process about five years ago. Although this conversion is recognized by several Orthodox rabbis in Ecuador (a definite source of pride to the Comunidad), it is reportedly not accepted by the Orthodox Jewish “establishment” outside of South America. This presents a problem, both because community members desperately long to be accepted as full members of Am Yisrael (the nation of Israel)



CONTINUED ON PAGE 3



*Moreh Yosef Franco, leader of the Sinagoga Sefardita del Ecuador,
presents a certificate of appreciation to Morah Elana Gerson
Photo courtesy of Elana Gerson*

and because many cherish the dream of making aliyah. But attaining conversions that will be universally recognized is difficult.

Some community members, such as Moreh Yosef and his family, have already undergone Orthodox conversion overseas. Most, however, continue in their fervent struggle to find a way to complete the arduous process by either traveling abroad to convert or importing a beit din (the requisite 3-member rabbinic tribunal). For the vast majority, both of these options are prohibitively expensive. In the meantime, community members have been leading fully observant Jewish lives for over five years. The homes I visited were virtually indistinguishable from observant Jewish households in the U.S. The Batioja's lives, like the lives of the others, are completely and joyfully devoted to Judaism, their beloved Comunidad, and each other.

I left Boston on August 10th and arrived in Quito on the night of August 11th. Hillel and Haviva met me at the airport, and my adventure began with an hour's drive to their home, which was conveniently situated about a 30-minute walk from La Comunidad. From the moment I arrived, everyone treated me like a beloved member of the family. They told me repeatedly how much my visit meant to them. I was instantly given the cherished title "La Morah", the (female) teacher.

The following day I learned my first new Spanish word, temblor (earthquake) when what felt like much more than a 5.1 quake shook our 4th floor apartment. It was a word that was to come in handy over the next two weeks as small and not-so-small temblores were a frequent occurrence. After a day or so adjusting to the altitude (literally!) and regaining my equilibrium, I set up shop and began teaching!

I had about 18 students who attended faithfully, excited to have an opportunity to learn Hebrew from a real morah! (Prior to my arrival, they had taught themselves as much as

possible from books and Internet sites.) The students ranged in age from 7-year-old Yitzchak to his abuelita (grandma), Leah, a lovely lady in her 50's. Their skill levels were also quite varied. Some students had no knowledge whatsoever; some could decode haltingly; some could read and write well; one or two could say a sentence or two. The most advanced students had the equivalent of a few months of college Hebrew. I was very glad that I'd packed teaching materials appropriate for all levels!

I decided that the best way to address the educational needs of such a diverse group would be to structure the classes as a reading/writing lab followed by an "ulpan-style" conversational class, with students attending either or both as their needs and desires dictated. Originally, there were to be separate sections for adults and children, but both classes quickly evolved into intergenerational learning, a model that proved to be extremely successful.

We decided on four hours a day, Monday through Thursday afternoons/evenings, as the optimal schedule. I offered to teach on Sundays too, but my hosts and the other families wouldn't hear of it! Sunday was a day off and they wanted to spend it showing me the sights.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



The “chevruta” model of two people learning side-by-side proved very successful. It was particularly inspirational to see adults and children absorbed in learning together.

Photo by Elana Gerson

I spent my mornings exploring the bustling and beautiful city of Quito, very often with one or two students or community members as my volunteer guides. As exciting as the city was, I couldn't wait to get back to La Comunidad each afternoon to teach. I've taught hundreds of students over the years, but never have I had students so motivated, so focused, so eager to learn, and so appreciative. What a novelty to be greeted and taken leave of each afternoon and evening with a cheerful and respectful “Shalom, Morah!” and a kiss on the cheek from children and adult women alike!

By the time my all-too-short, three-and-a-half-week visit had come to an end, all those students who had attended regularly were reading fluently. Some, including little Yitzchak and his brothers, who had begun the classes knowing next to nothing, completed my reading/writing program (which typically takes a year and a half to complete in an American afternoon Hebrew school) in an astonishing five sessions! The conversational class, too, was very productive and just plain fun.

On the final day of class, the members of La Comunidad surprised me with a party, complete with a video, a

beautiful framed certificate, personal gifts, and heartfelt speeches from each of my students. Thankfully, they also supplied kleenex.

The best gift though, was the opportunity to give of myself in a way that truly made a difference. I will always treasure the beautiful memories of my birthday trip to Quito and the close new friendships that I believe will last a lifetime.

As I write these words, it is a few hours before sunset on the eve of Yom Kippur. Tonight, when I hear the ancient, heart-rending Kol Nidre chant that begins the holiday service, there will doubtless be the usual prayers in my heart: health, happiness, personal peace and world peace! But this year there will be an additional prayer: “Por favor, Hashem- bendice a mis nuevos amigos (Please, Hashem, bless my new friends) who live in the middle of the globe! Gather them in speedily, together with all the scattered exiles of our People, and help them realize their dream of becoming fully accepted members of Am Yisrael! And please, dear G-d, if it isn't too much trouble - - help me learn the Spanish subjunctive in time for my next trip.

(See page 5 for information on my side trip to Cuenca.)



My hosts, Hillel and Haviva Batioja. Haviva is the daughter of Avaham and Hannah Reyes, who were among the founding members of La Sinogoga Sefaradita del Ecuador about 7 years ago

Photo by Elana Gerson

CONTINUED ON PAGE 5

Photo by Elana Gerson

A woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a black jacket, a patterned scarf, and blue jeans, is kneeling on the grass next to a large, rectangular, weathered gravestone. She is holding a white cloth and appears to be cleaning the stone. The gravestone has an engraved Star of David at the top, followed by the name "ORTOKAURI" in large letters, and below it, "1861-1910" and "APRIL 19". The stone is surrounded by green grass and some red flowers. A concrete wall is visible in the background.

Photo by Elana Gerson

Developing Judaism in Cote d'Ivoire and Gabon

by Bonita Nathan Sussman



*Rabbi Jerry Sussman dressed in the traditional robes of the Danites during the Torah dedication ceremony in the Beith Israel synagogue
Photo by Bonita Sussman*

"Where are you going next?" is the question my husband, Rabbi Jerry Sussman, and I are asked most frequently these days by both family and friends. Oftentimes, we can't answer the question, as our travel plans depend on the urgency of the requests we receive from isolated and/or emerging Jewish communities around the globe. In the last four years such requests have taken us to India, Cameroon, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea and, most recently, to the Ivory Coast and Gabon, the major subjects of this article.

The second question we hear is: Are you afraid? The fact is that we're not afraid. We're just going to another place, another neighborhood, if you will, where wonderful experiences await us....people who embrace us, and show us the most magnificent forms of hospitality, people who give up their beds for us to sleep in and go out of their way to get kosher food for us to eat, who give us presents when we leave and embrace us as members of their families.

Our latest trip this summer to Cote d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast) and Gabon (with a side trip to visit our friends in Cameroon) was another extraordinary adventure

with a warm and caring welcome by people we had never met. Our travel companion for the trip was Dr. Marla Brettschneider, a professor of political philosophy from the University of New Hampshire, who is researching black Jewish communities in Africa. We had met Marla at a conference in Florida on black Jews and knew we wanted to do something meaningful together. And indeed Marla turned out to be an excellent travel companion and a great addition to our expedition.

But let us start at the beginning. Our decision to travel to Cote d'Ivoire began with an email to Kulanu from Cornet Alexandre Zokou, a leader of one of two Jewish congregations that have formed in Abidjan, the commercial and banking capital of the Ivory Coast.* The email, dated March 27, 2014, read: "I am one of the leaders of an emerging Jewish community in Abidjan. We have been trying to set up a formal Jewish community in Abidjan for more than 10 years now, but we have been facing financial and educational obsta-

CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

*Yamoussoukro (population 295,500) is the capital of the Ivory Coast, but Abidjan (population approximately 4 million) is the commercial hub of the country.

cles. I have been to Israel once and my fellow leader also went to Israel for a longer period where he learned Hebrew for three months....We are familiar with all Jewish holidays. In Cote d'Ivoire people are yearning to familiarize themselves with and convert to Judaism. I am already looking forward to reading your reply as it will give me the opportunity to give you further information on our history."

As vice president of Kulanu and the board member responsible for new communities, I have committed myself to responding to all such requests. When I received Alexandre's email, I responded immediately. And thus began an exciting correspondence by email and Skype. Communication was easy as Alexandre is an English teacher and serves as a translator from French to English for the Israel Embassy in Abidjan.



*Alexandre Zokou, religious leader of the Beith Israel congregation, dons tefillin with the help of Rabbi Jerry Sussman
Photo by Bonita Sussman*



* Rabbi Yehuda Ashlag (1885-1954), was a world-renowned scholar and Kabbalist, author of many texts and commentary on Jewish mysticism, who believed in the widest possible dissemination of the ideas inherent in the Kabbalah.

In one of our conversations, Alexandre shared with me that he had found his way to Judaism from Christianity through the local Kabbalah Centre, founded some 15 years ago in Abidjan. The Centre was at that time part of a network of Kabbalah Centres worldwide established by the late Rabbi Philip Berg, an adherent of Rav Yehudah Ashlag*, to promote the study of Jewish mysticism and personal transformation through the study of Kabbalah. Although the Centre was devoted to Jewish subject matter, it attracted many local non-Jews, some of whom decided to embrace Judaism. Alexandre served as its director for 18 months.

Beith Israel

The name of Alexandre's congregation in Abidjan is Beith Israel (House of Israel). The congregation is composed of approximately 40 middle-aged men and women, who meet regularly at least once during the week and for Sabbath and holiday services. The women cover their hair in the orthodox manner, and sit separately, although there is no physical mechtiz (partition).

While most of the women cannot read Hebrew, they participate in the service, singing the prayers in Hebrew by heart. The male congregants, for the most

part, do know Hebrew and some are able to read it with ease.

Alexandre, who is fluent in Hebrew, serves as the congregation's prayer leader. On Shabbat, he leads a traditional service and gives what I would call a kabbalistic-style divrei Torah (words of Torah) with an element of self-improvement attached, and a Hasidic twist. His style of leadership and approach to prayer make his congregation different from the other Jewish congregation in Abidjan, which is also kabbalistic in approach, but does not have such a personalized message.

Alexandre's co-leader in the synagogue is Ishmael, also known as Semuel, a Muslim by birth, who studied Kabbalah in Israel at the Ramchal Center in Jerusalem. Semuel is very facile in Hebrew and the prayer service.

One of our goals in traveling to the Ivory Coast was to deliver a Torah, donated by Congregation Kehillat Jeshurun in New York City to Kulanu, to Alexandre's congregation. In honor of this gift, the congregation, which had been meeting in people's homes, built a small synagogue and ark on the rooftop of a home



Co-leader. Ismael demonstrating his skills at blowing the shower
Photo by Bonita Sussman



Fashion Show. A local Danite woman helps the Sussmans and Dr. Brett Schneider put on their new Danite robes.
Photo courtesy of Bonita Sussman

owned by Alexandre's brother Ceylon. The group also hopes to build a mikvah (ritual bath) for conversions and the observance of niddah (ritual purity).

A major highlight of our visit was the actual presentation of the Torah. Such an occasion is always a joyous and celebratory event. Rabbi Jerry created a wonderful hachnasat Sefer Torah (ceremony for the placement of a Torah in its new home), complete with dancing and singing.

Our visit to the community would not have been complete without a discussion of the needs of the community, how they view their relationship to the Jewish world and how Kulanu can help them on their Jewish journey. Marla led a wonderful session with the women of the congregation to discuss the specific concerns they face as women on their journey to become Jewish.

Ets Chaim

The second congregation we visited in Abidjan was Ets Chaim (Tree of Life), also formed by former adherents of the original Kabbalah Centre. This group is located in a wealthier area of the city than Beith Israel and its leader is Yago Abraham, a professor of linguistics at The University of Abidjan. The congregation numbers approximately 70 mostly middle-aged men and women. It is interesting to note that we did not see or meet any children in either synagogue.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 9

The Ets Chaim synagogue has a beautiful space for their services and a Torah, which they purchased on their own from Israel. Once again, the male members of the congregation appeared more learned than the women, who sit behind a high white and gold curtain/mechitza.

When asked about their specific needs, congregation leaders asked if Kulanu could provide them with a second Torah so prayer leaders can celebrate Rosh Chodesh (new month) with the traditional two Torahs.

In addition to the Torah, congregational leaders requested that Kulanu arrange for a Beit Din (rabbinic court) to visit Abidjan to convert their members to Judaism. I explained to the leaders that conversion is a lengthy process that they could pursue over time with study and preparation. After our return home, we received a message from Alexandre that the two synagogues had agreed to set up joint classes for their congregants to prepare for conversion.



Wooden bimah. The Torah readers of Ets Chaim synagogue use this lovely prayer stand during services
Photo by Bonita Sussman

Kabbalah Centre

Rabbi Jerry and I visited the then director of the Kabbalah Centre. He was grateful to Alexandre for the introduction. We were impressed with the size and museum-like quality of the facility.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 10



Mechitza. Female members of Ets Chaim are separated from the male congregants by a gold colored curtain
Photo by Bonita Sussman

Danites

The last group we met in Abidjan were the Danites, an ethnic group of around two million native to Cote d'Ivoire, some of whom claim descent from the Tribe of Dan. Their traditional clothing seems to suggest tallitot (prayer shawls), which some take as a sign of Jewish origin. Though belief in their Israelite origin is widespread, most Danites are Christian or Muslim. A relatively small group is interested in exploring the practices of Judaism. A French documentary film was made about the group in 2008. The Danites we met were happy to talk about their Jewish connections and participate in the services at Beith Israel.



Cameroon, Beit Yeshourun Sa'a*

From Cote d'Ivoire, Rabbi Jerry, Marla and I traveled to Cameroon, which Rabbi Jerry and I had visited for the first time in the summer of 2010. We had an emotional reunion with our Cameroon friends.

At the time of our visit this July, Serge Etele, the leader of the community, was in Jerusalem studying at Yeshiva Ohr Torah Stone founded by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

*A group of people from Beit Yeshourun Douala welcoming the Sussmans and Marla at the Douala airport in Cameroon
Photo courtesy of Bonita Sussman*

of Efrat. His three-month stay was facilitated by Kulanu.

Among the highlights of our visit to Congregation Beit Yeshourun in Sa'a was our introduction to Eliezer Sussman, Serge's three-year-old son, who was named in our honor. A thrilling experience! We also were serenaded with original music by two of the community's musicians, Nama Naser and David Baliaba, who handed us a CD with 12 of his songs, many of which were biblical psalms set to music.

Beit Yeshourun, Douala

An unexpected treat was meeting a second group of individuals in Douala, Cameroon, who have embraced Judaism through contact with Serge. The leaders of this group discovered Serge while researching Cameroon and Jews on the Internet. A beautiful 80-year-old woman is the inspirational head of the community and the widow of a prominent pastor who lost his large community when he gave up Christianity to embrace Judaism. The group joined Beit Yeshourun sometime after the passing of its founder and is now known as Beit Yeshourun, Douala.



*Eliezer Sussman, Serge Etele's son named after the Sussmans
Photo by Bonita Sussman*

** See Fall, 2010 issue of KulanuNews for an article on the Cameroon Jewish community.*

Gabon

Although Serge was in Israel, he arranged for us to meet the leader of a newly emerging Jewish group in Gabon, whose research on the Internet had led them to him. Moreh Nachman, Serge's father, and a group of Beit Yeshourunites escorted us to meet Pascal Meka Ngomo, the leader of the group, at the border. All we knew was that Pascal had been an evangelical preacher who was directed in a dream to leave the "faux dieu" (false god) and find the God of Israel. When he changed his Sabbath from Sunday to Saturday worship, he lost his friends, influence, and pharmacy business. And he was ostracized by his community. The group are Sabbath observers the way they understand it, and no longer eat pork, but their knowledge of what it means to be Jewish is still rudimentary. Serge has visited the community four times to teach. The latest visit was in September.



*Rabbi Gerald Sussman and Pascal Meka Me Ngomo,
leader of the Jewish community in Gabon
Photo by Bonita Sussman*

What was new for us was Pascal's desire to adopt an evangelical approach to his new faith. He wants to go out and spread news of the true God of Israel and the commandments. The two communities involved are Oyem and Bitam, small cities near the Cameroon border. In Oyem, women lead the prayer service in Pascal's absence. Rabbi Jerry taught congregants the shema and hung what is probably the first mezuzah in Gabon.

TO CONCLUDE:

As on our other trips to Africa, we were moved by the sincerity, dedication and graciousness of those reaching toward Judaism. This is a fast growing phenomenon, which is destined to have a great impact on the Jewish world. Kulanu is proud to be part of this development.



*Bonita Sussman and women from the Gabon Jewish community
Photo courtesy of Bonita Sussman*

Gan Eden Rediscovered

By Peter Terry, Madagascar



*Torah Delivery. Peter Terry presents community leaders with a Torah from Kulanu
Photo courtesy of Peter Terry*

The Garden of Eden? That is what Malagasies think of their island country. Not only do local residents believe that Madagascar is the original Gan Eden, many believe they are descendants of...who else? The Biblical Hebrews.

And that is just the beginning of this ever-surprising story.

According to many Malagasies, the first Jews arrived on these shores after Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar forced most of Abraham's descendants to leave their promised land. The next wave of emigration was from Ethiopia, from among the descendants of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. And after them came Jews from Medina, who apparently fled shortly after the rise of Islam. Is there any evidence that these stories are true? There are many pieces to the puzzle to be found and assembled before I am prepared to pass judgment. In the meantime, I am intrigued. And charmed. That millions of Malagasies should consider themselves to be related to Jews the world over.

In recent years, however, very few Jews have made their way to Madagascar and stayed long enough to be remembered. A few Israelis came to Madagascar to do business shortly after the country became officially independent from France in the early 1960s. But by 1972, a new government had formed and made all foreign investors unwelcome. The Israelis, like other foreign nationals left and have not returned since.

Forty years in the desert...time for a change? That is what Malagasies are hoping for. They have been

exploited successively by Arabs, by French, by Indians, by Chinese, and now they want some relief. They want help in developing their country, but they want to do it their way. Many are looking to America and to Israel, and to Jews in particular, to help them in this endeavor.

I'm a convert to Judaism who lives in New England currently but spent some years in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. When planning my recent trip to Madagascar, I discovered Kulanu and the emerging Jewish community in Antananarivo. Thanks to Kulanu, I was able to deliver a Torah scroll donated by Congregation Kehillat Jeshurun on New York's Upper East Side. For the past three months, I taught elementary Hebrew and Jewish history, Halacha (Jewish law) and minhag (custom) to members of this community.

The community observes Shabbat every week without fail. Together we planned and observed Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot. They make great challah, blow the shofar with stellar accuracy and enthusiasm, have a baal tefillah (prayer leader) who chants in Sephardic fashion better than I could ever have expected. They wear kippot (skull caps) and tallitot (prayer shawls) when they pray. And they try to observe as many of the mitzvot (Jewish laws and rituals) as possible. But they don't have a rabbi or a hazzan (cantor) or a shochet (ritual slaughterer) or even a proper Hebrew School (as I am a rank amateur)...so they need help in order to become part of Klal Yisrael (the Jewish people). They want to lead Jewish lives disciplined by Halacha and minhag. They want to speak Hebrew and pray in Hebrew and study Torah and Haftorah (Select weekly readings from the Prophets) and Talmud in Hebrew...like other Jews.

Will other Malagasies follow in their footsteps and seek to become Jews? Could be. I know it would be good for the country. And good for Klal Yisrael as well, for Malagasies have much to contribute, not least of all their beautiful country with vast and mostly undeveloped natural and human resources.

The Jewish community of Madagascar invites you to rediscover Gan Eden for yourselves. I've made the trip twice in the past year, and I'm going back soon. Why don't you join me?

From Cameroon to Israel

By Serge Etele

Cameroon

Introduction by Jack Zeller



*Serge Etele and Rav Shlomo Riskin, Chief Rabbi of Efrat
Photo by Jill Kuchar*

Serge Etele, 34, the leader of the Jewish community of Cameroon, was selected by Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Chief Rabbi of Efrat, to study for three months in Israel this summer at Yeshivat Machanayim Ohr Torah Stone in Efrat. Serge has been studying Judaism online for many years. At home he is the religious leader of a small synagogue of 60 people, in Sa'a, and several other newly emerging synagogues in Cameroon. In addition, Serge is a computer web page programmer/designer, an activist on behalf of inter-religious dialogue and a life-long farmer. Serge created a program to educate children in Tikkun Olam (repair the world) values in Cameroon schools and he is involved with many Christian religious leaders in Yaounde, Cameroon, who want to learn Torah and lead their Christians congregations closer to Jewish teachings. Serge hopes to promote Israel/Cameroon relations by creating an Hebraic Cultural Center in Cameroon to educate people about Jewish history and culture. JZ

This summer I spent three months in Israel, studying at the Yeshiva Machanayim Ohr Torah Stone, one of the many institutions for Jewish education created by Rav Shlomo Riskin, Chief Rabbi of Efrat. And what an adventure it was!

I arrived in Israel in mid-May. . .

Landing in Tel Aviv at night and seeing all the lights of the city from above was wonderful. Once I got off the plane, I found security tight. I had to answer many questions at each security point before being allowed to leave the airport. Kulanu founder and former president Jack Zeller was waiting at the airport to take me to his apartment in Yerushalayim where I spent my first night in Israel! I was now in the Holy Land, the biblical and historical land of Israel and in its holiest city and I was very excited.

The next morning, Jack took me to the yeshiva in Efrat. Everyone there seemed aware of my coming and welcomed me warmly.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

The yeshiva turned out to be a place of great diversity, like the country itself, with students from America, India, Brazil, Canada, France, Uganda, Australia, Morocco, England, Cameroon, etc., as well as from Israel. I found that people were exceptionally nice to me and to each other. It was not unusual to see people embracing. All this had a deep effect on me. I realized anew that the wellbeing of humanity depends so much on the way people are educated. It was wonderful to see how people that had been educated in love and caring treated each other and treated other people. I felt at home but also in a new home, one I could not have imagined.

My study program included Halakha (Jewish law), Shchita (ritual slaughter), Mussar (ethics) and Tanakh (bible). And, during my free time, I also studied Gemora (commentaries) and Jewish thought. My teachers included Rabbis Dr. Stuart Fischman and Nachum



*Studying Mussar with Rabbi Nachum Tauchman
Photo courtesy of my colleagues at Ohr Stone*

Tauchman who gave me private instruction, Dr Harry Greenspan a shochet and mohel and volunteer teacher Abe Reichman.

Some of my teachers were from other countries and had worked as dentists, accountants, and in other professions. But they had given up everything to be in Israel, in Efrat, studying and teaching.



*Rehearsing for an Africa-Israel concert to take place in Jerusalem
Photo courtesy of my colleagues at Ohr Stone*

Shabbat in Efrat was special, and most weekends, I had many invitations for Shabbat dinner from people I never met before. On one occasion, I met a local woman in the commercial center of Efrat, and after asking my companion and me where we were from, she invited us for Shabbat dinner.

In Efrat, I lived in a trailer dormitory with

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15



*Trip south. Visiting soldiers near Gaza during the last war
Photo by Eric Amien*

the other students, some of whom were married with families. Others were like me, single or without their spouse and on their own.

A few weeks after my arrival, the three Israeli boys were kidnapped while hitchhiking. This took place about 5 minutes drive from our yeshiva. That night, I could not fall asleep. Every day after that we all followed the news, hoping the story would have a good end. It was a difficult period. We knew our brothers were living a horrible fate and the entire nation was trying to dedicate all its spiritual and material resources to find and rescue these boys. During the day we studied all day in the yeshiva, but at night we gathered around our computers trying to find some good news.

After Shabbat, when we finally heard that the bodies of the three boys had been found, sadness swept through the yeshiva. It was devastating. Most of us had never met these young boys. But they were our boys nevertheless.

Later, we saw terrorists in Gaza on TV. They were rejoicing and celebrating the death of the three innocents. It is hard for me to understand. We live in a time when some people celebrate evil and death just

as we celebrate life and good. Even a policeman that kills a bandit doesn't celebrate.

The horror did not end as then a young Arab boy was murdered in Jerusalem by Jewish extremists.

I had traveled to Israel to study in peace, but there was to be no peace. Tensions continued to rise and rockets from Gaza began to rain down on Israeli cities. And then Israel retaliated. The war had begun.

The military campaign had a massive support amongst the Israeli population and among most Jews around the world. Many young Jews even flew from different countries to come and help defend the Jewish state. I never saw this kind of solidarity before.

Many students from my yeshiva also left for the army. During one cease-fire, French speaking Rav Haim Dynovisz,* one of my Internet teachers whom I finally met in real life in Jerusalem, organized a trip to the south, to bring food and give support to wounded soldiers, soldiers in the field, and comfort to grieving families.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 16

** (<http://www.ravdynovisz.tv/>)*



*Certificate of Completion. Rabbi Daniel Channen presented me with a certificate for completing a course on Halakah under the auspices of Yeshiva Pirchei Shoshanim
Photo courtesy of Serge Etele*

I decided to join him. First, we visited a French family in mourning to offer our condolences. There were many people there who came from different parts of the country to comfort the family. The father was crying, it was a sad and depressing sight. Sorrowfully, we took our leave of the family and continued on toward the Gaza strip to deliver food packages to Israeli soldiers. Getting there was not so easy. We were denied access to the main road as it was deemed unsafe. However, we met two off duty soldiers who offered to accompany us through a forest road. Finally the main road reappeared after many kilometers and it was a relief. We had passed all the roadblocks and were inside the military zone.

The soldiers were happy to see us so close to the border where you do not expect to see any civilians. We sang and danced together, took pictures, climbed on tanks, etc. At the time, it was officially a cease-fire. But suddenly, one of the officers told us to follow him. He was running behind a tank. We rushed after him and hid under a tank, the only place you could hide in this

open space. A few seconds later, a rocket fell about 150 meters away from us with a ground-shaking noise and lot of dust. We waited one more minute before leaving our “bomb shelter of fortune”.

From the front we traveled to Soroka hospital in Beer Sheva where we visited wounded soldiers. Again, there were people from all over the country who had traveled to Beersheva to visit them. The solidarity was truly moving.

Now, I am about to leave Israel. I have visited many holy places including the Kotel (wall) and the City of David, Hevron. I also went to the Dead Sea, the mystical city of Safed, the Golan, Tiberias, etc.

During my stay, Rav Riskin was very supportive and invited me to his home for Shabbat dinner whenever he was in the country.

He appreciated my hard work and scholarship and encouraged me to attend a rabbinical program in his yeshiva. I am hoping to return to study for the rabbinate if enough funds can be found to support my studies.

During my stay in Efrat, I also had the mentoring of Menachem Kuchar, Rabbi Riskin’s director of African Programs, who visited Cameroon last year. Among his many kindnesses was arranging for me to learn about Shechita (ritual slaughter) of chickens courtesy of one of the friends of the yeshiva. Afterwards, I was gifted with a great shechting knife and sharpening stones to bring home.

Before I left Israel, so many people brought me books that I was unable to fit all of them into my suitcase. My three months in Israel was one of the most fulfilling experiences in my life.

May all the good people who contributed to this special opportunity be blessed!

Zimbabwe with Love

by Mickey Feinberg*

Dear Friends,

We feel so fortunate to have spent a gratifying month this summer with the Lemba community in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe. Our mission for Kulanu was to teach Judaic studies and build on the educational foundation begun by New York's Elaine and Irwin Berg who visited the community for a month in October of 2013 and by Guer-shon Nduwa, an African Jew from Paris, who spent three months in Harare teaching last spring. Our hosts were community leader Modreck Maer-esera and his wife Brenda (both in their thirties), their young sons Aviv and Shlomo, as well as their distant cousin Zvamaziva, 19, and Modreck's nephew George, 24.

We all lived together in the rented four-bedroom, three-bathroom house, which functions as the Community House and center of Lemba Jewish life in Harare. It is here where services take place, holiday observances are celebrated and instruction is given. We absolutely loved living with the family, who went to considerable efforts to make us feel comfortable! In addition to enjoying the company of wonderful adults and darling children, living in the house enabled us to do continuous teaching on a daily basis. This was particularly so at the Shabbat table, sharing kitchen tasks such as baking challah for Shabbat and discussing the



Success. Brenda shows off her beautiful challah, the result of her first lesson in challah baking. Shlomo and Aviv who joined in the fun looked pleased with their efforts

Photo by Mickey Feinberg

similarities between Lemba and American Jewish religious traditions and practices.

The four adults who live in the house were the most knowledgeable of our students. That was no surprise as traveling to the Community House from distant parts of the sprawling city for classes or to participate in services or holiday celebrations remains a challenge for most of the Lemba, many of whom are unemployed and lack sufficient funds for transportation. Before we left home, our wonderful friends and family provided us with funds to assist us in our mission and some of that money went to subsidize travel expenses for students during our visit.

* Jewish educator Mickey (Miriam) Feinberg and her husband Mordy (Mordecai), a retired US Government international economist, have traveled extensively teaching Judaic subjects and as avid and inquisitive travelers. They have significant experience as professionals and as volunteers in counties around the world.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18



*Altogether now. Mickey teaches Israeli dancing to enthusiastic students
Photo courtesy of Mickey Feinberg*

During the first week in the community house, I taught Brenda and Zvamaziva how to bake challah. The challot looked GREAT on the baking tray. But just as they were about to go into the electric oven, we lost electricity, a common occurrence in Harare. When electricity reappeared 12 hours later, all we could do was laugh about how much the dough had risen. Nevertheless, we weren't deterred by that experience and kept baking challot for each of the subsequent Shabbatot we were there. Even Shlomo learned to create an almost round challah and Aviv's looks like a smaller version of the real thing. Brenda and Zvama (nickname) have continued to bake challah weekly since our departure.

Zimbabwe is intensely Christian with many churches of all denominations (Catholic, Baptist, Seventh Day Adventists, Lutheran, Dutch Reform, you-name-it and especially evangelical denominations) very visible. We frequently saw vans with evangelical messages written on them announcing their intent to welcome new members. There were also many groups of Jehovah's Witnesses, with each member wearing a badge identifying his or her religious affiliation. Needless to say, the presence and influence of so many Christian denominations throughout the country poses a real challenge to the fledgling efforts of the Lemba to reconnect with their Jewish heritage.

Our classes and Shabbat services were held in the synagogue/classroom/community center room in or

around Harare. Our students were friendly, appreciative and eager to learn. In general, they are educated, mostly men, who grew up in villages and are currently living in or around Harare. The lack of employment has other ramifications. Many of them are bachelors (in their 20's and 30's) who cannot afford to get married and support a family.

To make teaching easier, we used some of the money that friends donated to purchase a white board and markers. Another purchase from contributions was for a solar hot water heater for the house.

It was a relatively inexpensive purchase, and with so much available sun in Zimbabwe and the frequent loss of electricity, the purchase made a great deal of sense.

During the week (Monday through Thursday) we taught 10-12 students each day, a session at noon, one at 2 pm and another later in the day, at 4:30-6:30 pm. In addition, Mordy was always available to meet privately with anyone who wished to learn to read Torah and some students took advantage of that opportunity. We continued to "teach" (although less formally) on Shabbat.

On Shabbat, we usually had 12-25 adults and many children participating in Shabbat morning services, which were led by Modreck. Several of the men wore tzitzit (ritual fringes or tassles worn by observant Jews). It's quite difficult to offer Friday evening services as participants have different work schedules (if they are fortunate to have jobs), and traveling great distances on public transportation is difficult. Many also prefer to spend Shabbat evening with their families. Brenda and Zvamaziva cook throughout the day on Friday, preparing the meal for the family on Friday evening as well as a full lunch for all those who attend Shabbat morning services...an amazing amount of gracious hosting.

Our "curriculum" included: Jewish holidays (observances, prayers, melodies), Torah (reading in Hebrew, analyzing, understanding, reading with cantillation,

CONTINUED ON PAGE 19



*Private class. Modreck meets with Mordy for a one on one
Photo by Mickey Feinberg*

and teaching it to young children), studying the content of the weekly Torah portion, Hebrew (reading and understanding and some speaking), Jewish life-cycle events (practices and blessings), Israel (historical, modern life-style, songs and dances), establishing a functioning synagogue board, the Shabbat morning service (organization, prayers, melodies) and the Rosh Hashanah service. It seems like an ambitious curriculum, but we analyzed the needs of the community as we went along and adjusted the classes as needed.

While the Lemba have many long-standing Jewish traditions, the prayers and songs we taught them are more associated with “mainstream” Judaism. When we asked our students to evaluate their progress during our time with them, one young man said that it was important for him to know that there are Biblical and Talmudic sources relating to the practices with which he’s been familiar all of his life. At the end of our month of study we had a siyum (party) with some of the students.

Although KulanuNews has carried several articles about the Lemba and some of their beliefs and traditions, I have chosen to discuss some of these in more depth to show the similarities between Lemba practices of Judaism and our own at home.

The Lemba consider one day of the week holy and they praise God on that day. Throughout many centuries, they referred to that day simply as the seventh day. On that day one is not allowed to do any kind of

work; especially making fire, gathering fire wood, cooking, trading and working in the fields. They rested privately on the seventh day until being forced by missionaries to observe a Sunday Sabbath at which time they began to rest secretly on the seventh day.

The Lemba consider themselves a chosen people. They teach their children to honor their mothers and fathers. One of the major traditions that has made the Lemba so different from other people in Zimbabwe is their strict observance of most Jewish dietary laws (See KulanuNews Winter/Spring, 2012). These include eating only animals with cloven hoofs and those

which chew their cuds, the separation of milk and meat, and abstaining from eating seafood or predatory birds. Observant Lemba won’t eat in restaurants as they can’t be sure of the level of kashrut in those establishments. They will also never eat in the home of a non-Lemba person. Some older Zimbabwean Lembas won’t eat meat that is ritually slaughtered by someone they haven’t seen doing it or by those they don’t know.

The manner of slaughter and the draining of blood from the slaughtered animal indicates that the Lemba are familiar with the laws of shechita (kosher slaughtering). Both Modreck and George are shochem (ritual slaughterers). While we were at their home, friends and relatives came by on several occasions with live chickens to be shechted (ritually slaughtered). A Lemba shochem is never permitted to decline a request to shecht chicken or meat.

Male circumcision (models of circumcised male organs were found at the archaeological site, the Great Zimbabwe) is a Lemba requirement. Today boys are circumcised at age eight, a custom that was introduced in reaction to a prohibition against circumcision by Christian missionaries in times past and to protect the community’s Jewish identity. As young boys run around their villages naked, they would have been identified easily as Jews, which would have put their families and communities at risk of persecution.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20



*Planting in Harare. Modreck works in the Community House garden which the family is developing to supply food for residents and visitors
Photo by Mickey Feinberg*

Each month's new moon is celebrated on the day it is confirmed visually with the blowing of a shofar. Some elderly Lemba mentioned that they abstain from work on the day of pronouncement of the new moon, concurring with a practice in ancient Israel.

The Lemba place a Star of David on their tombstones. Lemba bury their dead with the head of the deceased facing east (if they're from Zimbabwe), or facing north (if they're from South Africa), in both cases toward the Land of Israel. There is a tradition of tearing one's clothing upon hearing of a relative's death. The Lemba bury the deceased as soon as possible (waiting no longer than a day) and the grave is referred to in Shona as "house of the deceased" (similar to *beit kever* in Hebrew). After the burial, mourners leave the cemetery in single file and wash their hands immediately. Mourners mourn for a week after the burial (*shiva*) and close relatives mourn for a year. All customs so similar to our own.

Many Lemba elders remember that when they were children, during the March-April period of a full moon, their families observed "Peseka" (compare our Passover) by slaughtering a lamb which they would roast and then they would meet together with family and neighbors to eat the entire animal. After the arrival of missionaries, the community performed this ritual in secret.

Traditionally the Lemba celebrated two New Year's, one in March-April and the other in September-October. One wonders if they are

celebrating the first month of Nisan and the seventh month of Tishre, both of which are considered New Year days under Jewish law.

Some elderly Lemba remember seeing their parents meet in secret a little more than a week after the Tishre holiday when they would abstain from eating for an entire day (Yom Kippur?). They would pray during that time and ask for God's forgiveness, after which they would gather together and celebrate with food.

One of our students told us that in the Lemba villages during harvest time, farmers leave some grain at the corners of their fields for needy people to gather and use. They then make it known that the grain is available and they welcome the needy in their fields. This custom is reminiscent of the story told in the Book of Ruth.

All these practices gave us such warm feelings about our common heritage and made us feel fortunate to have visited these remarkable people and to have shared some memorable experiences together. We'll miss the camaraderie and intense curiosity of our wonderful students, the warmth and inclusiveness of Modreck and his family (with whom we sat together at dinner on a daily basis) and most of all, the darling children, with whom we spent so many fun and funny moments. Love from Mordy and me.

Mickey Feinberg



Gifts from Boston. Mickey delivers Jewish ritual objects to Brenda and Modreck collected by Kulanu Board member Judy Manelis for the Lemba Community House

Kulanu Volunteer Opportunities

Jewish Communities Around the World

Africa

Sa'a, Yaounde and Douala, Cameroon (English & French): Three communities with combined 100 practicing Jews; Sa'a is a rural community, Yaounde is the capital city and Douala is a port city with the largest population in Cameroon; formerly Christian community which embraced Judaism in 1998; although primarily self-taught from Internet, very knowledgeable in some areas; need teachers of English, Hebrew, Jewish studies, preferably French speakers; Jewish materials in French; advice on building mikvah (ritual bath).

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia (English & Amharic): low income area of large city; formerly hidden Jews now going public; they seek Hebrew teachers, and guides who can help the community to integrate long-standing traditions with new learning; and, skills-training in cloth preparation and sewing and other income-generating activities to support the community's economic sustainability.

Gabon: (French) two communities, Oyem and Bitam; emerging and currently learning from Serge Etele, leader of the Beth Yeshourun Jewish community in Cameroon; want to learn more about Judaism.

Sewfi Wiawso, Ghana (English): rural community of 100 devout and observant Jews; need teachers of Hebrew and Jewish studies for children and adults; teacher of computer skills, financial reporting and guest house planning, management, and marketing.

Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire / Ivory Coast (French, English): two synagogues, the Beith Israel community of about 40 men and women and Ets Chaim, with 70 men and woman, need teachers of Hebrew and Jewish studies.

Kasuku-Ol Kalau, Kenya: (English, Swahili) growing, dedicated community of 66 members in a rustic part of the country; practicing Judaism for 20 years; need

teachers of Hebrew and Jewish studies for children and adults.

Madagascar: (Malagasy or French) developing Jewish community seeking teachers of Hebrew and Jewish studies.

Mbale, Uganda (English): thriving Abayudaya community of seven villages; much poverty; need teachers of any subjects from elementary to high school; business planning and management, other skills; lots of possibilities here.

Harare, Zimbabwe (English): capital city. Synagogue with live-in guest house; teach Hebrew, liturgy and/or Jewish studies; also need an experienced mohel to mentor local mohelim in modern practices.

Asia

Andhra Pradesh, India (English & Telugu): a small rural village called Kothareddypalem with about 40 families living in mixed community with Christians and Hindus; community called Bene Ephraim; need teachers of Hebrew and Jewish studies.

Latin America

Goiania, Brazil (Portuguese): large city of 1.5 million in the interior of Brazil. This is a community of 60+ people, all of whom wish to convert. They could use help with: cantors for the high holidays and teachers of Hebrew and other conversion-gearred religious study classes; Portuguese-speaking volunteers preferred.

Sao Paulo, Brazil (Portuguese): large 12 million person city on the coast of Brazil; this is a community of 40+ people who wish to convert. They could use help with: cantors for the high holidays and teachers of Hebrew and other conversion-gearred religious study classes; Portuguese-speaking volunteers preferred.

Quito: Bnei Anousim, Ecuador (Spanish): capital of Ecuador; this 70+ person Sephardic Orthodox community in Quito includes a percentage of Bnei Anousim (descendants from Spanish Inquisition) as well

(Note: The latest updates to this list are on our web site: <http://kulanu.org/getinvolved/overseasopportunities.php>). Available accommodations vary from home hospitality to guest houses to hotels, depending on the community. Volunteers pay or raise their own fund to cover expenses. Additional information on each of these communities is available on Kulanu's website: www.kulanu.org/communities.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 22

as many other Ecuadorians in the process of conversion; observant of Sephardic customs, shomer Shabbat/kashrut. Needs on-site volunteers, minimum one week, for liturgy, modern and biblical Hebrew, and Tanach teachers to help with children's religious school and/or adult classes; Spanish-speaking volunteers preferred.

Guatemala City, Guatemala (Spanish): capital of Guatemala; the Asociación Judía Reformista de Guatemala Adat Israel is a community of about 25 members, in existence since 2011. They need on-site volunteers for Hebrew reading and writing training and continued Jewish education for the community; Spanish-speaking volunteers preferred.

Mexicali, Mexico (Spanish & English): northernmost city in Latin America, two hours east of San Diego, with

population of over 600,000. Jewish community made up of 40+ individuals, many of whom are Bnei Anousim (descendants of Crypto Jews) who have formally converted; others are on road to conversion; community is inclusive, welcoming Jews of all denominations and backgrounds who are seeking their place in Judaism; need teachers of Hebrew and Jewish studies for adults and children and educational materials for youth in Spanish to advance their Jewish studies; Spanish-speaking volunteers preferred.

Huanuco, Peru (Spanish): small rural city of 70,000, 10 hours from Lima by bus. This is a community of 40+ people, most of whom have converted over the last decade. They could use help with: cantors for the high holidays and teachers of Hebrew and other continuing religious study classes; Spanish-speaking volunteers preferred.

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Stellar Reviews for: The Igbos and Israel An Inter-Cultural Study of the Oldest and Largest Jewish Diaspora*

by Remy Ilona**

Abuja, Nigeria

REVIEWS:

Amazing book...

...I highly recommend Remy Ilona's book, which links Western and African culture in a most profound way—through the heart and mind of Jewish religion and culture. Raymond Keen (3/12/2014)

A must-read!

...Author Remy Ilona does a masterful job with scholarly attention to detail...He is a wealth of knowledge and shares the fruits of his labor with humility and grace...Dumusani (3/26/2014)

A Joy to Read

Mr. Ilona does a fantastic job of covering the linkages between Igbo and Hebraic peoples. The book is a joy to read and a prerequisite for anyone interested in familiarizing one's self with the history of the Jewish people. Michael J. Ophir (4/18/2012)

The Most Comprehensive Work on Culture and Traditions of the Igbo

I highly recommend this book not only to those who are interested in origins and traditions of the Igbo people, but also to those who are fascinated by authentic traditions of Africa, so unjustly ignored and forgotten for centuries.....a must read for those who are interested in archaic forms of Judaic practice and the rich culture of the African continent. Irene Orleansky (4/26/2014)

Remy Ilona gives us an overview of what we know...

about the history of the Igbo people and their connections to Judaism. ...Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of his book is his connecting Igbo traditional



Author Remy Ilona with his two children Daniel Ikechukwu ("Gabriel") Chijindu Iddo Ilona (at 3 years 3 months) and Aliya Chi m ama nda ("Eli-Ne'eman") Ilona (at a year and 4 months) Remy and his children are wearing traditional Igbo dress

practices with those of Temple-era Judaism as depicted in the Hebrew Bible.... Friends of the Igbo, as well as scholars of emerging Jewish communities will be keenly interested in his work. Dr. Nathan Katz (7/2/2014)

A wonderful well-written resource

...the book is nothing short of a research masterpiece about a group of people who have been called "the Jews of Africa" by their neighbors....Yhoshua ben Yisrael (7/21/2014)

Great Book

This cultural study has by far presented the strongest parallelism in Judaism and Igbo tradition; the emphasis on language is a most needed bonus ! Le Rico (10/8/2014)

A Great Work

...the book is a must for every Igbo person and/or student of Igbo culture and values. It encompassed what I lived and so much more....Okenwa Ewudo

** Published by Kulanu and Carolivia Herron as a Kindle or paperback. Available on Amazon.*

*** Remy Ilona is a scholar, author, and activist on behalf of the Igbo Jewish community of Nigeria.*

Letter from the President

Dear Readers and Friends,

I hope you enjoy this issue of KulanuNews, which focuses on the recent travels of several dedicated and adventurous volunteers and board members who have visited our communities abroad. In recent months, travelers have been to Cameroon, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, Uganda and Zimbabwe. We are also working with potential volunteers who are planning trips to Ghana, India, Latin America and Uganda. In addition to the stories and photos here, you can check our web site, Blog, Facebook page, and Phanfare site for more information and pictures.

We are delighted to be a part of the relationship-building that develops when Jews from diverse backgrounds come together to work, learn and pray. Our traveling volunteers help serve as a bridge between communities around the world, making connections, fostering understanding, and enhancing our Jewish lives.

If you love to teach and help people, and enjoy traveling to cultures different from your own, then becoming a Kulanu Overseas Volunteer might be a great fit for you! Many of our communities are eager for knowledge about Jewish history, ritual and practice, opportunities to learn Hebrew and Shabbat songs and dances, and to receive donations of Jewish ritual objects and Jewish books. In addition, they can always use computers/smartphones/tablets/kindles/cameras or medical supplies. Others are eager to work on community development and create sustainable economic projects to support themselves and their communities, which often require knowledge of English, computer skills and business or organizational management. Check out the list of Kulanu Overseas Volunteer Opportunities on page 21 of this issue, or visit www.kulanu.org/getinvolved/overseasopportunities.php to see the most recent list of volunteer opportunities and to apply to be an overseas volunteer with Kulanu, Inc.

Are you already planning a trip to an area near a Kulanu community? Even if you don't have a month or more to volunteer, a short visit - such as participating in a local Shabbat service - or delivering some Jewish objects can be a life-changing experience. We can help put you in touch with community leaders, and we may also ask if you can carry donated goods to the community, and



*Harriet Bograd wearing dress from Cameroon
photo by Viviane Topp*

to share your photos, videos, or travel-blog with us so we can consider making them available to our Kulanu network. Please send us a message with the dates and destination of your upcoming trip at www.kulanu.org/contact

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our recent visitors and volunteers, including: Guershon Nduwa for three months in Harare, Zimbabwe; Kulanu Board member Rabbanit Bonita Nathan Sussman and her husband Rabbi Gerald Sussman, and Dr. Marla Brettschneider, who together traveled to several communities in West Africa (see article on page 5); Jerry Knoppow and his granddaughter, Miriam Saperstein for volunteering in Uganda; Kulanu Board member Marcy Stein for her visit to Kenya; Miriam and Mordechai Feinberg for the month they spent with the Lemba community in Zimbabwe; Elana Gerson for her three and a half weeks in Quito, Ecuador (see her article on page 1); Kulanu Regional Coordinator Lucy Steinitz and her husband Bernd Kiekebusch for their regular visits with the Beta Avraham community in Ethiopia during the three years they lived in Addis

CONTINUED ON PAGE 27



THANK YOU, DONORS!

Donations received between April 1, 2014 and October 29, 2014.

Please contact us at www.kulanu.org/contact if we have missed your name or contribution and we will list you in the next magazine. Thanks!

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CONTINUED ON PAGE 26

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Mitzvah Projects & Fundraising Campaigns –

Mazel Tov and Todah Rabah to Kulanu Activists.

Kulanu raised \$13,361 from the tribute journal in honor of Rabbanit Bonita Nathan Sussman and Rabbi Gerald Sussman (to see the journal, go to kulanu.org/tribute). Toviel Hesed Rose raised \$524 to support the Lemba Jewish Community of Zimbabwe. David Tobis raised \$3100 for the Torah for Abuja project in Nigeria. Mordy and Mickey Feinberg raised \$1757 for the Harare Lemba Synagogue of Zimbabwe. Marcy Stein raised \$2001 for the construction of a synagogue for the Ol Kalou Kasuku Jewish community in Kenya. Jerry Knoppow and Miriam Saperstein raised \$676 for a technology center for the Hadassah Primary School in Uganda. The Am Chai Tzedaka Collective in Evanston, IL raised \$412 for Kulanu.

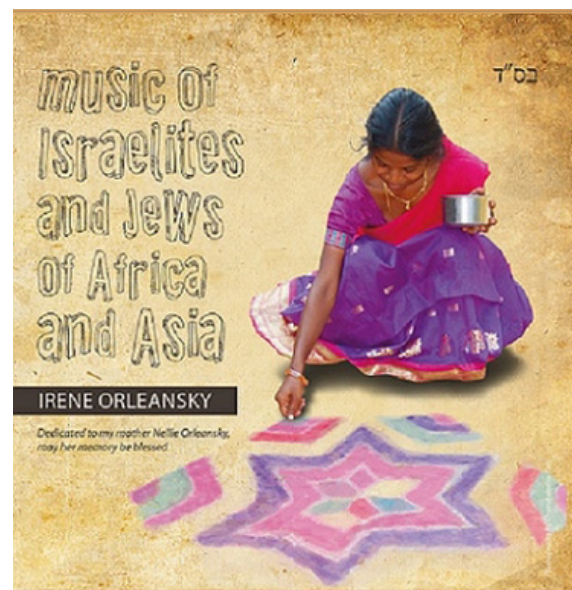
Mazal tov and yasher koach!

Fall 2014 Kulanu-Abayudaya Women's Speaking Tour Sponsors

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New Jewish World Music Recording Released



Irene Orleansky, an Israeli musician, spent two years traveling to Kulanu communities to sing and play music with them and to record their Jewish songs. This past summer, she released an album containing ten songs from nine different Jewish communities in seven countries in Africa and Asia.

Check out Irene's CD, *Music of Israelites and Jews of Africa and Asia*, and purchase it from her web site, ireneorleansky.com; it's also available for download from CDBaby (cdbaby.com/cd/ireneorleansky). The booklet that accompanies the CD is filled with photos from the two-year international journey.

Please enjoy!

You may also be interested in watching the inspirational five-minute trailer on UTube of Irene's latest project, "Balla Ejj: the Hidden Jews of Ethiopia", a documentary about the Jewish descendents still living in Ethiopia.

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

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www.kulanu.org/about-kulanu

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT, CONTINUED ***FROM PAGE 24***

Ababa; Rabbi Barry Dollinger, Naomi Paine, and Shai Afsai for their teaching visit to Abuja, Nigeria; Peter Terry for his time in Madagascar; Irene Orleansky for her visits to Jewish communities in Africa and Asia; and Sara Eisen, who is currently in Harare, Zimbabwe with the Lemba community, Andrew and Debbie Pearlman for their visit to the Lemba community in Zimbabwe.

Please note that with rare exceptions, Kulanu travelers pay or raise their own travel expenses, and make their own travel arrangements, with some advice and encouragement from Kulanu. The living accommodations available and related costs vary from community to community. In some communities (especially Uganda), community members offer their services as travel and safari guides.

Whether you see these opportunities as adventure travel or a mitzvah trip, I am sure your experience with an overseas Jewish community will make an impact on your life - and on the lives of far-away Jews seeking connection with their brothers and sisters around the world. Please get in touch with us about visiting or volunteering with a Kulanu community. We will be delighted to hear from you!

Sincerely,

Harriet

Harriet Bograd, President
Kulanu, Inc.



*Shoshanna Nambi at Niagara Falls during her Kulanu speaking tour this fall
Photo by Enid Bloch*



KULANU

*Supporting Isolated and
Emerging Jewish Communities
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Photo taken in June the night before Demeke Engida (navy blue shirt) of Ethiopia leaves for two months of study with Rabbi Gershom Sizomu in Uganda. With Demeke are his sister Hilina Engida and his brother Dereke Engida and Kulanu activist Lucy Steinitz and her husband Bernd Kiekebusch

Photo courtesy of Lucy