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ADDING THE FRIDAY NIGHT SERVICE

Five years after starting this congregation, it is high time we added a Friday night service at the Harare Lemba Synagogue. When we started the congregation five years ago, we had not learned enough to introduce both the Friday night and the Shabbat morning service and there were also logistical reasons. Most of the families do not live within walking distance from the synagogue and it was difficult to commute at night to and from the synagogue. So our members did a Shabbat dinner with their families at their houses. However, at this stage in our growth, it has become imperative that we introduce the Friday night service to the HLS. Without it, something will always be lacking.

With plans to start congregations in Mberengwa, Gutu, and Buhera at an advanced stage, this will be a good time to educate the prospective leaders of the communities about how to conduct Friday night services. It is every community member's responsibility to make sure that we have a minyan for all our services. For that reason, we are going to introduce what we will call the "minyan duty roster." Members will take turns to come to the Friday night service, with the

exception of children and those who live too far away from the shul. This doesn't mean that if someone wants to attend every service they won't be allowed to do so if it's not their turn to come for minyan duty. No: it simply means that every week it will be compulsory for some members to come to guarantee a minyan.

This is something that I learned from the late Mr. Leon Hanan "ZT" L" who used to be assistant gabbai for the Sephardic synagogue in Harare. He believed the community was more important than individuals--that it was important for individuals to put the community ahead of their private needs. Faced with a dwindling community of mostly elderly Jews, it became very hard for the Jews of European descent in Harare to make a minyan for chagim and services. Without the community, Mr. Hanan believed that Jewish identity would be dead. Therefore, every Friday before Shabbat he would call each and every member of the community and beg them to attend services so they could have a minyan.

This is the same concept that we are going to work with, making sure that we will put the needs of the community above everything else. We need to make sure we have a fully functional community that meets for all the services, all the holidays, and all community functions. We are, after all, a vibrant community on its way up; we are the very symbol of the Lemba Jewish renaissance. So starting in June, we will introduce the Friday night service at the HLS and we will post the minyan duty roster in the Shul.

PESACH 2018 BUHERA

By George Zvakavapano

In 2018 the Harare Lemba synagogue made a decision to send representatives to rural areas where most Lembas are situated to hold Passover Seders as a way of introducing Judaism to the Lembas in the villages. This decision came after the Harare Lemba Synagogue realized that a lot of people in the Lemba villages were eager to learn Judaism but had no access to the shuls. In Zimbabwe, the only Lemba Jews who had started to reconnect with modern Judaism are in Harare and Mapakomere. These Seders were not only meant to introduce Judaism, but also to start congregations in the rural Lemba villages. In 2017 the modern Seder was introduced in Mberengwa, so with the introduction of the Seders in Buhera and Gutu this year, it brings the number of Seders in Zimbabwe to five. Of the three representatives chosen to lead the Seders, I (George Zvakavapano) was the leader in my home area, Buhera Bedza.

On the 31st of March 2018, I and my crew, Irene and Brenda, went to Buhera Bedza to prepare for the Seder, which was going to be held on April 2nd at Nechavava Secondary School, which is a few kilometers from Bedza center. On the first of April, preparations for the Seder started with my team of selected young men and boys running around looking for sheep and goats and making the necessary formalities required by the school, the chief, and the village headman. By the end of the day, everything was in place. We had managed to secure the services of six ladies, volunteers who were going to help Irene and Brenda prepare food for the function, and six men who were going to help me with slaughtering and roasting the sheep.

Below: men skinning sheep before the Seder



On Monday, April 2nd, my team and the committee chosen to help with the preparations all met at Nechavava School at around 8am. One of the teachers, Mr. Makumbe, along with the headmaster, Mr. Gwarada, helped us secure a good classroom for the Seder. They also allowed us to use their school culture house for the food preparations. The food preparation began immediately by the six

ladies, while Brenda and Mrs. Makumbe were busy preparing charoset. The ladies asked a lot of questions, especially Mrs. Makumbe, who is a primary school teacher, and Mrs. Munhanga. They wanted to know what was being made and why. For example, "Why are you mixing nuts, wine, apples, honey and wine together?", "Why are we peeling ginger?", "Why are the guys bringing a dish full of bones?" among other fascinating questions. Irene and Brenda took turns to explain to them the significance of every item which was going to be on the Seder plate.

Below: women preparing food for the seder



Around 6pm all the food was ready and the ladies began putting the Seder plates on the tables, along with wine and grape juice. By 6:30pm everything was in its place and Brenda lit the candles. I began leading the Seder, explaining why we were holding the Passover and explaining the significance of the things on the Seder plate. I recited the Exodus story of the Israelites and people were listening attentively. People then enjoyed their dinner. One girl, Susan Makumbe, managed to locate the hidden afikoman and was given a box of chocolates as a reward.

After the Seder a lot more questions were asked, for example: "Can you convert me now?" and "When are you coming to start the congregation?" The Seder was over at around 9pm and people left. At around 10pm, we drove past the local shopping center in Bedza, where people were watching a game of soccer on TV. Three-quarters of the people who were present were wearing kippot that we distributed earlier that day. There were a total of ninety people who attended the Seder.

We are hopeful that this is just the beginning. We hope there are thousands of Lemba out there who are interested in reconnecting with modern Judaism. We have Jews-for-Jesus Christians and Muslims to contend with. These groups are working hard to convert Lemba to their respective religions. This makes our work cut out for us. We still have a lot of work to do, a lot of Lemba communities to reach out to, and we cannot afford to relax. Thanks to the Harare Lemba synagogue and its education programs, people like me and fellow community leaders like Hilary Zhou have been able to take leadership roles in our respective communities.

Below: during the Seder



The Harare Lemba Synagogue would like to thank Kulanu and its donors for their support to the Lemba community as a whole. We believe that with Kulanu on our side, the Buhera congregation is going to be a success. This year our Seder was in Buhera, but one day, God willing, it will be in Jerusalem.

THE HARARE LEMBA SYNAGOGUE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF JUDAISM IN ZIMBABWE

Since it was opened in May 2013, the Harare Lemba Synagogue has had a set of objectives: to be a congregation for the Lemba in the country's capital city, to be a learning center for the Lemba in the whole country, and to be the base for the Zimbabwean Lemba's bid to be reconnected with mainstream Judaism. Lemba from rural communities migrated and are still migrating to the city to look for employment opportunities and better education. Away from the villages of their origin, they needed a place where they could come together, socialize, and network. The HLS became such a place. There were times during the past six years when it felt like fulfilling those objectives was going to be a daunting task, and there were times when it felt like we were going to fail. But today we are glad to say that we have never felt closer to fulfilling our objectives.

With support from Kulanu's Board of Directors, and encouragement from its founding president, Dr. Jack Zeller and his wife Diane, as well as the Kulanu coordinator for the Lemba, Mr. Sandy Leeder, we found a rental property that we use as a community center, a synagogue, and a place to host our visiting teachers from abroad. Kulanu generously worked very hard to be sure we could host visiting teachers in a space with some of the basic health amenities not readily available elsewhere.

May 2013 was the month we officially opened to the Lemba public in Harare. We started off with a paltry fifteen congregants--ten adults and five children. With little knowledge of modern Judaism, the most important task was to learn. We did that through two sets of complementary program-- the cyberlearning program and the visiting teachers program.

Through the cyberlearning program, we used websites like www.learnhebrewpod.com and www.aish.com. We also used Skype to learn "live" with many teachers across the world. Today we have expanded the cyberlearning program to include social media platforms like WhatsApp. Through the visiting teachers program, we learn with teachers who come to live in our synagogue. For the most part, these teachers are sourced by Kulanu. The cyberlearning program is also funded within

Kulanu's monthly stipend to our synagogue. To date, our long-term teachers include the Bergs from New York, the Feinbergs from Maryland, Sarah Eisen from New Jersey, and Guershon from France, along with other shorter-term teachers who have spent time with the community, staying at the guest house/community centre/synagogue.

After six years of operating as a congregation and a learning center, we have produced a group of young Lemba who have basic Hebrew literacy and Jewish education. Now we feel it is time to spread modern Judaism to the Lemba in the countryside where thousands of our kith and kin still reside. The ultimate objective is to have a congregation in each and every Lemba community in the countryside and to have capable leaders in each of them. This we hope will forestall the Muslims and Messianic Jews who are working hard to convert Lemba. Our first strategy was to introduce modern Pesach Seders to the communities and then follow that up with establishing congregations, thereby creating more and more practicing Lemba communities across the whole country. This year the HLS, with funding from Kulanu, brought Seders to three rural communities where hundreds of Lemba came to celebrate and learn about the Pesach Seder. We had Seders in Buhera, Mberengwa, and Gutu. That brings the Lemba Seders in Zimbabwe to a total of five, including the one in Mapakomhere and the Harare Lemba Synagogue. Following up on the success of the Seders, George Zvakavapano and Hilary Zhou, young leaders from the HLS, have started congregations in Buhera and Mberengwa, respectively.

God willing, more and more leaders from the HLS will start congregations in the communities of their origins. When that happens, the HLS will have fulfilled its mandate to be the center of the Lemba renaissance and Lemba education, spreading modern Judaism to Lemba communities across the country. We hope that the impact of the Harare Lemba synagogue will not be confined to Harare, but will reach the whole country. When that happens, we will be much more than a congregation in the capital city of Zimbabwe; we will be the seed of a Lemba renaissance, the center of Lemba Jewish education. Our mandate is to spread Judaism to each and every Lemba community in Zimbabwe and beyond.

Recently, we realized that we needed to better prepare children for leadership positions so that they will be able to interface with Jewish peers and bring Lemba into direct contact with all kinds of Western Jews. It is never too soon to plan

ahead and to create a fuller Jewish world, where Lemba are more than an interesting community because they have been fully embedded in Am Yisrael.

For more information about how the HLS was started please refer to: <http://kulanu.org/wp-content/uploads/lemba/hlsnewsletter2017-5.pdf>.

THE HLS CHOIR: REVOLUTIONIZING THE COMMUNITY

One of the objectives of the Harare Lemba synagogue, when the synagogue was founded in 2013, was to create a Lemba identity--to be not just a cut-and-paste tapestry of different identities adopted from our teachers across the Jewish world from Europe, from America, and from Israel. Some were Orthodox and some were Conservative, some were Ashkenazi and some Sephardic. This contributed to making us a mosaic of different Jewish traditions and cultures. During services, we sing the prayers using different tunes learned from our variety of teachers. We, however, recognize the importance of creating a distinct identity for ourselves. We are neither Ashkenazi nor Sephardic Jews; we are Lemba Jews and we are within our rights to create our own identity within the larger Venn diagram of Judaism.

One way to achieve that goal is to have our own tunes for prayers and songs as a way of stamping our identity in the services. When people come to visit, they need to feel and experience our distinct and unique Lemba Jewishness with our own melodies and tunes. Hopefully, one day we can even include traditional Lemba songs and prayers within the service. We are lucky to have Hamlet Zhou as a member of our congregation. Hamlet is an experienced musician who has worked with the great Andy Brown and his band as a rhythm guitarist. Hamlet is leading the project to compose tunes for prayers in the siddur. He meets with his choir at the HLS for practice on Mondays and Thursdays. The project is already at an advanced stage. We sing his some of his tunes, like Oseh Shalom, Adon Olam and Ein Keloheinu, among others, during services. Plans are underway for him and his group to record an album of some of the songs that he has composed. We at the HLS are very grateful to have Hamlet and his group and for the wonderful and revolutionary work that they are doing.

Below: The HLS choir after practicing, back from left to right: Hamlet Zhou, Brighton Zhou, Pedzisai Hwingwiri and Kupa Yedidah Marazani. Infront from left to right. Sharon Zhou, Brenda Maeresera and Nomsa Hwingwiri.



Todah Rabbah Mushavi Hamlet and group.

PARTNERING WITH KULANU IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS: THE 2 WEIRS

For years, the people of Bedza and neighboring communities in Buhera endured agricultural uncertainty. With global warming and climate change making rainfall unpredictable, droughts and years of food insecurity became frequent. As a result, humans and animals suffered a lot. People, especially children of school-going age, had to walk with their livestock long distances in search of water, and the long walks left the animals tired and worse off. In the droughts of 1983, 1992, 2008, and 2014, the community lost about three-quarters of their livestock. The problem was made worse by the fact that the community streams had no pools to hold water when it rained. So all the rainwater flowed downstream, leaving no water at all for the cattle, sheep, and goats to drink. In a community where people used cattle to till their land, this had a disastrous effect. The result was that the community was now subjected to perennial food shortages and had to depend on donor aid for food.

The solution to these problems was to have water throughout the year. But how were we going to do it if our streams didn't have pools that hold water through the dry season? The answer to the problem was to build a weir, what some call a gravity retention wall. It is a wall that is built across a river channel to collect water flowing in the river. To put it simply, it is a small concrete and masonry dam. However, with the villagers being so poor and with the country in the middle of one of the worst famines, there was no way we could raise funds needed to build the weir. People were struggling to get food to survive. It is for that reason that with the help of Kulanu, we applied for and received a grant from the 2016-2017 Marin/San Francisco and North Peninsula Jewish Teen Foundations of the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation. We did impressive work, building the first weir successfully and completing it in December 2017. We received another grant this year, in January 2018, to build a second weir, which is still under construction as this article is being written.

Kulanu has been working with the Lemba Jews in Zimbabwe through the Harare Lemba Synagogue and the Great Zimbabwe Synagogue for many years now, sponsoring the HLS operations and funding various religious and charity programs. The Lemba Jews are a remnant of a group of Jews who became isolated in Africa many hundreds, if not thousands, of years ago.

The application for the grant to build the first weir was a joint effort by Kulanu and the Harare Lemba Synagogue, with Kulanu acting as a guarantor with oversight responsibility for the project, as well as representing the HLS during the grant presentation. We received the second grant through the efforts of Harriet Bograd, Kulanu president.

The people were so positive and hopeful that we were going to get the first grant that they started gathering rocks from the hills and mountains and placing them at the building site. A committee was elected and the villagers organized themselves into teams. Each team had a day that was allocated to them to report to work. This allowed the villagers to work at their fields, as well as at the weir project. At first some people were skeptical that anything was really going to come out of it. However, when we finally got the grant, people started to believe that this was a serious project. The project was nicknamed "sekutamba sekuseka" in Shona. Loosely translated, the nickname means something that started small, like a joke, but later became a life-changing project.

When the building material arrived, more and more people started to report to work. Initially, only two villages were involved, Zvakavapano and Maeresera villages, but later on other neighboring villages came to help with the work to make a total of five villages. The three other villages that joined were Charuka, Mangezi, and Makonya villages. What started as a Lemba community project grew to become a project for many villages with many people of different religious, tribal, social, and political affiliations. The coexistence and cooperation displayed by the community in a country where people are polarized and divided according to religious and political affiliations was nothing short of a miracle. Fresh from a terrible famine, people put their differences aside to confront a common enemy: water shortage. It is for this reason that when we try to quantify the social impact of the grants we got from the Marin/San Francisco and North Peninsula Jewish Teen Foundations and, we cannot adequately quantify how much their sponsorship positively affected our community. Suffice it to say the social and economic impact is monumental.

On Wednesday, July 12th, I joined the team that was tasked to break rocks to make aggregate stones to be used to make concrete. Mr. Victor Zvakavapano, the Shift leader of this team which was commonly known as the Wednesday shift, is the oldest grandson of Zvakavapano, the founding headman of Zvakavapano village. As we used hammers to break rocks, the talk naturally drifted to how this project was going to change the people's lives. Some of the people present that day remembered all the droughts and famines that have ravaged our community from 1983 to date.

The community had large heads of cattle and they lost 90 percent of their cattle to droughts, the worst of them being the 1982-83 one. I remembered that one too, my family had more than 60 cattle then. In January 1983, it just stopped raining, the crops in the fields and the still-tender grass in the pastures withered and were blown away by dry winds. No water had collected in the stream at all. By mid-1983 cattle had started dying of thirst. It was really the lack of water that killed the cattle more than lack of grass. There still were some tree leaves for the cattle to forage; it was water shortage that was a problem. We had to walk with our cattle for long distances to a perennial river 15 miles away; the long walks took their toll on the frail animals. Some died on the way, and some could not make the long trek back home. Instead, we didn't go back home--we stayed with the cattle for three to four days a week close to the source of water. So many cattle dying meant that hyenas and jackals had a lot of meat to eat and their

population grew; it became easy for them to kill the weak and defenseless cattle, and we lost a lot more to these wild animals.

For us, little boys having to stay with our cattle close to the river for 3 to 4 days meant that we had to skip school. So one can only imagine how this must have psychologically affected us. We have a habit of naming our cattle, we knew each and every one of them by name, we were fond of them and every cow we lost left a psychological scar in us. Gilbert Matsimba, another member of the Wednesday shift, remembered how his cousin fell ill, and when he went to the clinic the nurses said he was eating too much meat from the dead cattle and not eating carbohydrates at all. For those who ate the meat from the emaciated animals, this became their main food source since there was a severe shortage of grain and other foods.

We had a recurrence of droughts in 1992, 1995, 2008, and 2014-15, and every time the people were ill-prepared to deal with water and food shortages; each of these times cattle and even people died. This weir then became the first time the community made an insurance for themselves and their animals against droughts and famine. This was the first effective infrastructure that was going to have a mitigating effect on droughts and famine. As Mr. Victor Zvakavapano, the Wednesday shift leader said, "This weir is going to be both a good inspiration and a lesson to ourselves and others that we as human beings don't need to just sit and wait for rain and hope for the best. Harvesting water for the dry season and drought years is going to give us more control of our lives as well as our environment"

Pikela Marandu is 19 and he only remembers the 2008 and the 2015 draughts. However, the two droughts he experienced were enough to convince him he didn't need to experience anything like that again. "In 2008, people and cattle trekked long distances in search of water and people survived on chakata (a wild fruit). We should think beyond just having water for cattle--we can also put fish in the dam."

On Sunday I caught up with the masonry team working at the weir. This team was made up of Jews, African traditionalists, and Muslims, since Christians do not work on Sundays. The shift leader, Mr. Lawrence Zvakavapano, is a bricklayer by profession. He said the work he was doing and the time he contributed to this project was the most fulfilling of all the work he had ever done. He called it "hedging ourselves against natural disasters." Also present was Mr. Esmond

Zvakavapano, the project chairman, who is a brother to Mason Mr. Lawrence Zvakavapano. Mr. Esmond, who is also a teacher at a local school, is a respected pillar of the community who is an avid supporter of development projects. He sees this project as a start of many good things to come, explaining, "This is a start but doesn't need to be the end. We can have 3 more weirs in this stream, and we can start a fishery and a vegetable garden. We need to have something to occupy ourselves with, even in the dry season. Most men, for lack of nothing else to do, spend the whole dry season drinking beer and loafing around. Young people even leave the villages for the city, so hopefully, if we get something to gainfully occupy ourselves with throughout the year, then it will restore our dignity and pride as people."

For Priscah Mutava, a mother of three who belonged to the food team whose duty is to cook for the builders, the weir will mean that her kids won't have to skip school to drive the family cattle to the nearest watering hole. "I am happy that my children will find more time to study and just to be children and play like children their age should do."

Towards the end of the day when the people were about to pack their tools, headman Abisha Zvakavapano came to inspect the work of the day. He said he was happy this was happening during his time. This will be a good legacy for the younger generations. He said to thank Kulanu and the Marin/San Francisco and North Peninsula Jewish Teen Foundations for making this possible.

It is clear the weir is the greatest thing ever to happen in the community. In a country with a depressed economy, political unrest, and general despondency, this gave people a big psychological boost. What made it easier was the people's willingness to come together to work on this very difficult project. However, we needed to be careful to make each of the representatives of the five villages feel they were equally important. To make people feel that this was their project, we encouraged them to contribute maize meal, vegetables, chicken and goats for meat, and other foodstuffs for the working teams.

Building the first weir



The project attracted the attention of the Zimbabwe National Water Authority: a government organization that is responsible for regulating water use as well as water rights. The engineers were amazed by the amount of work the villagers had done and they inspected the wall and made some recommendations on how we can make the wall stronger and safer. Buoyed by this successful project, and after Kulanu successfully sourced funds to build second weir, the community made a commitment to build a second weir in one of the 5 villages that took part in the current project. As I am writing this report, the villagers have already started work on the second weir. The success of the first weir attracted more villages, and this time seven villages are involved in building the second weir. We are hoping to finish constructing the second weir by August 2018. We are very grateful to Kulanu and its donors for partnering us in these life-changing community projects.

Below: completed first Weir and water flowing out of the spillway; more photos @<https://kulanu.smugmug.com/2017/Lemba/Water-Conservation-Project> and <https://kulanu.smugmug.com/Timeless/Kulanu-Press-Photos/Lemba-Weir-Press-Photos/>



OTHER PROJECTS: BRIEFLY

THE SOIL CONSERVATION PROJECT

After successfully completing the irrigation project(<https://kulanu.org/wp-content/uploads/lemba/hlsnewsletter2017-11.pdf>) we realized the soils were too poor to support crop production. The land had suffered from overuse and little maintenance, and years of soil erosion had damaged the fields. With a grant from the San Francisco-San Marin and North Peninsula Teen Foundations, we carried out a project to repair existing drains or water diversion channels as well as make new ones where it was necessary. The drains serve to protect the fields' soil from being washed away by rainwater. We followed that up with restoring the soil's fertility through introducing compost in the fields as well as mulching the fields after planting. Special mulch grass seeds were imported from South Africa and were planted in one of the fields. The mulch will serve to preserve fertile soil by protecting it from erosion

Rehabilitating the soil by applying compost



Below: digging diversion channels /drains to direct water from flowing in the fields



THE NEW WEIR

After successfully completing the first weir, Kulanu president Harriet Bograd sourced us another grant to build a second weir in another village. Construction work on the second weir started at the beginning of May 2018. The second weir has attracted two more villages to bring the total number of villages participating in the project to 7. We hope to finish the second weir by August this year.

Below: digging the foundations of the second weir



Below: Construction work has started on the second weir



NEWS SNIPPETS

BIRNBAUM MALKA VISIT

Last April we at the HLS were honored to host very important visitors from Israel: Rabbi Eliyahu Birnbaum and his daughter Shir, and Malka Shabbat and her daughter Tevel. They spent Shabbat with us before visiting Mapakomhere which is a Lemba community in Masvingo. Rabbi Birnbaum teaches at Or Torah Stone Yeshiva and he works with many Jewish communities in the Diaspora, and Malka is an accomplished anthropologist and researcher. We really enjoyed our time with them all.

Below: After receiving matzah from Rabbi Birnbaum and Malka at the Harare Lemba Synagogue. From left to right: Malkah Shabtay, Sharon Zhou, Rabbi Eliyahu Birnbaum, and Nomsa Hwingwiri



LESSONS AT THE HLS

It is our goal at the HLS that all our members be able to understand and follow our service as well as have at least a basic understanding of Judaism. For that reason, we give 2 lessons a week to new and young members of our community. Children start learning to read Hebrew from the age of 7. All new members automatically qualify for this program; currently we have 11 students who are learning Mondays and Thursdays in the evening.

OUR GROWING COMMUNITY'S NEEDS

Our community is growing fast, both at the HLS and in the countryside where we are opening congregations. Congregations have been started in Buhera and Mberengwa and we will soon have one in Gutu. With our expansion program, our needs are also expanding. We need at least 100 chumashim, 100 Machzorim and 100 siddurim in both Buhera and Mberengwa. We also need books for teaching people how to read Hebrew, Seder plates, Tallitot, kippot, and Hanukiya. If our friends and donors can source this for us we will be very grateful. Getting the books is normally not the difficult part but it is the shipping expenses that are usually prohibitive. If our friends can help with shipping that will be a positive development.

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