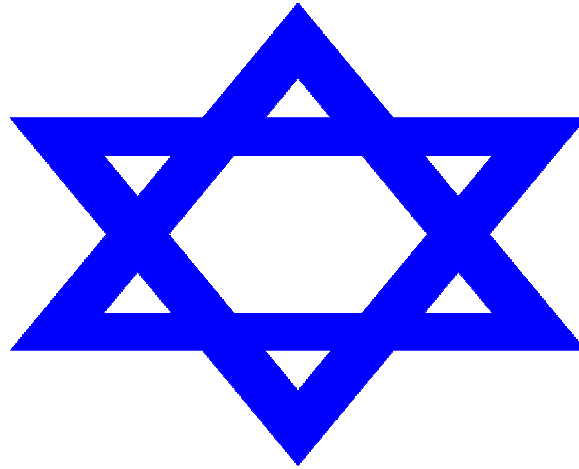

HLS NEWSLETTER VOL 3 MAY 2017



Newsletter

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MAY 1, 2017

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HLS Pesach 2017

By Brenda Chuma Maeresera.

For the 6th year running the Lemba Jews in Zimbabwe celebrated Pesach as a community. This year it was even more special because we had a total of 3 community Seders in Zimbabwe, In Harare, Mapakomhere and Mberengwa, with Mberengwa being the latest addition. This is very much in line with our goal to have a congregation in every Lemba community in Zimbabwe. Hashem willing we will not only have a Seder in Mberengwa but a full functioning congregation soon.

For the Harare lemba Synagogue community, the Pesach holidays have become something to look forward to. For the past 4 years we have been celebrating Pesach together as a community. The first two years our celebrations and observance of these important holidays were pretty basic, but ever since our first Pesach celebrations as a community we have been learning a lot, through teachers who come to teach through the Kulanu sponsored HLS education program and also through our cyber education program where we either study via Skype with Rabbis in Israel or and the USA or through our WhatsApp learning group where we invite rabbis from Israel and the USA to teach and to respond to whatever questions the students may have. Our goal is to observe the Pesach Holidays and any other holiday just like they are observed by fellow Jews everywhere. This year we were fortunate to learn with Rabbi Keith Flaks whose schedule in the army reserves afforded him free time to learn with us, guiding us through our preparations for the Pesach holidays. Together we learnt halakhot Pesach, how to go about cleaning chametz and the significance of chametz as well

as removing it. We learnt about the foods that are halachikally allowed and the foods that are not. We were confronted with several dilemmas, the most prominent being how to treat Kitnuyot. Do we go with the minhagim Ashkenazim or minhagim Sephardim on how to treat grains like beans corn, sorghum etc.? In the end we left this to the halakha committee and its decision will be effected by next Pesach, but for now we will follow the Sephardic customs since us, the Lemba originally came from Yemen.

Because of the learning we did, we were better off than the previous years in as far as understanding Halacha of Pesach is concerned. We understood that it was not just about the Seder day, nor the other Pesach days that followed (kol Ha moed), but the preceding days building up to Pesach especially the cleaning and removal of chametz were equally important. On the afternoon before the Seder the HLS grounds were a hive of activity, with a lot of people who had pre assigned duties and chores working to get everything done before the Seder. Some were cleaning, some were cooking, others were slaughtering and skinning the sheep and others did the roasting of the lambs. It felt like a real community working towards one goal and purpose. It was a marvel to behold.

What made our Pesach special was we didn't just, just go through the Haggadah, following the order of the Seder; the leader had to explain and we then discussed what every stage was about, and why and it was done the way it was done. First we had to teach each other the importance of this holiday, and how it came to be celebrated the way it is celebrated today and why it is still relevant for us today. We compared how Pesach is celebrated by most Jews today with how it was traditionally celebrated by the Lemba and we tried to explain the differences by

referring to the different developments in our respective communities. When we recited the brachot, we did it together, it showed that most of the people present were now familiar with the Seder proceedings. Most people followed the Seder proceedings easily and recited the brachot without much difficulty. Little Zanele Zhou recited the four questions effortlessly and all the kids waited for their favorite part of the Seder: searching for the Afikoman. In the end we rewarded the losers and the winners alike. The children who couldn't find the afikoman got several candies each and the winner Fortune Zhou got candies and a dollar as price.

It was a wonderful Seder night, a night where we celebrated our freedom from slavery; a night of joy, of learning and celebrating our coming together as a community to celebrate the holidays. Thanks to Kulanu; its donors and all who made it possible for us. We hope next Pesach we will be using our own Lemba Haggadah, with both Hebrew and Shona and we also hope that someday we will celebrate it in Jerusalem.

Pesach I Mberengwa

By Hilary Zhou

For the past 5 Years starting in 2012, the Lemba Jews in Zimbabwe have been celebrating Pesach, as a community in form of giant community Seders. The first

ever Seder for us as Lemba Jews was celebrated in Mapakomhere in Masvingo province of Zimbabwe in 2012 when Kulanu's regional coordinator Sandy Leeder came and organized a community Seder for the Lemba Jews of that rural community. In many ways that Seder marked the beginning of the Lemba's journey towards reintegrating with mainstream Judaism. Ever since then we have introduced the Seder to the Harare Lemba Synagogue; a community of Lemba who live in Harare the capital city of Zimbabwe and this year we added Mberengwa, bringing the number of community Seders in the country to 3.

Bringing the Seder to Mberengwa was long overdue, as a district that boasts the largest Lemba population in Zimbabwe it is only fitting that Mberengwa has its own Seder. Despite having the largest Lemba population, Mberengwa also has a substantive Lemba traditional chief and it is the hub of Lemba culture and traditions and for those reasons bringing the Seder to this community was logical. For many years the people of Mberengwa have been patiently waiting for the Seder and modern Judaism to be introduced to their district and this year they were able to see that dream come true.

The intensive education that I received through the Kulanu sponsored Harare Lemba synagogue education programs: learning with teachers like Guershon and other visiting teachers did not only give me a deep understanding of what this holiday was about, but also prepared me to lead the first ever Seder in my home district of Mberengwa. Leading the Harare Lemba synagogue Seder last year also helped a lot in preparing me for this great day.

The venue for the Mberengwa Seder was at Chegato Primary School, a school that is close to a Lemba Village, called Masarira. Masarira village consists of about 200

households mainly of the Madi clan, while they are also the Sadiki, the Hamis, Mani, and Sarif clans in the village. Located a few kilometers from the Dumbwi Mountain where the ngoma lungundu used to be housed. The village has a population of about 5000 but currently only about 2000 due to the rural- urban migration when people move to cities in search for jobs and sources of living.

We started preparing for the Seder early Monday morning, lighting fires for cooking and roasting meat. Our shochet Vupamwe Zhou(holding the sheep in the pictures) 15 is on apprentice and will one day replace the village shochet while at the same time acts as the village shochet for the daily slaughter requirements, slaughtered the sheep for the Pesach Seder. Vupamwe was selected to be the village shochet because he has never set his foot outside the district which means he is believed to have never eaten non lemba kosher food and is also believed to have never eaten from a non Lemba household. According to Lemba traditions for one to be a shochet they must be known to have adhered to Lemba dietary laws all their life. After the skinning and burning of the hides and chametz, it was time to set the Seder tables at the school dining hall.



Trainee Shochet Vupamwe Zhou Skinning the sheep: photo by Ashton Zhou

Sheron my wife took this opportunity to teach and share her knowledge about setting the Ke'ara (Seder plate) to the ladies. She had lettuce and ginger for marror, Charoset which she prepared with apples, cinnamon, raisins, nuts and red wine, Karpas a boiled potato, Z'roa the roasted Lamb and goat bones, Beitzah a hardboiled egg completed the Seder plate. A bottle of wine, a cup of salt water, matzot and translated copies of the Haggadah completed the set for each table. One of the elderly ladies Mrs. Makuvaza who was helping with the dining hall preparations was very happy about what she called the greatest reunion: "what we want now is to continue to learn and our great wish now is to have services she said. Please tell our dear brothers and sisters who have made this possible to send us rabbis to teach us"; she added. Hopefully with enough learning I will be able to take up the role of leading services for the village.



Setting the Seder tables at Chegato School. Photo by Ashton Zhou

As we waited for the lighting of the candles and the shehecheyanu, since it was a first for most people, I took the time to give a brief background of the Seder and the story of the exodus and its meaning and why we eat and drink wine and tell the story of the exodus. I also took the time to teach about chametz and the dietary requirements for Passover and how different traditions have different dietary observances which brought us to a discussion on which tradition we were supposed to follow for Pesach, the Ashkenazi or the Sephardic traditions. The decision will be made by the Halacha committee sometime this year. I also took time to explain how this, our first Seder in Mberengwa was a significant one since it symbolized our coming back to mainstream Judaism.

A temperate mood presided in the dining hall as everyone listened as we discussed the Pesach Seder and its traditions. “We need books, tallit so that we can read and learn Jewish Law and practices since we had lost our books long ago

please thank everyone who made this possible for us, this is indeed a dawn of a new era in our lives” said Mr. Zvoushe Zhou.

After the candle lighting it was time to begin the Seder service, which we began with reciting of the Kiddush and the drinking of the first of the 4 cups. There was a bit of pushing and shoving as all our junior guest jostled to be the one to ask the four questions. We eventually settled to have 4 kids to ask a question each, from four of the 5 clans present and this gave an amicable ending to the jostling. Due to the enthusiasm from the kids, for the Afikoman search we decided to have only the girls participate as only the boys had participated in the asking of the four questions. The ultimate price of a bar of chocolate went to Elsinah Ngavi while all the other children also received sweets as a compliment for their participation.

We recited the britkat hamazon, then the Nirtzah and finally it was time to say our goodbyes. It was a wonderful night of eating, song and dance. About 70 women, men and children gathered to celebrate Pesach in Masarira village. Their ages varied from a year old to 80 years. Finally the modern Seder was introduced to the Lemba Jews in Mberengwa. Hopefully soon we will have services and eventually build a synagogue for the community one day.

I would like to thank everyone who made this special night possible, Kulanu and its donors for the donation that made this event a resounding success and Natasha Simcha Butchart for sourcing the Matzot.

Lemba Tzedakhah

By Modreck Maeresera

Lemba have a Long tradition of Tzedakhah and most of this tradition was centered around a system of social welfare based on agriculture. It was imperative that the society looked after those who were not in a position to look after themselves, the widows, orphans the old and the disabled. The Tzedakhah system went beyond looking after the disadvantaged members of the Lemba community: it was also extended to giving hospitality to travelers and visitors and even helping our non Lemba neighbors.

Traditionally the village headman was in charge of the Tzedakhah program and some fields were assigned to him for the production of food crops that were reserved for caring for the poor, the needy and for providing hospitality to travelers and visitors. In every Lemba village, depending on how much agricultural land was available to the villagers, there was always a small portion set aside for the Tzedakhah program and this small portion of land was managed by the village headman or the community leader. The whole village was responsible for the tilling, planting, weeding and harvesting of the tzedakhah fields. Days would be set aside where the whole village would gather to do work at the tzedakhah plots.

After harvesting the food was stored at the village headman's compound and it was managed by him and his assistants. A monthly allocation was channeled towards the needy; the amounts depending on the number of dependents. The system was geared towards ensuring that everybody was well fed in the community, it was taboo to have starving people while others had a lot of food. According to Lemba values the community was not supposed to just look after its own, it was also supposed to care for the needs of our non Lemba, neighbors and travelers.

Long ago when people used to travel long distances on foot, they would need places to spend the night and in most cases it will be in villages and communities along their way. The lemba tzedakhah system was designed to deal with these kinds of situations, people who wanted to spend the night in the community were directed towards the community head who was responsible for hosting them: giving them a place to sleep and something to eat. The food came from the tzedakhah allocation. If it so happened that there were more people than the community head could provide accommodation for, then he would distribute them to other families in the village and the headman would give the hosting families food from the community tzedakhah reserves.

In drought years and during famines it was also common for people from neighboring non Lemba villages to come looking for food assistance. The Lemba were renowned agriculturalists and they kept large herds of livestock so more often than not they were better off food wise than their neighbors even during famine years. Individual villagers and the headman through the grain tzedakhah fund always assisted whenever they could, to help those who desperately needed

food. Normally those who received food assistance would pledge to come and help work in the Tzedakhah fields or the fields of their benefactors during the planting, and harvesting season. Growing up my father would loan some of our cattle to non Lemba neighbors who didn't have cattle to till the land or provide them with milk. These neighbors would look after the cattle and they in turn would come to assist us plant our fields and harvest our crops.

The tzedakhah system was used to care for those who needed help as well as create good relations between the Lemba and their neighbors. It was used to provide assistance to fellow Lemba and strangers and was central to Lemba values.

HLS 4th Anniversary

In May of 2013, with the help of Kulanu and with the help of Dr. Jack Zeller Kulanu's founding president and Sandy Leeder Kulanu's coordinator for the Lemba; the Harare Lemba Synagogue congregation was found.

The HLS was found out of the need to cater for the lemba who moved out of the village to start a life in the city, it was found because of the need to counter the negative impact of modernity. Some Lemba moved into cities from the village communities to study or find work. The rural urban migration of lemba removed them from the protective cocoon of the closely knit village communities and exposed them to assimilation. There were no community centers for the Lemba in the city: there was no community to talk about at all. The city Lemba lived wherever they found accommodation and there was need to bring them together into a community.

The HLS was a solution not only to that problem, but it was also meant to be a vehicle for reconnecting the Lemba with their Jewish brothers worldwide. In 2012 again with the Help of Kulanu a lemba congregation was started in the rural community of Mapakomhere in Masvingo province of Zimbabwe and the HLS came as an expansion of the same program. Together the Great Zimbabwe Synagogue and The Harare Lemba Synagogue were the designed to spearhead Lemba Jewish renaissance. To a large extent since it was started in May of 2013

the HLS has managed to fulfill its mandate and has ever since grown not only to become a community center for the Lemba in Harare but also to be a center for Jewish education for the Lemba community in Zimbabwe as a whole. It wasn't easy at all when we started, the biggest hurdle was getting a space that was going to be big enough to provide a space for daily Minyan to the Lemba community as well as act as a guest house for our prospective visitors. After weeks of searching we finally found the house from where we are located now; 1 Heathrow close Bluffhill in Harare. The place was ideal for our needs with a big lounge that we have converted into a bet Knesset and several bedrooms for hosting local and international visitors.

We started the congregation with a total of ten people 6 adults and 4 children. The biggest challenge was how to conduct a service since none of us had any formal Jewish education to talk about. We had a couple of Hebrew-English siddurim, 3 Sim shalom chumashim. Luckily for us; in 2012 the synagogue President Modreck Maeresera had compiled a siddur using a website called www.buildaprayer.org which was recommended to him by Harriet Bograd Kulanu president. The prayers were in Hebrew, English and transliteration and Maeresera translated the siddur into Shona Zimbabwe's local language. That gave us a good starting point, with no knowledge of liturgy and no Hebrew literacy we read through the service in Shona and English.

We realized then that the most important thing that we needed was a Jewish education and with the help of Kulanu we launched the Harare Lemba Synagogue cyber education program. A program that enabled us not only to study on line through websites like Aish, Chabad, Judaism 101 etc.: but also enabled us to study

live with teachers in Canada, Israel, and the USA through Skype. Kulanu bought us a laptop and subscribed internet for us to make this program a success. Since only a few of us could learn and use the laptop at a time; we recorded our skype lessons and shared with those who couldn't make it to the lessons. That way our skype lessons benefitted a lot of lembe even those in the countryside.

Over the following months between May and October our congregation grew from 10 members to 25 members and most of the time we had a minyan for our Shabbat shacharit services. However we realized that although we were learning a lot through our cyber education program we needed to have live face to face lessons with teachers. We needed lessons on how to conduct services, liturgy lessons, how to keep a kosher kitchen among other things. In October 2013 Mr. Erwin Berg and his wife Elaine Berg from New York volunteered through Kulanu to come and spend a month with our community teaching. The Bergs' visit immensely benefited the community. With them we learnt Hebrew from scratch till we could read directly from the siddur, we learnt how to lead services, how to organize ourselves as a community among other things. Their visit was the beginning of the Kulanu Lemba visiting teachers program. After the Bergs we had Guershon from France who stayed with us for 3 months between March and June in 2014, after Guershon we had Mordy and Mickey Feinberg volunteers from Washington USA who stayed with us for a month in August 2004 and again in August 2005 teaching. After the Feinbergs we had Sarah Eisen from New Jersey USA, she stayed for 4 months between October 2014 and January 2015. After Sarah we had Rabbi Keith Flaks and his wife Nili from Israel and they stayed for 2 weeks in April 2015 and they helped us with our community Seders.

The amount of learning that we did with both the visiting teachers and the cyber education program greatly transformed our congregation. Now we understand the services which we are conducting in Hebrew Shona and English, we sing together and our services are full of kavanah. We have since moved up the ladder to learn more than just the basics, some of us are learning Torah trope and we are also studying Halacha. Moreover we have been able to send several of our members to attend programs like the BCI, Massa and Pardes programs and the people we sent to attend those programs have benefited a lot from the exposure and the networking. Hopefully soon we will have professional rabbis and cantors.

Looking back over the past four years, the amount of learning that we did and the growth that the congregation has experienced is encouraging. To date we have 65 members in the congregation and on average Shabbat day; we get 40 people for Shabbat services. The learning does not just benefit the members of the Harare Lemba Synagogue; in many ways the HLS has become a learning center for the Lemba in Zimbabwe. In 2015, students from Masvingo, Gokwe and Gutu came to learn with the Feinbergs. After learning the HLS members also have an obligation to go to their villages of origin to teach their kith and kin what they have learnt through the HLS education programs. It is our goal that the HLS becomes a vehicle that will spear head lemba Jewish renaissance; through the HLS the Lemba in Zimbabwe as a whole will be reconnected with modern Judaism.

Although the progress that we have made is wonderful, we recognize and accept the fact that there is still a lot of work that needs to be done and it is not yet time to rest on our laurels. There are still a lot of Lemba out there who need Jewish education; a lot of villages and communities that are eagerly waiting for services

to be introduced to them. We too still have a lot of learning to do. This does not deter us, it's a challenge for us here at HLS. With the support that we are getting from Kulanu through its donors and from our Jewish friends from all over the world we know we can do it. We are grateful to Kulanu and all our friends who have supported us to get to where we are today, without you we wouldn't have made this progress.

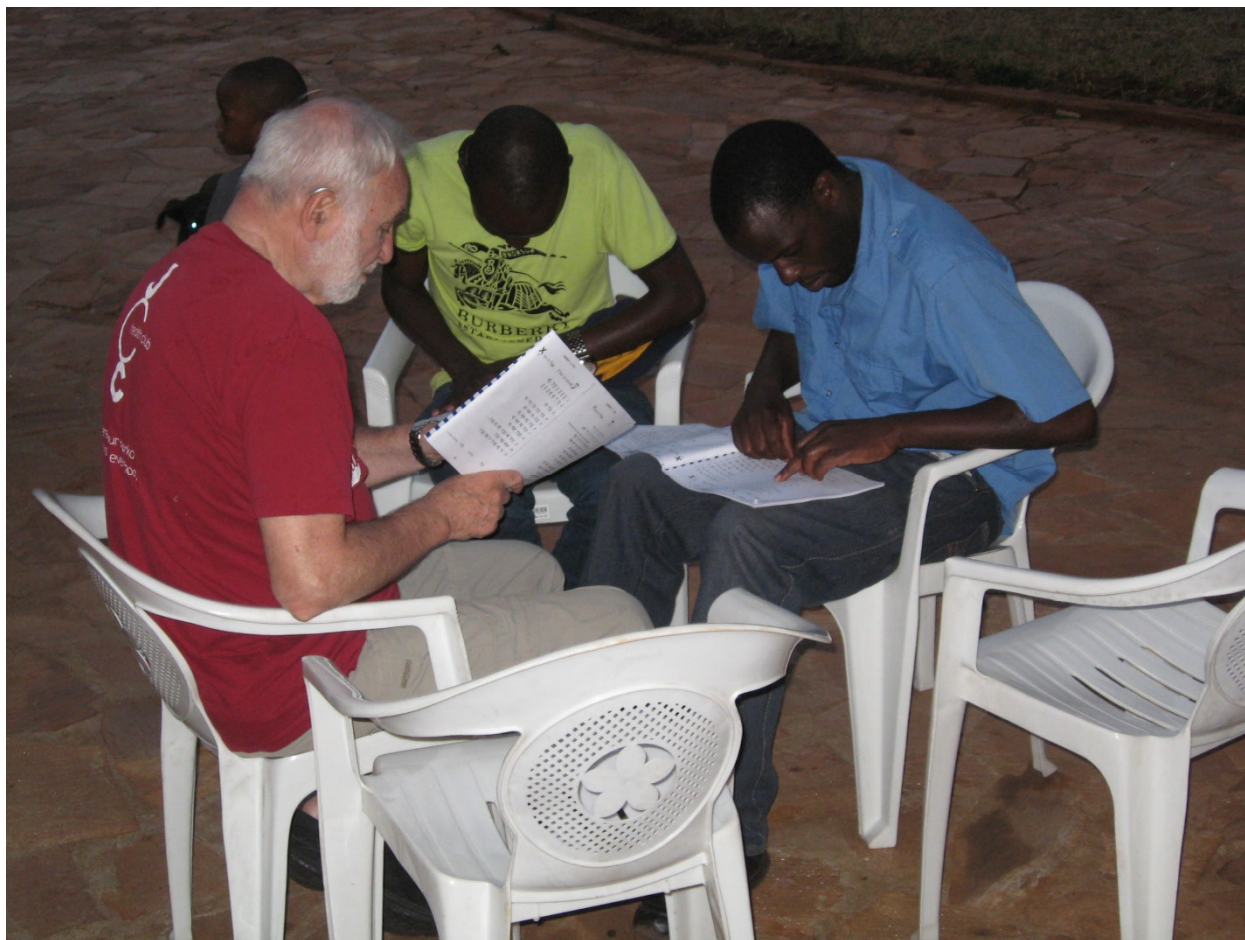
Todah Rabbah

Kulanu Lemba visiting teacher program in pictures

Below are pictures of different teachers who came to teach at HLS, by order of when they visited



Elaine and Irwin Berg teaching Hebrew at HLS in October 2013: photo by Modreck Maeresera



Irwin Berg teaching a couple of students in October 2013: Photo by Modreck Maeresera



Guershon Nduwa teaching Hilary Zhou to put on Teflin: Photo by Modreck Maeresera



Last day of learning with Guershon Nduwa: Photo by Modreck Maeresera



After a lesson about Teflin with Guershon Nduwa in March 2013: Photo by George Zvakavapano



*After 4 months of intensive learning with Guershon Nduwa in May 2014 the students got certificates:
Photo by Nelson Hamandishe*



Mickey Feinberg Teaching a group of children at HLS in August 2014: Photo by Mordechai Feinberg



Learning Israel Dances with Mickey Feinberg in August 2015: Photo by Mordechai Feinberg



Davening Daily Shacharit with Mordechai Feinberg: Photo by Mickey Feinberg



Ladies learning to bake chala with Mickey Feinberg in August 2015; Photo by Mordechai Feinberg



Learning to braid challa with Mickey, in August 2015: Brenda braids challa while Nomsa (Right) Simcha (far left) and Mickey Feinbergs watch:Photo by Mordy Feinberg

My time in the holy Land

Modreck Maeresera

Ever since I was a little boy; the horizon has always been an enticing thing which held the promise of adventures unknown and an escape from the rural life which I then thought to be boring and full of back breaking hard work. Most of my colleagues whose fathers worked in the city would go spend their school holidays in the city, but with both my parents; fulltime subsistent farmers and village dwellers: I was stuck in the village even during school holidays. I would look at the horizon and yearn, wondering what lay over the far off lands where the sun set, wishing I could escape from the restrictive cocoon of the village life. From a very young age I fell in love with reading novels, something I learnt from my older brothers and sisters who were also addicted to reading novels. Like a picture or a painting on the wall that gives one the illusion of getting rid of the wall and its confining effect affording one a chance to look at the far off horizon, at the grass filled field or the far off mountains: Novels gave my imagination the illusion of pushing back my horizons. I could venture into far off lands and be with the heroes in Luis L'Amour novels or Zane Grey characters.

Going to boarding school slightly broadened my horizons, but I quickly got used to the new environment and once again I found myself casting a yearning look at the horizon, more so when during the holidays most of my classmates left the

school for the city and I once again made my way to the familiar environment of my home village. No matter how many novels I read, no matter how many places I went to when I finally left my village to go to college in the city, I couldn't get rid of the addictive yearning for the places unknown yonder beyond the horizons where the sun sets.

In 2013 and 2015 I got the opportunity to go on a speaking tour representing the Lemba community in Zimbabwe and that immensely broadened both my personal horizons and the horizons of the community that I represented. I didn't only get the chance to be in the places of the heroes in the novels that I read both as an adult and as a boy but also broadened the horizons of my community: a community that yearned to retrace its steps to a religion, a culture and traditions that it has been separated from for hundreds of years. For hundreds of years the Lemba have lived in Southern Africa but they have always yearned for a home that they had left somewhere in the east. For a city they called Sena, for a book that they lost and a religion and a culture they wanted to reconnect with. A religion whose vestiges still remained in the cultural practices the Lemba preserved and adhered to against all the odds. It is in every Lemba's DNA to yearn for those things and being a Lemba my yearning was not quenched no matter how much it seems I broadened my horizons through travel and learning alike. I still found myself looking east and yearning, because it is in the nature of every Lemba to yearn.

By 2015 I had learnt enough about Jews, Israel and Judaism to understand the nature of my yearning and the nature of the Lemba people's yearning. I had learnt enough to understand the nature of the old people's obsession with the

home that our people left many, many years ago. It was the soul of a Jew seeking its way back home. My yearning by then had ceased to be personal in nature; I yearned for myself and the lemba community as a whole. After unsuccessfully applying for an Israeli visa in 2012 I finally got a visa thanks to Boni Sussman Kulanu's vice president's connections. After a 2 year long personal wait I was finally going to visit Israel and to study at Or Torah stone Yeshiva in Efrat for 3 months. Over the years I had heard a lot about Rabbi Riskin head of the Efrat community, both from the time he lived in Manhattan and when he started a community in Efrat Israel. How he was working to bring Judaism to a lot of isolated and emerging Jewish communities in the world. In many ways his work was very much like that of Kulanu, the organization that is sponsoring my community and the organization that made this trip possible.

I landed at Tel Aviv airport on the first of March 2016, and Jack Zeller Kulanu's president emeritus and my friend picked me up at the airport; it was great to see him again. As we drove from the airport to across Tel Aviv on our way to Efrat my first impression and feeling was that of being underwhelmed. It looked like any other modern city, like Johannesburg and the other cities that I have been to on my two US trips. There wasn't much to see once we left the city lights of Tel Aviv in the twilight of dawn. As we got to Or Torah Stone in Efrat and drove to the trailer house that I was going to share with Amir Serge Etiele, a fellow student from the Kulanu sponsored community In Cameroon I again got the sense of being underwhelmed. It didn't look like a very big place and in the early morning hours there wasn't much activity at the Yeshiva.

We met Amir who had woken up early to welcome me, he was a talented multilingual gentleman and I was glad to have him as my roommate. When we got into the trailer that I shared with Amir I found out that a lot of people had made a lot of effort to make it comfortable for me. Mrs. Vickie Riskin had made sure there was a heater and warm clothes for me since it was still winter, Jill Kuchar had made sure I had a warm bed linen and Jack and Diane his wife had bought a fridge, microwave, a stove, electric kettle and food for us to share with Amir-Serge. Immediately I felt at home. There is a saying which goes “a place won’t feel like home unless there is a mother, or a mother figure for you.” As it turned out for me, I didn’t have one but many mother figures and that largely contributed to the how quickly I settled and felt at home in Israel.

Amir-Serge gave me a tour of the Yeshiva which despite my first impression was quite a remarkable place, although I was a bit taken aback by the number of gun slinging students on campus; that really took me a while to get used to. Since I didn’t speak Hebrew I had a special learning arrangement where I learnt in English with Rabbi Stuart Fishman, Abe Reichmann and Rabbi Nachum. I learnt Halacha with Rav Fishman, going through Mishnah Berura, from Halakhot tzitzit, Halakhot tefflin and etc., with Rav Nachum we studied The Gates of Repentance and we did Parashat Hashavua and theology with Abe on Sundays and on Friday mornings. Amir-Serge was in these classes too, but he also took another class of senior students with Rav Boaz.

One day a funny thing happened, I got into the Bet Midrash (study Hall) and Rav Boaz was conducting a class with 5 students and to my surprise I understood everything that they were saying. My first reaction was; yeah now I could

understand Hebrew! But immediately I realized it wasn't Hebrew at all: it was only Portuguese. I had studied Portuguese at college before I went to work in Mozambique for two years; Mozambique is a former Portuguese colony and Portuguese is the official language there. As it turned out there was a group of students who had made Aliyah from Brazil and they were in Rav Boaz's group. Rav Boaz also spoke fluent Portuguese and he had a Portuguese speaking wife too.

After that; learning and life at the Yeshiva became easier. I used English to communicate with most of my teachers, when I had a lesson with Rav Boaz it was in English and Portuguese. Later he used Hebrew too to encourage me to speak the language. When I had a chavruta with Avraham, Rafael and my other colleagues from Brazil we spoke in Portuguese. I quickly got settled in the Yeshiva life, finally got used to leaving my phone and belongings unattended in the Bet Midrash because nobody was going to steal them, and I got used to Sunday being a working day and Friday being a weekend.

I really started enjoying my stay in Effrat particularly and in Israel in general. It was a wonderful community with a lot of caring people. I was always invited for Shabbat dinner or lunch. On my first Shabbat I got invited for Shabbat dinner and lunch at Rabbi Riskin's. It was wonderful to finally meet the man I had heard a lot about. I was used to the untouchable African VIPs who were enigmas and rarely mixed and mingled with ordinary people. So I was surprised at how humble Rabbi Riskin was in the way he interacted with his guests and other people. In the following weeks I learnt that it was his patience, kindness, simplicity and humbleness that made him an extraordinary man. He had a way of making you feel like you could accomplish anything once you put your mind to it. Looking at

the community that he started way back in 1983 I agreed that he was indeed an extraordinary man.

Over the following weeks I got a chance to meet more people in Effrat as a guest for Shabbat dinner or lunch or both, at the Fishmans, at the Beidins etc. The Reichmann and the Kuchar homes were practically like my homes in Effrat. I ate most of my meals there and celebrated most of my holidays there. Like I once said: we lemba believe that once you find a mother figure in any place it will be easy to settle in and like I said in Effrat particularly and in Israel in general I found a lot of mother figures. Mrs. Ruth Fishman was always worried if I was eating enough, Jill Kuchar always worried if my laundry was done, if I had warm enough clothes, Libby Reichmann worried about my family back home, were they safe, did they have enough to eat and enough clothes. Every week Diane Zeller made sure Jack brought me some groceries “in case I missed some meals at the Yeshiva”

Slowly but deeply I fell in love with Israel. Often people asked me what I liked about Effrat and Israel. After getting to think a lot about it I finally realized what it is I loved about Effrat. Way back in the mid-90s when I was still in high school. I took my grandmother; my mother’s mother to visit my brother in Harare. When we got to my brother’s house my sister in law asked my grandma if she liked Harare and how it compared to the village. Without hesitating my grandma said she didn’t like Harare at all “All the way from the bus station to here nobody bothered to greet me or give me a hand shake or ask how I was. Harare is a cold soulless place and I don’t like it “she said. We laughed at her observation and I personally wondered if she would have survived handshakes from scores of people that we met on our way to my brother’s house. However I found myself

thinking about her observation during my time in Effrat. Although Effrat was developed like any modern city with, running water, electricity and modern houses and other infrastructure; in many ways it was like a village. In a village everybody would know everybody else and when they meet they greet each other and ask after each other's health and welfare. When a person falls sick people would know about it and everybody would come to see them and wish them a speedy recovery. It was like that in Effrat. On my way to the synagogue people would wish me a good Shabbos and when I got lost on my way to the Fishmans' house someone would take me there or point the way to me. Effrat, Rochovot, Shorashim, and most places I have been to in Israel had the warmth, heart and souls of a village.

Religious wise Israel as a whole was a paradise for me, this was a place tailor made for Jews to live Jewish lives. There was synagogue in every direction and I chose which one I wanted to attend for the Kabbalat Shabbat service and which one for the shacharit service. For Kabbalat Shabbat services I liked going to the Carlbach shul aka the happy minyan. There was a lot of dancing and singing and the tunes were just wonderful. Most of the time I went to the Happy Minyan with Menachem Kuchar and for the Shabbat shacharit service I chose a shul close to the Kuchars and Reichmans home since I ate most of my Shabbat lunches with them. On Shabbat in Effrat there was virtually no car driving in the streets and the quietness was amazing except for Arab cars driving on the highway below. Then one day I visited Rav Keith and his wife Nili in the Old city Jerusalem, Rav Keith and Nili had visited us in Zimbabwe in April 2015 and they had helped us organize our Pesach Seders. I had a chance to speak to Rav Keith's students before they

took me to visit the Kotel for the first time. It was one of the most memorable days in my stay in Israel. Together with Rav Keith's students we sang and danced our way to the Kotel and along the way soldiers and policemen joined in. Like I said to Rav Keith and Nili later in a thank you note:

"It was one of the best days of my life. I wasn't expecting such a warm and decibel(icious) welcome from you and the students at the Yeshiva. It was wonderful, it was so great I cannot adequately put it into words. Singing and dancing all the way down to the Kotel was another beyond description experience, I loved it when the police and the security joined us. It will forever be etched as one of the best days in my life"

Most of my stay in Israel was a wonderful learning experience, twice in Jerusalem I got a chance to attend a Brit ceremony; one that Sandy was invited to and the second one for Jill and Menachem Kuchar's grandson. For both the brit ceremonies I got the chance to get close to the mohel to observe the procedure from up close. Sandy knew I wanted to learn to be a mohel for my community and I really needed this experience and I am very grateful to him for making this happen.

It indeed it was a historic series of events for me, something that I am always going to remember for as long as I live. During some of the weekends I visited friends in different places in Israel. My first visit was to Shorashim in the Galil, when I went to visit Andy and Derby Pearlman; the Pearlman's had paid for my tuition and other expenses at the yeshiva and they had made it possible for me to study in Israel. I travelled to Shorashim with the Pearlman's friends Marcelle and Noam Zion. Driving all the way from Yerushayim to the Galil was a memorable

event in itself. I got to see for myself just how beautiful Israel is, the hills, the valleys, the undulating landscapes and the orchards, it indeed fit the description of a land that oozes milk and honey.

The weekend in Shorashim with the Pearlmans and their friends was wonderful. It was great learning about how to write a Haggadah with Noam Zion who is a great author himself and in shorashim another trip this time to Rochovot was born. Melody and Sherman Rosenfeld; Debbie and Andy Pearlman's friends invited me to pay them a visit. Sherman took me to visit and meet the Ethiopian community in Rochovot and we went on a hike with some of the members of that community. It was great learning about their history and the challenges they faced trying to adapt to a new life in eretz Israel.



A weekend in Shorashim with Andy and Debbie Pearlman's friends; from right : (front row) Andy Pearlman, Debbie Pearlman, Macelle Zion and Melody Rosenfeld. Back row from right: Modreck Maeresera, Noam Zion, and Sherman Rosenfeld.

After Rochovot I visited Jon and Leslie Feinberg; Mickey and Mordechai Feinberg's son and daughter in law. I had met Mickey and Mordy, Jon Feinberg's parents when they came and stayed at the HLS for a month teaching in 2014 and 2015. These visits made it possible for me to see different parts of the country; as well as meeting many people who to this day have become good friends of mine as well as my community.

When my 3 months were almost up Sandy, the Pearlmans, the Zellers and Abe came to meet and to strategize about how best to go forward with the Harare Lemba synagogue and the Lemba community in Zimbabwe. I felt like I was at boarding school again during school visiting weekends when my father mother uncles and aunts came to visit me at school. It made me feel like I wasn't walking alone, like the Lemba were not alone. Here were friends who cared about us and wanted to see us through this Journey that we had undertaken. I had the chance to say goodbye to Sandy and the Pearlmans whom I didn't see again before I came back to Zimbabwe.

As my 3 months stay in Israel came to an end I realized that the horizon no longer stirred a yearning emotion in me. It was as if I have been to every place that mattered by just being in Israel. No; the horizon no longer made me yearn for lands unvisited and things unseen. Now the only place I could gaze at and yearn was towards the heavens and at the starry night skies.

Abe took me for a tour of Israel 2 days before my departure and it was the icing on the cake of my Israeli trip. I found I had too many things to bring back home to my family but too little space to put them. Jill had bought gifts for my family, and some clothes for the community, Sara Beidin had got us books from the library where she works, I also spend half a day with Libby and her granddaughter Moria buying stuff for me and my family, Jack and Diane had knives kippot, books and other items for me and for the HLS community. I had a lot of stuff to carry I ended up leaving some of the things behind. My Israeli visit was indeed a memorable one, but one thing that made it that memorable was the love and support I got from friends. Thanks to everybody who made it possible and to everybody who

made it memorable, To Andy and Debbie, to Sandy, Jack and Diane, to Sherman and Melody, Abe and Abe and Libby, Menachem and Jill, Rav Riskin and Vickie, everybody

Todah Rabbah

Brit Mila Program: bringing circumcision back to 8 days

The Lemba shifted from biblically instituted 8 day brit Mila because of persecution by Christians and missionaries. The persecution made it impossible for the Lemba to openly practice their culture and religion and they started practicing in secret. The shift to 8 year brit was made because of the necessity to keep the practice a secret. At 8 year the boys would move around with clothes on, they would bath themselves and they could be told to keep the Lemba practices a secret.

However now we have freedom of religion in Zimbabwe and people are no longer persecuted for their religious and cultural beliefs, the need for keeping our practices a secret is gone. More over medical circumcision is now so common there is a billboard in every street in town advertising the program. The stigma that circumcision used to have is gone. For those reasons this is the right time to bring back brit Mila to 8 days.

The HLS this year will have a brit program where 5 people from the congregation will be trained first by a traditional Lemba Mohel and then later by a Jewish Mohel. We believe our traditional mohels are important and they have been and are still doing a wonderful job of keeping and preserving our traditional practices under very difficult circumstances. After training with a traditional mohel the group will then train with a modern Jewish Mohel. Plans are under way to bring Ari Greenspan a Kulanu board member and mohel to train our group of prospective Mohels. Ari will come sometime next year

Bringing brit back to 8 days does in no way mean our traditional mohels are now irrelevant, it means we are merging the two traditions and goal is to keep and

preserve our traditions as well as make our practices Halachikhally correct. This program together with other programs are designed to bring back the Lemba into modern day Judaism. Efforts will be made to ensure we will balance between bring in the new as well as preserving Lemba traditions. Coming back into the fold doesn't mean totally abandoning our identity as Lemba Jews.

The names of the people who will be taking part in this program as well as further details about this program will be made available on our Facebook page, our website and WhatsApp groups. We will also print the newsletter so that it will be available to every Lemba community in Zimbabwe.

Updates

The irrigation project

The irrigation project has been a wonderful success, we are in the process of harvesting and it looks like it will be a bumper harvest. We have already started preparations for planting our next crop which will be a variety of vegetables. Once we finish the soil rehabilitation project we expect the yields to treble.



Some of the harvested corn: Photo by Caston Muradzikwa



Photo: By Caston Muradzikwa

Bar/Bat Mitzvah program

We have bar/ bat mitzvah lessons for kids between the ages 8 and 13 on Saturdays after Shabbat and Sundays at 11am at HLS. So far we have 4 children in this program and those who have kids in this age range are free to bring them to join.

Shaliach Tzibur Training program

Modreck will be training Kupakwashe Yedidah Marazani and Brighton Zhou to lead services on Thursdays at 11 am. Our aim is to have at least 6 people who can lead services. After these 2, we will identify more people who will train to lead services. When time comes for us to open new congregations in Lemba communities across the country we will have enough people who know how to

conduct services and these can also teach their fellow Lemba in their respective communities

[Note from the President](#)

We at the HLS are proud with the progress we have made thus far and we should like to thank all who have contributed to make this happen. We acknowledge and recognize we wouldn't have made it without our friends and sponsors. So to Kulanu, and its donors and to the HLS friends, thank you very much. While we are proud of the progress that we have made we know there is still a lot of work that needs to be done to make this congregation grow, to make it function more efficiently and make it a real vibrant center of Lemba Jewish education in Zimbabwe. We encourage HLS members to fully take advantage of the educational programs that we have to learn and advance our Jewish education. The next time that we are going to have a visiting teacher at the HLS, I don't expect to see ten or twenty people coming to learn; we should have scores of people coming. Our worry should be where to accommodate them. Although we benefited immensely from the visiting teachers programs so far, the attendance could and should have been better. There are a lot of people who put a lot of effort and use a lot of resources to put these programs in place. To acknowledge these people's efforts all we need to do is fully participate in the programs that they organize for us. Our visiting teachers also need to feel like the time they spend with us teaching was time well spend. We owe it to them, to ourselves and to the rest of the Lemba community.

Right now we have a WhatsApp learning group, which has members from the Lemba in Zambia, Zimbabwe and South Africa. We need to take advantage of it to learn. That is the only way we can progress. Technology is indeed wonderful and we should be taking advantage of it. Now someone in the Lemba rural communities can be part of our education programs without needing to travel to Harare first. I hope more and more people from the districts will join our WhatsApp group as this would benefit them as well as their respective communities.

Thanks to all who are volunteering to make the HLS a smooth functioning congregation, the food committee, the education working committee, the Lemba summer camp committee, those who volunteer to prepare meals for Shabbat and those who clean after the meals: everybody Todah Rabbah.

Modreck