



Kulanu Establishes New Online Boutique

Tamar Kemp and Harriet Bograd have become the cherished volunteer proprietors of Kulanu's new Online Boutique. The Boutique's website is now — or soon will be — located at <http://www.KulanuBoutique.com>. The Boutique will be offering the same items we have in the past plus some new ones -- tallitot, kippot, challah covers, books, music -- items that are hand crafted or designed by our various communities, such as the Abayudaya, the Sefwi Wiawso Jews, and the Bnei Menashe.

Kemp will be designated as the Kulanu Vice President for Boutique Sales and Marketing and Bograd will be her chief supporter, and advisor on nonprofit matters of transparency and reporting.

Proceeds from Boutique sales benefit the respective communities. **A new benefit is that we will be able to accept credit card orders** as well as payments via checks or money orders. Mail orders will continue to be accepted (see page 15 of this newsletter for order form). For further information, contact kulanuboutique@ureach.com. See Tamar Kemp's introductory letter on p. 6.

AMISHAV UPDATE

We Speak in Many Languages

By Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail

The past few months have been busy ones for Amishav, and I am grateful to be able to offer you a brief account of some of our latest activities.

The approximately 600 Bnei Menashe already living in Israel are doing well. Thank God, none have been injured or killed in the ongoing Palestinian terror campaign. There have been several marriages of late in the community, and a number of young Bnei Menashe couples have succeeded in purchasing new homes of their own. This, of course, should serve as a source of great pride and joy to us all.

Our work on behalf of the Bnei Menashe still in India continues apace. I am not at liberty yet to discuss details, but we have been in extensive contact with a wide range of Israeli public figures on this issue, and we remain hopeful.

One of our latest projects is to identify young Bnei Menashe men in Israel who are ready and willing to consider pursuing a career in the rabbinate. I think it is especially important for the Bnei Menashe to develop their own, home-grown spiritual leadership here. As I have

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Surfing to Uganda

By Moshe Cotel

By the time you sit down in your easy chair to read this article, I will be, if God wills it, in rural Eastern Uganda, far from paved roads and modern civilization, working with an isolated community of 600 black Jews called the Abayudaya - the only Jews to be found in this entire African nation of 22 million people.

The Abayudaya are native Ugandans who have been practicing Judaism for several generations - ever since their leader, a local governor named Semei Kakungulu, studied and meditated upon the Old Testament around 1919. He circumcised himself and his son -- and all his male followers did the same -- and they embraced the observance of all the laws of Moses as expounded in the Bible.

Over the years and decades that followed, the Abayudaya were visited by occasional Jewish travelers and adventurers from the outside world who helped them fill in the blanks about rabbinic Judaism.

Then, a Ugandan dictator arose, Idi Amin, who banned Judaism in the 1970s and persecuted the Abayudaya fiercely. Their numbers declined under this ferocious campaign of Ugandan anti-Semitism, but after that madman was finally overthrown, the Abayudaya were able to return openly to the peaceful practice of their beloved Judaism.

In 1995, Kulanu sent a delegation to visit the Abayudaya and seven years later, a second delegation has been formed to travel to Uganda again this February -- this time with a Beit Din (rabbinic court).

That's where I enter this story in a small supporting role. I'm traveling

with the delegation as administrative assistant to the Beit Din. Some generous friends have donated the money to make my trip possible.

The Abayudaya, cut off from world Jewry for so long, are about to become an official part of the Jewish people. Their synagogues, usually made from mud, are located in five different villages without plumbing or electricity, outside a town that you have probably never heard of, Mbale. These modest synagogues ring with joyous Shabbat and holiday songs that constitute a precious strain of African-Jewish culture which is unique in all the world.

Six months ago, Kulanu hosted two Abayudaya leaders in the States (the first time they had ever been outside of Eastern Uganda).

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Moshe Cotel

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

Chatting with Gershom

(An interview with Gershom Sizomu by Karen Primack and Lucy Steinitz, Dec 2001)

Now that you have spent five months in the US, what is your overall impression?

I think there is a lot to learn in the US. Every day I was learning a new thing -- very many things. And meeting very many different people. My overall impression was very good.

What did you study during your semester at Hebrew Union College?

I took Midrash - about Genesis - I took Tanach, a class in Education, and Biblical Hebrew. My Biblical Hebrew teacher taught us to use the root to work out modern Hebrew words. It is most helpful; I will take it back to my people.

Which of your courses are particularly applicable to your congregations in Uganda?

Especially Midrash, because at home we try to answer questions that the Bible doesn't answer. The Torah sometimes speaks about something and leave us with a space; we try to find out what happened. In school we are asked to write our own Midrash - what do you think happened? There are many questions about the Akeda (the story of the sacrifice of Isaac), so I wrote a Midrash. The Bible says that after the Akeda, Abraham went back, not with Isaac. So where did Isaac go? My Midrash says that Isaac was taken to heaven by the angels and he later returned from heaven; and I have verses that support this.

Did you write any Midrash before you came to the US?

No, I started to open my eyes when I came here.

Won't your Tanach studies at HUC be transferable to Ugandan Jews?

The Tanach I learned at HUC is not transferable, because the way they believe is not the way we believe in Uganda. They adopt the Reform view that the Tanach is written by human beings and all the ideas are from human beings, even the laws. So that sort of reduces the Tanach from its sacred point to a human point, which makes it difficult. It causes many questions for me. If you think it is a human fabrication, then why do you observe the laws? If a human being can say, "I am the Lord your God who brought you out..." isn't that a lie?

I think the Bible was written by human beings but the message therein is a sacred message. I don't like a human being setting all those rules and telling all those stories!

So how did a human come to set down these divine words?

I think there was divine inspiration. For example, when prophets poured out their spirit, there were scribes who would write what was going on. In a meeting someone speaks, and secretaries write. So I think there was a period of time when God inspired people to speak and write for His followers.

Has that time passed?

I think it has not passed, because even today people are extraordinarily wise. They can think about wonderful ideas. And I think God inspires them. You can appreciate that such people are more than you, Page 2

and there is no way that you can come to their level. Then that means there is a supernatural power creating the difference between them and you.

Examples are the sages, people who wrote the siddurim, prayers, compositions of sacred works. And even in the secular field, there are people who are extraordinary; inventing the computer was God-inspired!

How have you spent your time in New York?

Most of my time was spent in school and speaking. I had four days full-time at school. And then I would use even the nights after school to go and speak. I had no time to study; it was a problem. All weekends were taken for speaking. I traveled to Boston three times, New Jersey, Washington, and so on. I did not even have time for sightseeing. Shabbat was spent in prayer and speaking.

Now that your time in the US is almost up, what do you regret not doing?

I wanted to meet many other friends, and I have not done the sightseeing. I have not seen snow. I'm going home without any stories or pictures of snow! And I wanted to make more connections for coming back here to study.

What are your study plans?

It is a little bit difficult for me to go away to study because I am a spiritual leader and headmaster of the Abayudaya high school in Uganda, and I support a household of 14 people. Probably in the future, as younger people get interested in taking up my role, they will fill my position and I will go off to study. I'm training people, such as Samson Waman, Moses Seabago, Seth Jonadav, and Rachel Namudosi — I want her to be one of the leaders, because I'm becoming a feminist now!

Actually, I want to come back within a period of a year. I think I can learn a lot here. I would like to try an Orthodox or Conservative school. I have friends at JTS and I have a meeting there with some rabbis on the board.

Have you gotten used to the American standard of living?

I think the standard of living here is wonderful. It's going to be hard for me to adjust. Here I just get in the shower and command, "let there be water" and it is there. At home it is a long process. I have to go to the well, spend one hour waiting for water to fill, carry it back, go to the bush, look for firewood, and heat up the water. If I overheat it I have to go back to the well to get some water to chill it a little. Then I go to the bathroom, and use my hands to pour water on me. For people who have responsibilities, it takes a long time to get yourself set.

We are working on getting running water and electricity. I spoke in Boston last week, and one woman donated \$3000 for electricity. The cost is \$12,000 to bring electricity to our villages.

We are thinking of using the money we earned selling our kippot and CDs to buy a house in the nearby city of Mbale to have electricity and run some projects there. Being near a town is the major issue -- nearness to social amenities. Perhaps we could run a guest house or other permanent income-generating project. If we had a hotel, we could play our music professionally there.

By the way, we hope to record another album (Continued on original)



Photo of Gershom Sizomu, © 2002 by Diva Communications, Inc.

A Jewish Spark Rekindled in China

By Michael Freund

(reprinted from *The Jerusalem Post Magazine*, November 23, 2001)

Though he is only 23 years old, Shi Lei of Kaifeng, China, is laboring hard to reclaim centuries of Jewish tradition and heritage, much of which has all but faded away in his native land.

A descendant of a once prosperous and thriving Jewish community located on the south bank of China's Yellow River, Shi Lei (pronounced Sher Lay) is now enrolled in the one-year Jewish Studies program at Bar-Ilan University outside Tel Aviv, where he is busy studying Hebrew and learning about Jewish history and culture.

Shi Lei is heir to a proud legacy that was handed down from father to son over the generations. His ancestors were Chinese Jews, part of a community that enjoyed nearly a millennium of peaceful relations with their Chinese neighbors.

"My ancestors came to Kaifeng, China, about 1000 years ago," Shi Lei says. "In 1163, the Jews in my city bought a piece of land in a downtown area in Kaifeng and set up a synagogue, which stood in place for about 700 years, before it fell into ruin."

China provided its Jews with a welcome and comfortable home, free of many of the insecurities that plagued Jewish communities elsewhere in the Diaspora. There are no known recorded incidents of anti-Semitism in China, and the Jews were free to engage in trades and the professions.

At its peak, during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Kaifeng Jewry numbered about 5,000 people. Concerned, perhaps, about their community's sense of collective memory, the Jews of Kaifeng decided to erect steles (stone monuments), on which they inscribed the history of their sojourn in China. Two of the steles, which were erected in 1489, 1512, 1663 and 1669, now sit in the Kaifeng Municipal Museum, a lasting testimony to the Jewish life that once thrived there.

According to Dr. Wendy Abraham, a leading scholar on the history of Kaifeng Jewry, many Chinese Jews had risen to high ranks in the Chinese civil service system by the 17th century. But by the middle of the 1800s, widespread assimilation and intermarriage had all but erased the Chinese Jews' practice and knowledge of Judaism. After the last rabbi of the community died sometime in the first half of the 19th century, Kaifeng's Jewish community all but disbanded.

Nowadays, there is no community in Kaifeng per se, just a few hundred individuals who identify themselves as descendants of the city's Jewish community. "There is no rabbi, no synagogue. There is nothing left, only memory. Only memory," says Shi Lei.

And it was a compelling desire to investigate that memory that led Shi Lei to come to Israel for a year.

As a child, Shi Lei remembers his father and other family members telling him that he is of Jewish descent. "My father told me: 'you are Jewish,' but I didn't know the meaning behind this word. What is a Jew? What is Judaism? I didn't know so much. All I knew was the word 'Jew' and 'Jewish,'" he says.

Shi Lei's grandfather would recount to him the distant memories he still preserved of Jewish practice. "When my grandfather was a kid, maybe when he was 8 years old or so, he saw the celebration of the Passover," says Shi Lei. "His father, my grandfather's father, used a traditional Chinese writing brush to dip in chicken's blood mixed with water. After dipping, he would dip this on the doorpost of his home." The ritual echoes the Biblical command given by God to the Children of Israel prior to the exodus from Egypt.

Other vague memories of Jewish customs were also passed down. "My grandfather, when he was a kid, he saw some kipahs, or yarmulkes, which were put in the medicine chest of his mother. But my grandfather doesn't know when," says Shi Lei. But even these remnants of Jewish ritual have been lost with the passage of time: "Now, so many things just disappeared. We don't know why, they just disappeared -- yarmulkes, but also the celebration of the Passover. We don't do it anymore now," Shi Lei says.

As he grew older, Shi Lei read everything he could find about Jewish history and culture, slowly expanding his knowledge base about his ancestors' way of life. "As my knowledge about this was growing, I gradually, little by little, more and more, I had the strong wish that I want to study Judaism and Jewish history."

In July 2000, Shi Lei met Rabbi Marvin Tokayer of Great Neck, New York, who was leading a study and tour group to China, as he has done on many occasions over the past two decades. Rabbi Tokayer, a former Chief Rabbi of Japan and author of some 28 books on Jews and the Far East, was deeply impressed with Shi Lei and his sincerity about exploring his heritage.

His meeting with Shi Lei was fortuitous. "Suddenly," he says, "I meet a recent college graduate in China who knows English well and is a direct descendant of the original Jewish families. He is very proud of his ancestry and anxious to learn." After Shi Lei served as a guide for Rabbi Tokayer's tour group in Kaifeng, the participants became enamored with the young Chinese scholar. After consulting with Shi Lei and his family, Rabbi Tokayer contacted Bar-Ilan University and arranged for him to enroll in the one-year program.

Shi Lei was excited at the prospect of learning about Jewish traditions and culture. "After I knew that I am Jewish and that my ancestral land is Israel," he says, "I had a strong wish to go to Israel to study. Rabbi Tokayer contacted Bar-Ilan University and the university promised to give me a full scholarship because I do not have any personal funds." Thanks to a scholarship from the university, along with some funding from the members of Rabbi Tokayer's tour group, Shi Lei is now busy juggling an intense program of study.

When I visited with Shi Lei at the Bar-Ilan campus, the excitement was palpable. (Continued on page 13)

Descendant of Kaifeng Jews To Visit the US

By Ray Kaplan

Kulanu is pleased to announce that we will soon be welcoming to the US, for the first time, a descendant of the ancient Jewish community of Kaifeng, China. Mr. Shi Lei is a resident of Kaifeng, where he grew up and received his education. He is a 1999 graduate of Henan University, in China, where he majored in English in the Foreign Languages Department. He is currently completing a one-year Jewish Studies Program at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, which he started in July 2001.

He will be returning to Kaifeng upon completion of his studies and will be stopping in the US to do some sight-seeing and to further pursue his academic interests in his Jewish heritage.

Shi Lei's trip to the US is being sponsored by the Sino-Judaic Institute and they, together with Kulanu, will be arranging speaking engagements for him. He is expected to arrive here in early July and will be available through the middle of August. **I will be the Kulanu coordinator and will be scheduling all speaking engagements for Shi Lei while he is on the East Coast. Interested parties and/or organizations should contact me at Raykap@worldnet.att.net or tel. 201-886-9138 or write to me at 300 Windsor Dr. #3020, Cliffside Park, NJ 07010.**

Many Organizations Dedicated to Ethiopian Jewry

We have often extolled the work of the **North American Conference on Ethiopian Jews (NACOEJ)** in maintaining a compound in Addis Ababa for Ethiopian Jews awaiting permission to go to Israel. Within the compound, the organization furnishes food, education, religious services, an embroidery project, and many other programs.

According to its mission, NACOEJ has four mandates - to help Ethiopian Jews survive in Ethiopia, to assist them in reaching Israel, to aid in their absorption in Israel, and to preserve their unique and ancient culture. They maintain a web page at www.circus.org. Tax-deductible donations may be sent to NACOEJ at 132 Nassau Street, 4th floor, New York, NY 10038, tel. 212-233-5200.

At least three other worthy organizations are also working on behalf of Ethiopian Jewry.

The **Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews (IAEJ)**, an Ethiopian-led organization, works exclusively to advocate for the full and rapid integration of Ethiopian Jews into mainstream Israeli society. Noting that over 72% of Ethiopian immigrant children live below the poverty line, and only 28% of Ethiopian students pass the matriculation exams (less than half the national average), IAEJ focuses on education as the key to Ethiopian integration and mobility within Israeli society. To address the fact that the number of juvenile delinquents in

Over 72% of Ethiopian immigrant children live below the poverty line in Israel

Israel is double in the Ethiopian population, it has developed a program for troubled youth, located within the Tel Aviv central bus station, which has become a model for similar institutions serving other sectors of the Israeli population. To receive IAEJ's regular email newsletter, see <www.ahava.com/iaej>. Tax-deductible contributions may be sent to Friends of the IAEJ, Inc., 2001 West Main Street, Stamford, CT 06902. In Canada, send to the New Israel Fund, 801 Eglinton Avenue West, #401, Toronto, Ontario M5N-1E3.

The **South Wing to Zion** has worked for over 10 years for the reunification of the Beta Israel community with their loved ones in Israel. They advocate for the acceleration of the aliyah process so that families can be reunited after years of separation. They also solicit funds for humanitarian assistance (including food, health care, housing and education) to stop the suffering and prevent the loss of lives while the community waits for approval to make aliyah. Tax-deductible contributions can be sent to Friends of South Wing to Zion, PO Box 580 Gracie Station, New York, NY 10028. For information, email <Neguise@inter.net.il> or call Lisa Schachner at 212-794-1904.

The non-profit **Ethiopian Immigrants Volunteer Organization** was formed in 1996 to take a "holistic approach" to improving life within the Ethiopian community in Israel. Members are working Ethiopian Jews in Israel who devote their free time to helping other members of the community blend into Israeli society "with less pain and frustration." One important facet of this is developing liaison between the Ethiopian community and public institutions. Programs include computer training for parents and kindergarten children, a project in which elders resolve family and personal matters according to custom, after-school learning centers, and courses in Jewish religion and Ethiopian tradition in Amharic. The organization invites visitors to their programs in Israel. Contact <ethadera@hotmail.co.il>.

Yasher koach to all!

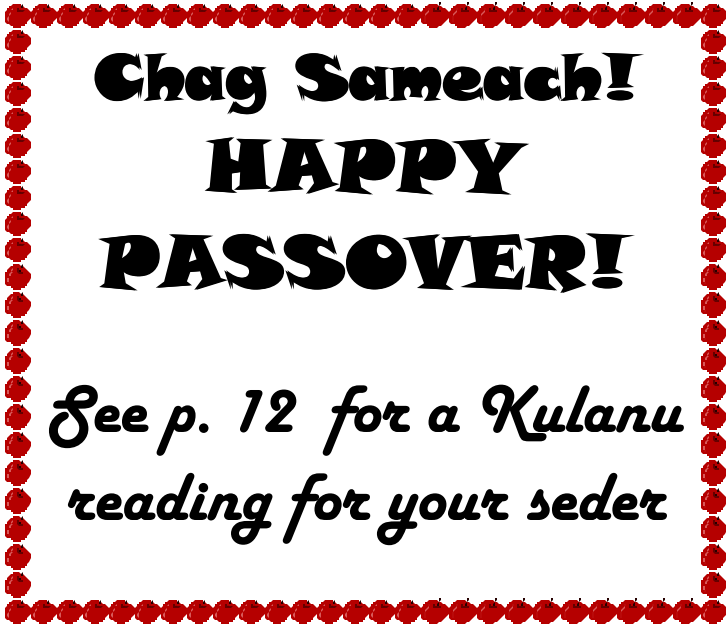
Science-based Education for Ethiopian Children in Israel

A joint project run by the Jewish Agency and the Weizmann Institute, and sponsored by the New York UJA, will provide intensive technology and science enrichment classes for Ethiopian children in Israel. The aim is to form a group of students from among Ethiopian *olim* with good chances of being accepted for future academic studies and integrate them in the hi-tech sectors in Israel.

According to Jewish Agency estimates, few members of the Ethiopian community integrate in this sector in Israel. According to Meir Nizan, director of the Jewish Agency's Israel Department, there are just a few isolated Ethiopian engineers in the Israeli work place. Even the number of Ethiopian students attending colleges of engineering and science at universities is extremely limited.

The enrichment program, to be spread over a three-year period, will be attended by a group of 53 eighth graders, boys and girls from communities in the vicinity of the Weizmann Institute (Lod, Ramle, Rishon LeZion, Rehovot, Yavneh, Nes Ziona and Beer Yaakov). They were chosen from among 100 candidates who participated in science and technology day camps during the summer.

The project includes intensive, informal enrichment in the sciences, technology, computers and scientific thought, in an effort to help the youngsters make achievements in these subjects. Once a week, classes will take place at the Weizmann Institute and exercises will be practiced once a week at the students' homes. Included in the subjects taught are computers, applied math, physics and astrophysics, experimental biology, rocket building, chemistry and photography. The project will operate under the supervision of a professional team that will include Ethiopian coordinators who will monitor the students' progress. The students' parents will be involved at every stage of the project and will receive ongoing updates regarding their children's progress.



**Chag Sameach!
HAPPY
PASSOVER!**

*See p. 12 for a Kulanu
reading for your seder*

OPINION: Bring In the Bnei Menashe

By Myer Samra

Although we are proud of our religion, we Jews have difficulty accepting people who want to join us. With 2,000 years of persecution behind us, we are naturally suspicious of anyone who would want to tie their fate to a group, knowing that they too might be subjected to abuse and discrimination. Surely anyone wanting to become a Jew must be "crazy", and therefore unacceptable as a convert.

At the same time, now that the State of Israel is well established and relatively prosperous, we are suspicious of potential converts from poorer countries, suspecting them of wanting to make use of the Law of Return as a gateway to the affluent West. Either way, the would-be convert just can't win.

We seem more willing to accept Russian Christians as converts, or as settlers in Israel — even without conversion — than people of the "wrong" racial background.

These attitudes reveal a failure within Jewish circles to appreciate the fact that **Judaism is a world religion, with a universal message that has attracted admirers and potential converts from many different backgrounds, in many different eras.** The truth is, even the most pious of Jews today does not know his or her ancestry well enough to claim a pedigree that goes back uninterrupted to Sinai. The fact is, even in the most trying of times in Jewish history, we have taken in converts.

Historically, we should not forget that royal families, and with them a significant part of the population, adopted Judaism in places as diverse as Adiabene (northern Iraq), Himyar (Yemen), and Khazaria (the Crimea). Today, the descendants of these people are fully integrated into the Jewish world and completely indistinguishable from other Jews.

During the festival of Hanukkah, the Bnei Menashe, a group from North East India who have Mongoloid racial features, celebrated 25 years since they commenced practicing Judaism, in an environment where they have risked social ostracism for their faith. Six hundred members of this group have successfully settled in Israel and have been formally converted to Judaism. They have in the main lived exemplary Israeli-Jewish lives, continuing to practice Judaism, undertaking army duty, and working assiduously to support their families.

At the same time, the 3,500 still in India continue to face problems. Not the least of these is that until they leave India, they cannot appear before a Beth Din to complete their conversion to Judaism. Would-be converts usually take one or two years to complete the process. The Bnei Menashe have endured a far longer "apprenticeship". If they were not genuine in their convictions, one could not imagine people praying as Jews, diligently studying *Halakhah*, and translating prayerbooks (siddurim), books of blessings, the Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers), guidebooks on *avelut* (mourning), *Taharat Mishpaha* (Family Purity), the Haggadah, and much more besides into their languages (Mizo and Thadou). This is a community with a strong commitment to the religion they have chosen to follow.

One often hears concerns expressed in "floodgates" language, that to let in more of these people could inspire half the poor people in the world to come knocking on the door, seeking conversion to Judaism and entry to Israel. Such an argument does not hold water in the circumstances of the Bnei Menashe, whose numbers are quite small and readily absorbable, and who have already proven their genuine commitment to the Jewish faith.

Israel has taken 50 to 100 Bnei Menashe settlers per year since 1989. At this rate, one can imagine a second, perhaps even a third generation of Bnei Menashe, raising families and practicing Judaism without acceptance as Jews. **The policy of taking a small number each year has created a gulf between those who are proud to be able to join a minyan anywhere in the world, and those who are conscious that they are not accepted as genuine Jews.**

Furthermore, the way selection for Israel occurs is bound to lead to friction between the two segments of the Bnei Menashe, as those already in Israel will seek to bring their relatives, at the expense of

families not represented among the settlers. The potential for such a division within so small a group, equally committed to Judaism, should be scotched immediately. The time has come to accept all those who can demonstrate their Jewish credentials. It is time to assist those who wish to convert to Judaism and to permit them to settle in Israel if they so wish.

At this time when the Bnei Menashe are celebrating 25 years since they embraced the practice of Judaism, the Knesset's Immigration Committee is to consider the question of Bnei Menashe aliyah. Let us join together to urge the Knesset to make the right decision: assist them to undergo *giyyur*, and allow them to settle in Israel if they should choose to do so.

[Dr Myer Samra is an Australian anthropologist who has worked with the Bnei Menashe, in India and Israel, for 12 years.]

OPINION: The Children of Israel

By David Turetsky

As a quick glance through Kulanu's home pages on the Internet reminds, the Jewish people through history have left an enormous impact across the world and through the pages of history. Though we have not often ruled, we have nevertheless left an indelible impression wherever we have gone, deeply affecting and altering the course of history and impacting our understanding of who we are and the very world we inhabit.

Because Western Jewish tradition is inevitably colored through the lens of rabbinical Judaism, a natural response to the Diaspora, we tend to greet newly encountered communities from the perspective of the familiar and comfortable Euro-centric Judaism within whose traditions we were informed of our being.

Judaism is of course much larger and richer than just the familiar Western traditions. It is rich in its rabbinical lineage, which includes famous scholars from Babylonia, Egypt, and other centers of learning. And when we encounter isolated communities like the Jews of Belmonte, we have a priceless opportunity to reach back hundreds of years in the past and view that tradition as from a much earlier time. We are enriched when we do so and grow in our own understanding. So too in our meeting we enrich the Jews of Belmonte.

Though we be Jews with a proud and noble heritage, let us also not forget that larger family of Israel of which we are just one small part, though perhaps better recalled by history. When we receive reports from Afghanistan, and when we read of the historic journey of the Lemba, it is a vivid reminder of the extraordinary, rich family tapestry into which Judaism is interwoven.

Our task then becomes clearer. Let us not fall into the trap of seeing everyone as a Jew returning to the Western mold which would be a terrible misreading of history, but welcome them back into this larger family of which we are just one of the children. The Lemba have never lost sight of their traditions. Rather it is we who have lost sight of them. And they of us.

As a minority culture throughout the Diaspora, Judaism has had to adapt to the societies within which it has had to exist. The Yiddish language is one rich example of this, largely influenced by Germany, within whose borders much of Jewry lived for hundreds of years. Just as within Judaism there coexists another language, Ladino, which reflects the Diaspora history of the Sephardic Jews, so too among the children of Israel there inevitably also exist other languages, other sagas, other traditions, other wisdom, whose authenticity and history coexist with ours and belong equally to the family we share.

If within the inevitably misty understanding of our history we lose sight of this perspective, we fail in our understanding of the enormous gift our hosts have extended to us and from which we are profoundly enriched.

LETTERS TO KULANU

Kulanu's New Online Shopkeeper

When Jack Zeller asked me to set up and run the Kulanu Gift Boutique on behalf of our various communities, I was more than happy to oblige. Perhaps I should first introduce myself to those of you who probably have no idea who I am. Many of you who have participated in the Kulanu listserve have probably seen and read my posts in which I passionately defend a person's right to self-identify. Or perhaps you have seen posts in which I announce the latest update to my art website.

Well, I am Tamar Kemp, artist and mother of three lovely and lively boys. I live in southeastern Pennsylvania, where I work at a local Jewish Community Center and sell my Judaic art via my website. At this point in time I cannot remember exactly how I found out about Kulanu but once I heard of the organization I was more than thrilled about what it stood for. My first venture with Kulanu was when I headed a book drive for the Abayudaya's first Jewish High School, in which I collected nearly \$3,000 worth of used college textbooks, some religious texts and monies for postage. Members from AfrAmJews, Jewish-Africana, and Kulanu listserve and my local college bookstore supported this. (I learned of the Abayudaya via Matt Meyers in 1998 and held the book drive in 1999 while pregnant with my third son.)

I am ready to lend help however I am able. So when Jack Zeller asked that Harriet Bograd and I work together on this Online Boutique, I felt it was such an honor. It has been a pleasure to work with Harriet. The first Sunday in January she invited me to her home in NYC to meet her and her family as well as Rabbi Gershom Sizomu of the Abayudaya. All I can say is that between the good food and excellent company I had a wonderful day!

The website is now located at <http://www.KulanuBoutique.com>. The boutique will be offering the same items we have in the past: tallitot, kippot, challah covers, books, music, items that are hand crafted or designed by the various communities. Proceeds from sales benefit the respective communities. We will be able to accept credit card orders as well as payments via checks or money orders. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email at kulanuboutique@ureach.com. For those interested in seeing my art please visit my website <http://blueartstudio.com>.

Tamar Kemp
Kutztown, PA

Anticipating Conversion in Peru

The community of Benei Avraham of Trujillo, Peru, has the honor of saluting you and all the distinguished members of this prestigious organization that you represent. We are writing these short lines primarily to thank you for all that Kulanu has done, does, and will do in our favor. We are a simple community but we are very happy to hear that we have come to know this blessed way to Judaism. We are in eager anticipation of a possible conversion by the rabbinic court that will come to Peru.

We have one G-d and His blessed Torah and the wish to go to Eretz Israel and get together with the blessed people and heart and life.

We are very grateful for this great mitzvah that you will soon do.

Nilo Perez, president, Benei Avraham congregation
Trujillo, Peru

(Editor's note: The conversion of 83 Peruvians took place shortly after this letter was written. See news item on page 8.)

Request from Tarazona

In the medieval Spanish town of Tarazona some years ago, they discovered Hebrew manuscripts used as bindings in liturgy books in the cathedral. They have created a Centre for Jewish Studies, rescued

the Hebrew manuscripts (the Cathedral and Bishop are totally cooperative), and have held a couple of conferences. Last July, my daughter Tamar and I had the pleasure of being the invited artists for the conference, and presented a lecture-recital of Sephardic music geared to the event. Javier Bona has just written me, asking me to contribute an article for the journal they are planning. He's also asked me to circulate his request for Jewish journals, magazines, recordings, haggadot, documentation, Israeli coins (today's), kippot, etc., to help them start up the museum/resource centre. Items from the Sephardi tradition would be most appreciated. If you have questions and don't write Spanish, I'll be happy to forward translations. They are delightful people who take their work and projects seriously. The address is: Amigos de la Cultura Judea de Tarazona "Moshe de Portella" Placeta de los Arcedianos, 50500 Tarazona, Zaragoza Spain.

Judith Cohen <judithc@yorku.ca>
Toronto, Canada

Inspired by Abayudaya Visit

I am sure you have heard of the fun JJ Keki and Gershom Sizomu and I had singing together in the recording studio. We had a great time! I only wish JJ could have stayed longer in NYC. His deep spirituality and commitment to Judaism and his worldview have so much to teach us. I asked him when he arrived if he felt unsafe walking around in NYC. His reply was that "NYC is a very safe city--Nairobi, now...that is a dangerous city!" I know we have made a friendship through Jewish music that will last a lifetime. The *Kabbalah Music* CD with our Ugandan-American musical collaboration on JJ's L'cha Dodi melody will be out soon and available at Amazon.com.

I have seen Gershom several times here in NYC. After I introduced him at a Kabbalat Shabbat concert of mine at Stephen Wise Synagogue we were able to arrange an engagement for him to work with the children there. Gershom is a gifted teacher and he worked with children in small groups from the 3rd to the 7th grade, telling them the story of the Abayudaya, showing photographs of the children in Mbale and answering questions. The children were very moved by how brave the Jews of Uganda have been to survive so many years of danger and difficulty with such a deep love of Judaism. The NYC children, so soon after the Sept. 11 tragedy had taken several Temple family members, sang their versions of "Sh'ma," "Hinei Ma Tov" and other songs, as Mr. Sizomu shared the Abayudaya melodies of the same songs. It was very beautiful. (Gershom took a photo with each and every class.) The children are in the process of writing letters to be forwarded to Abayudaya pen-pals by way of Gershom. I'm sure they will remember his visit and the emotional connection he made with them their whole lives. His educational work here has been so powerful. His talent and leadership are a great blessing both to the Abayudaya and the World Jewish community. I hope JJ and Gershom's inspiring visit brings much good to the Jews of Uganda. It has brought even more good to the Jewish communities of the United States.

Thank you for being there and helping to inform folks of the endless diversity of World Jewish culture.

Laura Wetzler
Cummington, Massachusetts

Wondering About Students' Jewishness

I'm an ESL teacher in Irving, Texas. From time to time, I've had kids who just seem SO Jewish to me, although they aren't. Last year a kid drew a menorah and gave it to me. He was a first-year immigrant, illiterate in Spanish, from Vera Cruz. He said his grandmother put candles in this at Christmas. None of the other Mexican

LETTERS TO KULANU

kids had ever seen anything like that. You DO wonder!

Good luck with the Peruanos.

Diana Blum

Irving, Texas

Candle Lighting as Clue to Origin

I am intrigued by the association of Shabbat candle lighting as a clue to origin. Unfortunately I don't have any of my paternal Grandmother's candlesticks - they passed on to her daughters and I don't know what became of them. Nevertheless it was my lighting of Shabbat candles that helped my father recall that his mother did the same thing. And my father's memories stirred my own memories of my Great Grandmother Olivia. When I was nine years old she told me that her own Great Grandmother was a Spanish Jewish woman who escaped from North Africa with her husband in the late 18th century. They settled in the Georgia Sea Islands, became "Geechees," and intermarried with freed slaves. Somehow I managed to forget what my Great Grandmother told me until my father recognized the candles.

I'm intrigued about how the candles remain in crypto-Jewish culture when everything else seems lost. My Grandmother used to light the candles every Friday night but she always told me it was because I visited her for the weekend.

All very interesting.

Carolivia Herron

Washington, DC

Shi Lei Introduces Himself

Shalom! Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Shi Lei. I am a Jewish descendant of Kaifeng, China. Now I'm studying in Bar-Ilan University, Israel. I hope to continue my Jewish Studies in some US university or college to get a Master's Degree after I finish my studies in Bar-Ilan. After these studies, I hope to go back to China to teach Jewish Studies somewhere. Now I am applying to a US university or college. Since I don't have personal funds to study in America, Rabbi Marvin Tokayer, Mr. Irwin Berg, Dr. Wendy Abraham, and others are doing all they can to find a US university or college which matches my situation.

According to the estimates, I will arrive in America on July 7th, 2002. If a US university I apply to accepts me as a student, we figure that the school begins on August 20th, 2002. I may begin my lecture tour in America on July 10th, 2002. I am so grateful to Raymond Kaplan for making speaking engagements for me and grateful to all the other members of Kulanu for their great efforts in helping me.

Shi Lei

Kaifeng, China

Sadness in the Abayudaya Community

10 November 2001 was a difficult day of grief in the Abayudaya community as shock befell us upon receiving the sad news about the death of two of our members. Rachel Jabingo and Sauya Nasinza were both active members whose deaths have left a big gap to be filled. May their souls have a peaceful rest among the souls of Sarah, Rebecca and Leah.

Mrs. Rachel Basilika Jabingo, born in 1970, was a shopkeeper, tailor and a farmer. She had been the treasurer of the Abayudaya Women's Association (AWA). She was also a secretary on the finance committee of the high school, a member on the kippot knitting committee, and a member of the new Bet-Tikvah Tailoring center. The gap she left is hard to be filled. She died at the age of 31, leaving a 7-year-old son, Magoma Samuel.

Born in 1950, Sauya Nasinza was the sister to JJ Keki, Rabbi Gershom, Aaron Kintu and Seth Jonadav. Her occupation had been cater-

ing. She had been working with Penta group of companies in Nairobi, Kenya, since 1975. She had also been active in development for the Majengo area of Nairobi. Her home in Nairobi has served as a guest house for every Muyudaya who visits the Nairobi synagogue. Her death therefore, has robbed us of a most valuable person. She died at the age of 51 years, leaving one child and 4 grandchildren.

Jacob Mwosuko, Chairman, Abayudaya Community

Mbale, Uganda

Activities in New York City

A group of Kulanu supporters in New York has evolved into a multiracial group of Jews with roots in Africa, Yemen, West Indies, Panama, Dominican Republic, Latin American, Canada and the USA. Our monthly meetings are held in synagogues and Jewish community centers. As a result, we have brought Kulanu's message to the Brotherhood Synagogue, the Bnai Zion House (Zionist fraternity), Makor (a popular Jewish center) and Habonim-Dror (a Zionist youth movement).

The New York group has adopted the Abayudaya Jewish community in Uganda and the Bet Israel Jewish community in Ghana. At our September meeting a large turnout gave a joyous and singing welcome to Joab Keki and Gershom Sizomu, the two Abayudaya leaders who were visiting the US. A number of our women wore beautiful, colorful African robes, adding a festive atmosphere to the special occasion. Joab and Gershom sang Shabbat and other Hebrew songs, while Gershom played his guitar. It was a moving experience for us.

In September I was interviewed in Yiddish by Sarah Schechter of the *Forward*, who wrote a lengthy supportive article about the Abayudaya community (Sept. 14). I received many inquiries and expressions of support.

In October Gershom and I packed and mailed two cartons of school supplies, books, maps, notebooks, pens, crayons, scissors, games purchased by our members for the Abayudaya high school and early childhood program. Shep Wahnon sold 10 Abayudaya kippot at his synagogue, and Harriet Bograd has been very successful in selling



Tudor Parfitt (second from right) with New York group.

challah covers made by the community in Ghana. We plan to ask synagogue gift shops and Judaica shops to help sell the kippot, challah covers and tallitot made by our brothers and sisters in Uganda and Ghana.

We have recently made contact with the Jewish Multiracial Network. We will work together to make our religious and lay lead-

ers, principals, teachers, students and the Jewish media aware of the existence of large numbers of Jews – children and adults – who are not white.

Kulanu supporters everywhere owe a great deal of thanks and appreciation to Claire Lugo, a kind, generous, gentle and lovely woman who has housed and fed Gershom Sizomu from August to January.

Yaacov Gladstone

New York and Deerfield Beach

KULANU BRIEFS

Beit Din Converts 83 Peruvians

A Beit Din, acting under the auspices of the Office of the Chief Rabbi of Israel, and largely paid for by Kulanu, has recently completed its mission in Peru. It decided to convert 83 Peruvians. All have expressed a desire to make aliyah, and the Israelis have begun to make absorption plans.

This Beit Din represents the culmination of years of work by a large number of Kulanu supporters. Members of Kulanu have been involved with this community for years. Several Kulanu members have visited and encouraged the community and helped them not to give up hope.

Kulanu's Web Site Is "Way Cool"

Already lauded as "way cool" by one Jewish newspaper, Kulanu's web site has continued to be enhanced with many new entries, including a number about the Pashtun, the Jews in Zimbabwe, and extraordinary Challah covers made by the Jews of Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana. We have many contributions from the scholarly Anne Hirschman, a new and improved Kulanu boutique, the availability of the Kulanu Newsletter in Adobe .pdf format, and a fresh set of graphics to focus interest.

Also, a link has just been added to Kulanu's web site to Rick Gold's web pages about Jewish Morocco. In the course of working in the US Foreign Service, Rick was stationed in Morocco, married a Moroccan woman, and is very knowledgeable about the long history of Jews who lived in that country.

Kevin Brook's submission regarding "Jewish DNA" will also be posted to the web site together with his earlier post on this subject under a new section, "DNA."

New additions are marked with red bullets. A navigable, site index has been added to Kulanu's web site and may be accessed at <http://kulanu.ubalt.edu/indexx.html> or by clicking on the link at the bottom of the home page.

More than 40,000 have visited the Kulanu web site since January 1, 2000. The credit for this success goes to webmaster David Turetsky.

Foreign Rabbis Needed!

Barbara Shair is compiling a list of rabbis who can help with foreign conversions or who have special abilities useful for a person who might live in a remote area or who speaks a foreign language. Please visit BECOMINGAJEW.ORG and see if you would like to be listed. They link to www.convert.org and its rabbis, but rabbis for different conversion circumstances are needed. Just sign the guest book and explain.

Conference on Freemasonry

Gloria Mound has announced that Casa Shalom, the Institute for Marrano-Anusim Studies, will hold a conference on Marranos in Freemasonry on April 9-10, 2002 in Israel.

Mound also reminds readers that Casa Shalom's web site is updated almost weekly www.casa-shalom.com and that she invites inquiries about her upcoming spring speaking tours to America. For information, contact her at PO Box 66, Gan Yavneh, Israel 70800, tel/fax 972-(0)8-8573150 or marrano@aquanet.co.il.

Introducing Challah Covers from Ghana

Harriet Bograd has been breaking all sales records with the beautiful challah covers she has been importing from the Jews of Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana. The latest designs are large, fully lined, and richly



machine-embroidered in the West African style. The challah covers – and Bograd's photo journal of her Ghana trip – can be viewed at <http://members.aol.com/hbograd1/ghana.html>

200 Attend Multiracial Chanukah Party

The Institute for Jewish & Community Research hosted a multiracial Chanukah party for 200 in San Francisco; 50 attended the previous year. Among those present were non-white converts to Judaism and interracial families. Guests of honor were Rabbi Capers C. Funnye Jr., who led Beth Shalom B'nai Zaken Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation in Chicago, and Rabbi Rigoberto Emmanuel Vinas, founder of a New York Beit Midrash for Spanish-speaking Jews. The Institute was founded by Gary and Diane Tobin, who have five adult children and a young adopted son, Jonah, who is black. Having Jonah inspired their work in community-building for Jews of color.



At the Chanukah party in San Francisco

Multiracial Network Seeks Members

The Jewish Multiracial Network, a program of the Jewish Retreat Center at Camp Isabella Freedman, is seeking new members. This support organization holds events and activities and an email discussion list. For information contact the Jewish Multiracial Network, 307 Seventh Ave., #900, New York, NY 10001, tel 212-242-5598, fax 212-924-5112.

Venezuela Embassy Focuses on Synagogues

The Embassy of Venezuela in Washington presented a photographic exhibition in November and December by Venezuelan artist Thea Segall depicting modern and ancient synagogues of Venezuela and the Caribbean, and their treasured works of art. Inspired by Rabbi Pynchas Brenner's acclaimed book, *Synagogues in Venezuela and The Caribbean*, the exhibit traced the history of the Jewish communities in Venezuela and neighboring Caribbean islands.

Paradesi Synagogue on Alert

Visitors to the 430-year-old Paradesi Synagogue in Cochin, India, should expect thorough security precautions. The famous landmark

(Continued on page 9)

KULANU BRIEFS

(Continued from page 8)

has been on alert ever since a recent warning by police intelligence about a possible terrorist attack.

India on Focus in New York

The 92nd Street YMHA in New York was the site of two India events last November. As part of a storytelling series, Rahel Musleah performed "Jewish Rhythms of India: Spirit, Song and Story." And Romiel Daniel presented an evening of Indian Jewish culture. Daniel, a Bene Israel cantor and formerly a synagogue president in Ahmedabad, has conducted high holiday services in New York's Village Temple.

Todah Rabah

Kulanu will forever be indebted to **Bea and Joe Hantman** for their untiring service for four years as Kulanu's financial secretaries. They have retired from this position but we continue to count on them for their gracious support and for Joe's popular lectures from his remarkable fund of knowledge about Jewish communities around the world.

Rabbi Menachem Youlis of the Jewish Bookstore of Greater Washington has given generously to the Abayudaya in honor of their upcoming conversions. He has donated two sets of tefillin, has given several kosher mezuzah scrolls at cost, and has donated his services as a scribe in reconditioning a Torah for the community.

The **Irving I. Moskowitz Foundation** contributed \$1500, and **Abe Pollin** contributed \$1000 to Kulanu's Beit Din appeal. A contribution of \$1000 was received from the **Harriet Bograd and Kenneth Klein Fund**. Also **Jules Harris** donated \$1000 for the Beit Din fund.

An **Anonymous** donor contributed \$720 to Kulanu in honor of the conversion of JJ Keki and Gershom Sizomu.

Vera Katz donated to the Abayudaya a sewing machine and a large Ashkenazic Haggaddah.

The **Samiljan Family** donated \$500 to Kulanu's general fund. **Harold Adlerman** donated \$500 in memory of his father, "for Kulanu's efforts to assist Jews in the furthest reaches of the Diaspora." **Morris Feder** donated \$500 for the Beit Din fund.

For her bat mitzvah project, **Winnie Hartman-Gross** solicited contributions for the benefit of the Bnei Menashe. She sent the \$434 to Kulanu.

Judge Edward Avankenka, Mel Elfin, Bessie and Max Krieger with the **Sarah and Max Munchick Foundation** each contributed \$250 for the Beit Din fund.

Rita and Sherm Shapiro donated \$200, as did **Louis Blumengerten** and **Robert Fenichel**.

Julia Chamovitz donated \$150 to the Abayudaya following a visit there with her family. A \$150 grant was received from the **National Center to Encourage Judaism**. **Alan and Ann Moskowitz** donated \$150 and **Ray and Rebecca Kaplan** donated \$125 for the Beit Din fund.

Members of the \$100 club: **Cynthia and Michael Weisfield** (in honor of the wedding of Jen and Brian Primack), **Jonathan Marshall** (for the Abayudaya Education Fund), **Charles Leeds** (Abayudaya education), **Barbara Libarkin, Sherry Wolf** (for the Abayudaya Congregation), **Amichai Heppner, Rachel Seagal, Irwin and Elaine Berg, Gayle Kesselman, Joyce and Byron Hurwitz, Dr. Martin Gouterman, Dr. Stanley Azen, Dr. Arlene Gardsbane, and Marvin Wolf** (all for the Beit Din fund).

Mazal Tov!

To **Rufina Bernardetti Silva Mausebaum** on the arrival of her granddaughter, **Michaela Braka**, in Sydney, Australia

Kulanu activist **Moshe Cotel** was featured in a CBS documentary in January on mid-life seminary students. Cotel retired from Peabody

Conservatory of Music, where he taught composition for 25 years, to enter rabbinic studies.

To **Jay Sand** and **Lauren Krug** on their marriage on November 23. **Rabbi Gershom Sizomu** of the Abayudaya community co-officiated at this, his first American Jewish wedding ceremony. He was flown in from Uganda for the occasion by Jay Sand, who has done extensive research on Jewish communities in Africa (<http://www.theJewsofAfrica.com>). They were married in Beth El Synagogue in Harrisburg, PA. After the signing of the Ketubah, Rabbi Gershom opened the ceremony with an original wedding tune, singing "Hallelujah, hallelujah" as the bride and groom's families came into the hall. During the ceremony he and the Rabbi Allan Meyerowitz from Beth El each spoke about the happy couple and led Hebrew prayers. Gershom sang the *Sheva Brachot* to a tune he composed, inviting all in attendance to join in on every Amen. "Rabbi Gershom's presence was a wonderful addition to a special event," according to the newlyweds.

Refuah Shleimah

To **Adelaide daughter of Charlotta** (mother of Yaffah Batya DaCosta), who is recovering from surgery.

To **Noela bas Ruth** in Australia.

Condolences

Bumba Kezekiah passed away on December 13. He was a member of the Abayudaya executive committee, representing the Elders. A pillar of the Abayudaya community, he was very instrumental during the Kibbutz Youth Movement and is remembered for his devotion to synagogue and to the study of the Torah and the Hebrew language.

The Abayudaya community also lost **Rachel Jabingo** and **Sauya Nasinza** on November 10. See obituaries in LETTERS TO KULANU, page 7.

Jerry Goodman, who was a participant on the Kulanu Listserve, was recently killed in a motorcycle accident.

Kulanu has lost one of its Rabbinic Advisers, **Rabbi Myron Zuber**. Rabbi Zuber was instrumental in helping the Peruvian community learn about Judaism. Without the inspiration and knowledge of Judaism that he gave to them, it would have been impossible for the 83 people who recently converted to Judaism to have done so. He was a steadfast Kulanu supporter for years, and devoted countless hours to helping this neglected community. He continually prodded other Kulanu supporters into doing more and more for this group by his tireless example. Kulanu, the Peruvian community, and countless other people will greatly miss this great and wonderful man.

Subscription Info

Please let Kulanu know whenever you have a new address, and please include your new phone numbers and e-mail. Every issue of the newsletter that has to be redirected costs Kulanu a minimum of \$1.50 -- money we would much rather spend for our communities.

And Don't Forget, the date on your label is the date of your LAST donation to Kulanu. After 12 months without a donation, the merciless data base refuses to send you any further newsletters. If the date is not on your label, please let us know by mail or e-mail to jdzeller@umich.edu Attn. Diane. Thanks.

What if you are a snowbird and regularly spend time at another location? The new Kulanu data base can handle that flawlessly providing you tell Kulanu the months you usually spend in each residence.

So, PLEASE, remember us at least once a year, although donations are gladly received as often as you wish!

Publications of Note

"Balemba say Israel is not a racist state," by **Jameson Maluleke**, appeared in *The Citizen* last August. In the article, written at the time of the Durban conference on racism, Seremane Mathivha was quoted as saying that the Balemba support Israel spiritually and morally because "they are our people."

Alexander Books has just published *A Ladino Legacy: The Judeo-Spanish Collection of Louis N. Levy* by **Aviva Ben-Ur** of the University of Massachusetts.

Roman Malik is the editor of *From Kaifeng to Shanghai: Jews in China*, published as part of the Monumenta Serica Monograph Series in Germany in 2000. This is a compilation of 31 articles that resulted from a 1997 colloquium in Germany which 20 scholars from nine countries attended.

Ethiopian Jewish Immigrants: The Homeland Postponed by **Tanya Schwarz** is the outcome of anthropologist Schwarz's two years in the mid-1990s in Afula, Israel, where she lived with an Ethiopian Jewish family and conducted fieldwork in Amharic. She looks at the experiences and cultural practices of different generations of Beta Israel who struggle to adapt and integrate into Israeli society but also try to retain a separate identity and cultural practices.

Alan M. Tigay's moving article, "Letter from Recife: Increasing Returns," appears in the January 2002 issue of *Hadassah Magazine*. It discusses the aftermath of the publicity surrounding the opening of a new Jewish center on the site of the oldest synagogue in the New World, including the renovation of Recife and the return of more and more Marranos from their secret existence in Brazil's interior.

Page one of the *Le Monde* Book Section on September 28 was devoted to **Nicole Lapierre's** article "Hidden Jews of the New World," a lengthy review of *The Faith of Memory: Marrano Labyrinths* by **Nathan Wachtel**. The article details examples of repression suffered by secret Jews who had fled from the Inquisition in Europe to the Americas, where Inquisitorial courts soon followed. The reviewer says Wachtel attains his objective of constructing "at the same time a living memory and an intelligible history." Our thanks to Cynthia Weisfield for providing an English translation of the French.

HaLapid (the quarterly of the Society for Crypto Judaic Studies) always makes fascinating reading. The Fall 2001 issue is no exception, with papers by **Mausenbaum, Ward, Abrami, Benveniste, Ferry and Hirschman** (on the Melungeons, **Halevy** and **Hordes**). To subscribe send a check for \$25 payable to "Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies" to Randy Baca, 7836 Via Sonrisa, Scottsdale, AZ 85258.

The Autumn 2001 issue of *The Casa Shalom Journal* contains an article by **Devora Sintes** on discovering that she is a descendant of Crypto-Jews with a Minorca-New Orleans background; a piece on Manitos by **Seth Ward**; a double book review by **Yitzchak Kerem**; a description of the 2001 Passover Seder in Majorca by **Gloria Mound**; two "Sephardic/Marrano" recipes; **David Graizbord's** article on Con-

verso merchants as cultural border crossers; and **Judith Cohen's** overview of Crypto-Jewish musical traditions in Portugal. To subscribe, send \$36 to Casa Shalom Institute for Marrano-Anusim Studies, PO Box 66 Gan Yavneh, Israel 70800.

The Jewish Standard of November 23 ran **Joanne Palmer's** article, "From Uganda to Tenaflly, with a Message," about Gershom Sizomu's talk. Three photos accompanied the article.

Troubled Souls – Conversos, Crypto-Jews, and Other Confused Jewish Intellectuals from the 14th through the 18th Century, edited by **Charles Meyers** and **Norman Simms**, has recently been published by Outrigger. It contains a preface by David Gitlitz, a dozen articles by specialized scholars, and an epilogue by Richard Zimler. To order, send a check for \$35 payable to "Outrigger Publishers" to Outrigger at PO Box 1198, Hamilton, New Zealand. Price includes postage. For further information, email the editor at [<normansimms@hotmail.com>](mailto:normansimms@hotmail.com).

A *New York Times* article on November 16, **Sandee Brawarsky's** "Central Asian Jews Create *Queensistan*," describes an enclave of 50,000 Bukharan and other Central Asian Jews in Queens, NY.

A Tunisia-born French scholar has come out with a 380-page study in French of the Jewish presence in India for the last 2000 years. **Monique Zetlaoui's** *History of the Jewish Communities of India* discusses the Bene Israel, the Cochins, and the Baghdadis, with a short chapter on the Bnei Menashe.

Gabe Levenson's "Exotic Itinerary," in the January 8 *NY Jewish Week*, discusses Jewish trips with missions to exotic places. He lists Costa Rica, the Abayudaya in Uganda, the Bnei Menashe in India.

Kulanu is inviting submissions for an upcoming book of *Readings in Jewish Diversity*. In connection with this project, Kulanu is running a contest for original works. See page 11 for details.

NEWSLETTER BY E-MAIL?

We would like to continue to explore the possibility of sending the newsletter as an attachment to email. Please send me an email at primack@starpower.net if you would like to receive the newsletter via email. It would mean lower costs to Kulanu for printing and mailing (especially the foreign mailing costs!), you would receive the newsletter faster and the pictures would be in color. It might also mean we could send more pages with more information!!

We do recognize that it might take a while to download, since it is a large file.

Thanks.

Aron Primack

Unexpected Discovery in Armenia

By Kevin Alan Brook

(Excerpted from "Los Muestros: The Sephardic Voice")

In 1996, an unexpected and remarkable archaeological discovery of Jewish significance was made when an Armenian bishop, Abraham Mkrtchyan, came upon a number of large inscribed gravestones in a river and adjoining forest at the edge of Eghegis, in the Siwniq region of southeastern Armenia. These stones, which were shaped from granite into oblong cylinders, contain Hebrew and Aramaic inscriptions and are the first known physical evidence of a Jewish community in Armenia prior to modern times. The community existed contemporaneously with Jewish communities in neighboring regions like Georgia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Dagestan, the Crimea, and Ukraine. The stone inscriptions contain dates ranging from the middle of the 13th century to 1337. (The Mongols ruled Armenia during this period. The present-day Jewish community of Armenia does not have deep roots in Armenia, having arrived during the 20th century from Georgia, Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine.)

An archaeological team was assembled from Israeli and Armenian experts, and a preliminary survey of the Jewish cemetery took place during October 2000. The second phase of excavation took place in May 2001, and the third phase is scheduled to take place in the spring of 2002.

To date, over 62 Jewish gravestones have been located at various sites in Eghegis -- including the Jewish cemetery, the foundation of a mill, and the lower support of a foot-bridge. At the cemetery, some of the stones are positioned on open graves while others are on sealed graves. A number of the stones had magnificent ornamentation. Some of the symbols on the Jewish gravestones -- like a spiral wheel -- were also in use on Armenian Christian stone crafts around the same time. While some of the inscriptions were worn down over the centuries, a lot of them are decipherable.

For example, a gravestone dated the 18th of Tishrei of the Common Era year 1266 contains an inscription dedicated to the memory of "the virgin maiden, the affianced Esther, daughter of Michael.

May her portion be with our matriarch Sar[ah]..." The opposite side quotes "Grace is a lie and beauty is vanity" from Proverbs 31:20 of the Hebrew Scriptures and continues with a statement that Esther was "God-fearing." This stone was found in the bank of a flour mill.

Another gravestone in the bank of the same flour mill read "Rachel, daughter of Eli, may her repose be in the Garden of Eden." Rachel's stone also contains geometric ornamentation.

Another gravestone recorded the death of Baba bar David in the month of Tamuz in 1600 (the equivalent to the year 1289 of the Common Era). The other side of this stone reads "A good memorial and rest for the soul" in Aramaic. Still another stone includes a Hebrew blessing of Aaron the Priest from the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.

One noteworthy gravestone contains an emotional statement from a father mourning his son's passing. In this inscription, the father claims that the soul is eternal and cites passages from Isaiah relating to the resurrection of the dead.

It is evident from the gravestones that many typical Hebrew names were in use among the Jews of medieval Armenia.

The archaeologists learned that the cemetery of the Orbelian royal family of Armenia, at the other side of Eghegis, had gravestones made of the same material and in a similar style as the Jewish gravestones.

Michael Stone, professor of Armenian Studies at Hebrew University, thinks it is possible that an identical workshop produced both the Jewish and the Christian stones.

At the time of Jewish settlement in Eghegis, the city was an important commercial, cultural, intellectual, and governmental center, serving as a provincial capital. Apparently, Jews were wealthy and important members of the society, though Armenian Christians predominated in the city's population. On the wall of an Armenian church outside of Eghegis, an inscription mentions that the plot of land where it stands was purchased from a Jew.

Contribute to Our Book! Enter Our Contest!

Kulanu will be publishing a book of special *Readings in Jewish Diversity*. We hope it will be used for synagogue services, home ceremonies, communal gatherings, and quiet contemplation of the rich diversity to be found within Judaism.

We welcome poems, prayers, prose, even songs! Perspectives can be Ashkenazic or Sephardic, white or nonwhite, American or Asian or African, Lubavitch or Marrano -- you get the idea! The writing can be, but need not be, geared to a particular holiday or life-cycle event. We encourage world-wide submissions.

Both published and unpublished writings are acceptable, by well-known authors and obscure authors alike (we won't publish anything without securing written permission). We know that Kulanu readers include professional writers and poets as well as many eloquent, intelligent others with valuable perspectives.

As an incentive for you to write something especially for this collection -- or to submit one of your own unpublished works -- we are announcing a CONTEST! Kulanu will award prizes of \$300 for first place, \$200 for second place, and \$100 for third place for the most beautiful, moving and appropriate original submissions by an adult. We are running a separate competition for young writers (16 years of age and under) with awards of \$150, \$75, and \$50.

All contest submissions will be considered for publication in the book. Please indicate clearly if your submission is for the contest as well as for publication. There is no reading fee, but submissions cannot be returned. Each submission **should be submitted in triplicate** with a self addressed, stamped envelope for notification of results. Deadline for submissions is August 31, 2002.

This idea was inspired by a wonderful Social Action Shabbaton held in January at Tifereth Israel Congregation in Washington, DC. The service included readings that the congregation printed in a small booklet called *Bring Us Home from the Four Corners: Readings and Prayers of Identity, Hope and Justice*. In it, among other things, were a responsive reading incorporating the words of Martin Luther King Jr., prepared by Rabbi Nathan Abramowitz, and "After the Fire" by Clara Castelar (a poem about *anousim* that appears on the Kulanu web page). The Shabbaton was chaired by Chris Zeilinger and Gene Herman.

Send submissions by email (preferred) to primack@starpower.net or by post to Kulanu Book Project, 1217 Edgevale Road, Silver Spring, MD 20910-1612, USA.

A New Kuzari

By Rabbi Benjamin Z Kreitman

I had the privilege recently to welcome to my office at the World Council of Conservative Judaism, Gershom Sizomu, the spiritual leader of the main synagogue of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda and founder and headmaster of their high school. Gershom and his brother JJ Keki, former chairman of the Abayudaya Jewish community, had come to the States this summer in part to undergo formal Halachic conversion. Their community of 600 and more individuals had been observing Judaism since 1919, observing the Sabbath, celebrating the holidays, adhering to kashrut, shchita, brit and even mikveh. Gershom remained on for another five months to study Judaism intensively at Hebrew Union College, NY, so that he would be able to lead his Jewish community in an appropriate, authentic way.



This is a remarkable and an amazing story. It is for me a modern replay of the story of the Russian Khazars made famous by Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi in his philosophical tome, the *Kuzari*. The *Kuzari* is based on an historic incident, although in part legend, which tells the story of the king of the Khazars around the 8th century of the Common Era who has a dream wherein the heavenly messenger said to him, "Your intentions are good, but in practice, God is not satisfied with your ways." He thereupon

invited representatives of the three faiths, Christianity, Islam and Judaism, to describe their faith, their practices and their celebrations. The wise king of the Khazars discovered that both Christianity and Islam refer back to the Hebrew Bible and validate their religion and their practices by that Bible. He then said to the 3 representatives: "You authenticate your religion by and through the Jewish Bible. I will therefore accept Judaism as the true faith and I will persuade my people to follow me in this act of conversion." It is told by some historians that the Khazars and their Jewish faith spread over a good part of what is now known as Russia.

In 1919 Christian missionaries traveled to Uganda and sought to convert the "natives" to Christianity. I have the feeling that later on, some Islamic mullahs tried to do the same. The founder of the Abayudaya, like the king of the Khazars, said to the missionaries, "You seek to validate your religion and even to predict the coming of the Messiah on the basis of the Jewish Bible and Jewish tradition. Indeed, you have convinced me to become a Jew." He went through a difficult circumcision and considered himself a Jew and influenced a good number of his community to follow him in the practice of Judaism.

This coming February, a Beth Din of Conservative Rabbis from the US and a Mohel from Israel, together with activists from Kulanu, will travel to Uganda and will convert a community of 600 or more individuals to Judaism in a formal Halachic way. To my great delight I discovered that two of the Kulanu activists are my cousins, Aron and Karen Primack. Aron is a physician and Karen is a lawyer, both distinguished members of a Conservative/Masorti synagogue.

Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi in his subtitle to the *Kuzari* noted that he is writing this tome about the Khazars and their conversion to Judaism to uplift the spirit of the Jews. Sometimes we need the perspective of the outsider or of a stranger to give us a sense of the treasures of Judaism.

Today, we are confronted on the one hand by secular indifference, by the seduction of a materialistic culture, and on the other hand we have the challenges that come from other faiths and other rituals. We need, as in the days of Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi, a perspective on ourselves to see and to behold the meaning of Judaism, the depths of its teachings and the unique way it gives purpose to our lives. The stories of the Ethiopian Jews who with great courage and risk to their lives journeyed to rejoin as Jews their brothers and sisters in the land of Israel is heartwarming. The story of Gershom and JJ and their 600 member congregation in Uganda about to become Halachic Jews lifts up our spirits and gives us strength and inspiration for the future.

(The writer is the Executive Vice President emeritus of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism.)

A KULANU PASSOVER READING:

Recovering the Afikomen – and Recovering Lost Jews

By Jeri Roth Lande

(To be read after the children search for and find the hidden afikomen.)

Reader:

Before the Seder can continue the *afikomen* is eaten in memory of the Pesach offering. Another name for this part of the service is *tzafun* or, literally, the "hidden". Many interpretations have been given for the custom of breaking the *afikomen* and hiding a portion of it for the children to find and ransom.

All together:

One interpretation is that the hidden portion of the *afikomen* represents those parts of the Jewish people who have become lost or separated from us.

Reader:

One such group is the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, who became separated from the rest of the Jewish nation after the Assyrian conquest of Israel in 722 B.C.E. Another such group consists of Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity during the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions, but who secretly maintained some part of their Jewish heritage.

Just as we recover the hidden *afikomen* during this part of the Seder, in recent years some descendants of each of these groups have discovered their hidden Jewish roots and returned to Judaism. For example, the Shinlung in India believe that they are descended from Menashe, one of the Ten Lost Tribes. More than 5,000 are now practicing Judaism, and more than 600 have made *aliyah* and formally (re)converted. Recently, some descendants of "Marranos" or "Anousim" in Portugal, Mexico, Brazil, the United States and elsewhere have also begun reclaiming their roots and returning to Judaism.

All together:

Let us welcome each returning Jew with warmth, enthusiasm and joy. Their return to Judaism completes our community as the *afikomen* completes our Seder meal.

Jewish Spark in China (cont.)

(Continued from page 3)

ment he felt about his lessons was palpable. He proudly showed me his daily schedule of classes, which include lectures in Jewish history, archaeology of the Holy Land, and Hebrew language. His personable nature and ready smile have served him well, as various people stop us in the hallway to greet him and say hello.

As the first descendant of Kaifeng Jewry to come to Israel to study, Shi Lei often encounters a great deal of curiosity and interest in his background. When he tells people of his Jewish ancestry, he says, "the first reaction of some is surprise, surprise, surprise, after which they always ask me many questions about the Jews, about the history of the Jews in China."

After completing the one-year program at Bar-Ilan, Shi Lei plans to return to Kaifeng, where he hopes to find a job in academia researching Jewish history and culture in China. He is grateful to the Chinese government, which allowed him to study in Israel, and says that relations between China and the Jewish state are friendly.

Shi Lei encourages American Jews and Israelis to visit China, and to learn more about the history of Kaifeng's Jewish community. Such visits, he says, are "really very helpful to Jewish descendants in Kaifeng, because they can tell us more about Jewish history and traditions. Most of us know nothing about Judaism or Jewish history." In the past, visitors have sent Jewish books and other materials to Jews in Kaifeng, all of which have helped them to deepen their knowledge of their roots.

When asked about the number of Jewish descendants in Kaifeng, Shi Lei says, "To tell the truth, I don't know how many people in Kaifeng identify themselves as Jewish. About ten years ago, the former curator of Kaifeng's Municipal Museum, Wang Yisha, conducted an investigation of this issue. At that time, over 300 identified themselves as Jewish."

All of the Jewish descendants belong to one of seven clans, each identifiable by its surname. Legend has it that during the Song dynasty over a thousand years ago, a Chinese emperor, unable to pronounce the Jews' Hebrew-sounding names, bestowed his surname and the surnames of six of his ministers on the Chinese Jews. These seven names -- Zhao, Li, Ai, Zhang, Gao, Jin and Shi -- were used by Kaifeng's Jews throughout the centuries, and it is to the Shi clan that Shi Lei traces his own roots.

But even among those who do preserve the memory of their Jewish heritage, there is no active communal life. "Every Jewish family in Kaifeng," says Shi Lei, "every family is an orphan, an island in a lake, so this family has no connection with that family and they don't know each other. When the new year in China comes, some other people from the Shi clan, they come to my grandparents' home and visit my grandparents so that at that time we can meet each other. So you can see it is only about individuals."

Nevertheless, Shi Lei has gotten to know some of the other Jewish descendants in the city. "As the foreign visitors came to visit us often, it grew necessary to choose some representatives from every family, who would sit together and talk to each other and meet with the visiting groups. So through this, we get to know more and more Jewish descendants in the city."

Despite these developments, it would be wrong to speak of a revival of the Kaifeng Jewish community. Too many years have passed, too much has been lost, to try and rebuild a Jewish communal framework in the city.

The site of the former Kaifeng synagogue now serves as a hospital. It adjoins Jiao Jing Lane, which is Chinese for "Teaching Scripture Lane," which passes through what was once the Jewish district of Kaifeng. Though the synagogue had been renovated and rebuilt a dozen times in the centuries after its establishment, by the 1860s it was no more. In 1866, a Reverend W.A.P. Martin visited Kaifeng and wrote that the only thing left of the once beautiful synagogue was a

single, solitary stone.

Now, nearly a century and a half later, even that stone is gone.

Or is it?

Interestingly, when I asked Shi Lei the meaning of his name in Chinese, he told me that, roughly translated, it means a "strong stone." I could not help but be moved by the symbolism.

For more information about the history of this community, please consult the Sino-Judaic Institute <<http://www.sino-judaic.org/>> or the China-Judaic Studies Association: <<http://servercc.oakton.edu/~friend/chinajews.html>>.



Surfing (cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

J. J. Keki, former chairman, and his brother Gershom Sizomu, spiritual leader of the main Abayudaya synagogue and headmaster of the Abayudaya high school, were formally converted to Judaism by a Conservative Beit Din headed by Rabbi Howard Gorin of Congregation Tikvat Israel of Rockville, Maryland.

Subsequently, Abayudaya chairman Jacob Mwosuko invited the Beit Din to travel to Uganda and officially convert the rest of the community of over 600 souls.

I fervently hope and pray that by the time you read this, the conversions will have taken place. As I have written elsewhere, a tidal wave is coming our way. It is a tidal wave of conversions to Judaism, and it will be unlike anything else that the Jewish people has witnessed in centuries - even in millennia. Throughout the world today, in lost and forgotten communities in Africa, India, Asia and South America — not to mention Europe and North America — Judaism is coming alive spontaneously and vigorously.

While our experts have been wringing their hands over demographic figures indicating that the Jews are declining in numbers, Judaism has paradoxically emerged as an appealing choice to countless men and woman everywhere. We simply have to open the gates to them, and accept these new converts - as well as returnees -- warmly as fellow Jews.

Even if a logistical glitch develops which causes the cancellation of this current trip to Uganda — and I would then have to face the embarrassment of having published this article about conversions that didn't take place — the trip would just be rescheduled for a future date.

The great wave of conversions which is coming our way remains constantly before my eyes. Our leaders in the Jewish world must learn to see this, too, and face this rapidly approaching wave unflinchingly. We desperately need to learn how to surf this mighty wave of conversions. Either we ride it boldly or we drown in it. We dare not ignore it.

So now you know why I'm going to Uganda. I believe that this modest event, which has developed so quietly in recent years, is actually the harbinger of powerful new thunder in modern Jewish history. The whole face of Judaism will change dramatically in the coming decades as this world-wide tidal wave of conversions builds momentum inexorably.

The Kulanu Boutique

Also accessible online at www.KulanuBoutique.com

Jews in Places You Never Thought Of, a 305-page hardback which includes descriptions of personal interactions with returning and emerging Jewish groups around the world; over 30 photographs. *Proceeds benefit Kulanu.*

Shalom Everybody Everywhere! acclaimed recording of the unique sounds of the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda. Hear traditional Jewish liturgy and new compositions set to African melodies and rhythms, sung in English, Hebrew, Luganda, and Swahili. *Proceeds benefit the Abayudaya.*

Hand-made Ugandan Kippot available in small, medium and large, some in dark colors, others in bright colors, some in the traditional skullcap shape, some in the pillbox shape. *Proceeds benefit the Abayudaya.*

Hand-Woven Ugandan Tallitot, white with colored stripes, bag included. *Proceeds benefit the Abayudaya.*

Challah covers from Ghana. *Proceeds benefit the Sefwi Wiawso Jewish community.*

Hand-woven Bnei Menashe Tallitot, white with black or blue stripes; bag included. *Proceeds benefit the Bnei Menashe.*

Hand-crocheted Bnei Menashe Kippot (skullcap shape only), muted colors. *Proceeds benefit the Bnei Menashe.*

Journey to the Vanished City: The Search for a Lost Tribe of Israel (paperback) by Tudor Parfitt. The fascinating story of the Lemba, recently shown genetically to have distinct close ties to the Jews, especially *cohanim*. *Proceeds benefit Kulanu.*

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Please make checks payable to "KULANU" and mail to Kulanu, c/o T. Kemp, PO Box 103 Kutztown, PA 19530. Please allow four weeks for delivery.

Chat with Gershom (cont.)

(Continued from page 2)

compositions and some of our versions of prayers, like "Mi Chamocha" and the Kiddush. It has been wonderful to hear our melodies sung in congregations in Boston, New York and New Jersey. HUC is using our tune for "Hinei Ma Tov"! I've also learned some melodies at HUC that I would like to bring back to Uganda. We shall have a mixture of ours and theirs.

The Abayudaya started embracing Judaism long before the establishment of the State of Israel. Would the community be interested in making aliyah?

The community wants to go to Israel, but we think it is difficult there. If we were invited, yes, the entire community would go. I'm sure. They would give up their special land and his tory in Uganda.

In what ways do you think Americans could learn to improve?

I think it is wonderful to be Jewish in the US because the environment is Jewish-friendly. There are many synagogues, the political atmosphere is friendly to Jews, there are many Jewish schools and institutions. It is very easy to be Jewish in the US. But I have noted that many people take that for granted. We lack so many things, amenities, in Uganda, and therefore it is difficult for us to be Jewish. I've met many people in the New York area who don't mind about being Jewish or going to synagogue or raising Jewish children. They don't mind about extending Judaism beyond themselves, to the next generation

Because we lack, we yearn. When you don't have something, you want it. When you have it, it's not valuable any more.

Yasher Koach, Noah!

Noah Mitchel with Gershom Sizomu



Noah Mitchel collected money and children's vitamins for the Abayudaya community as part of his bar mitzvah project at Tikvat Israel congregation in Rockville, Maryland. Noah addressed classrooms, manned his exhibit in the synagogue lobby on three Sundays and placed a donation box in the lobby. Noah's interest in the Abayudaya grew after he met Gershom Sizomu in Washington. At press time, he had already collected \$1100 and 45 bottles of vitamins!

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Amishav Update

(Continued from page 1)

written previously, a young man by the name of Shimon Gangte has already become the first Bnei Menashe in over 2000 years to be ordained as a rabbi in Israel. We now hope to build on this success by providing scholarships to a handful of worthy candidates interested in undertaking religious studies full-time.

Lately, Amishav has expanded its educational projects which are aimed to reach out to wider audiences around the world. *Judaism* - my book on Jewish practice and thought - has just been published in three new languages: Japanese, Thadou and Mizo. Copies of the Thadou and Mizo versions have already been sent to Mizoram and Manipur, where the bulk of the Bnei Menashe live and practice Judaism. I hope that it will prove helpful to them in their efforts to return to the faith of their forefathers. Additional copies of the translations have been made available to the Bnei Menashe in Israel, in an attempt to facilitate their increased understanding of Jewish observance and practice as well. In the coming months, the book will also be published in Chinese, and a reprinting of the Spanish language edition was also recently completed. My book on the Lost Tribes of Israel is now being translated into Italian, and we are exploring the possibility of publishing it in other languages as well. Through these efforts, we hope to generate increased awareness regarding the fate of 'lost' Jews such as the Ten Tribes and the descendants of Spanish conversos.

Not surprisingly, the horrific events of September 11 in the United States sent shockwaves throughout Israel. All of us were stunned by the cruelty and devastation of the attack. In its aftermath, a number of reporters and journalists became interested in the historical connection between the Pashtuns (or Pathans), the largest tribe in Afghanistan, and the Jews, a subject discussed at length in my book. The late president of the State of Israel, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, also investigated the connection between the two in his book *The Exiled and the Redeemed*, and he too concluded that the Pashtuns are descended from Jews. I granted a number of interviews on the subject to media outlets including the *London Jewish Chronicle*, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency and Israel's Channel 1 Television.

In the coming year, we hope to expand our activities still further. The only constraint, as always, is budgetary. There are so many people out there who share a strong historical connection with the Jewish people, and who wish to investigate their origins and learn more about their heritage. But to reach them, we need your help and support. Please send your tax-deductible contribution, made out to Amishav, to Amishav, 3b Epstein Street, Jerusalem 9655, Israel. Thank you for your assistance.

High Seas

© 2002 by Carolivia Herron

My grandmother's Friday night candles light the way to the high seas. A pirate ship where the sailors earn their living by stealing Jews from the North Mediterranean, Spain, Portugal, France, Italy — they carry the Jews to North Africa — Tunisia, Algeria, Libya — and ransom them in the Jewish communities there. My Great Grandmother's Great Grandfather was one of these pirates. She told me that our family was a free black family that had been founded on one of the Georgia sea islands by this Portuguese pirate and a Spanish Jewish woman who had been stolen from one of the Mediterranean countries. She told me we are Geechees. She told me the Portuguese pirate fell in love with one of the captured Jewish women. They jumped ship together in North Africa, in Tripoli, and came to America.

Their children intermarried with the sea islanders, Black Geechees. I did not even know that Geechees were a real group of people. I thought it was a pet name of endearment because my mother often told me with a smile that I am a Geechee. "You and your father are both Geechees," she would say, and hold me close with love. I found out later in books and movies that "geechee" was sometimes used as an insult for wild blacks who lived away from everybody and had not been slaves. Even later I discovered that Geechees are a real group of people living on the Georgia sea islands.

He stole her. He changed his mind. Sailing the high seas. And she came with him. My great grandmother told me they fell in love with each other. They left the world into which they had been born and moved somewhere else. She is nameless in our oral tradition, but she has leaned through history to tell me that her name is Sarah. I thank you, Sarah, my Great Grandmother's Great Grandmother, from generation to generation you are the one who has sent me the Shabbat candles.

Deadline for next issue: April 15, 2002

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Edited by Karen Primack

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