



Supporting Isolated, Emerging, and Returning Jewish Communities around the Globe

# KULANU

“All of Us”

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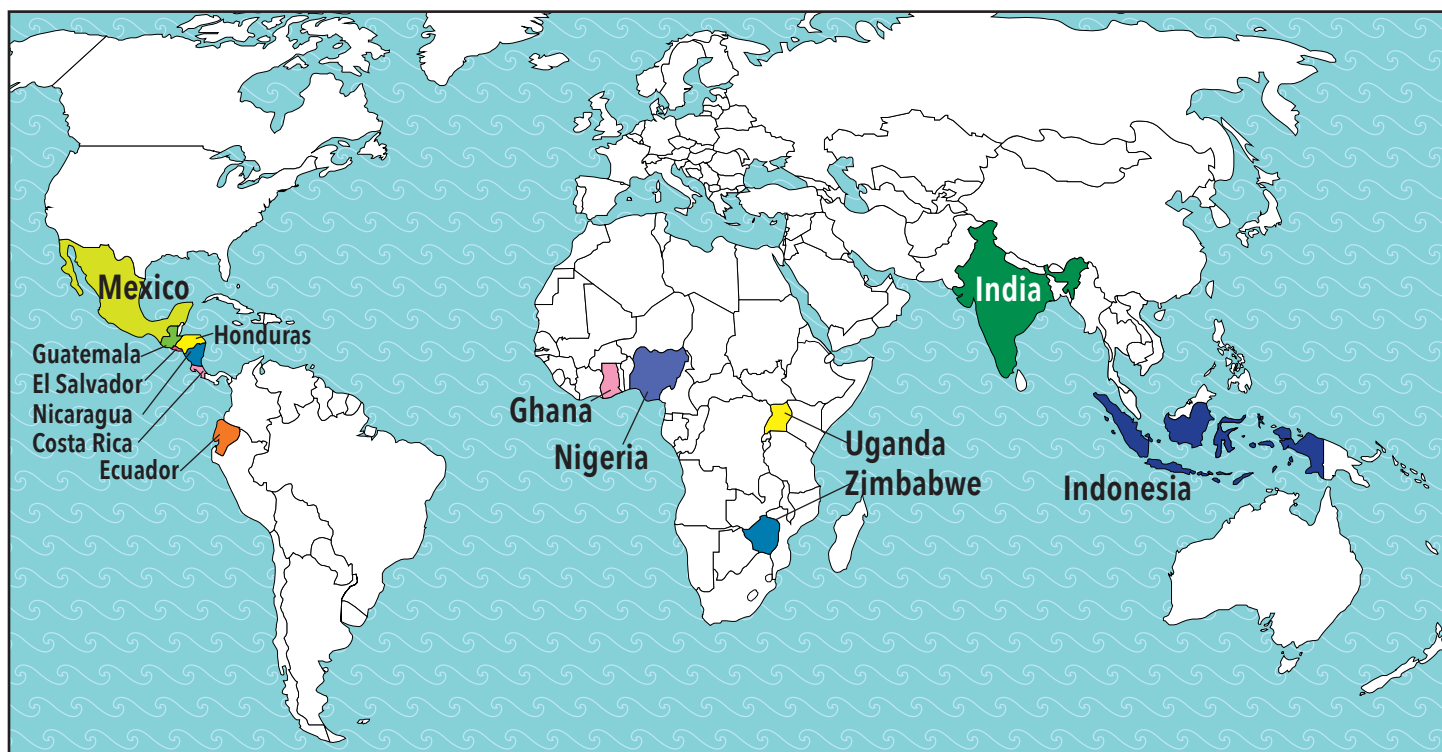
Welcome to Uganda!

You will be greeted with open arms by the Abayudaya Jewish community. Here is Rachel Wanyenya, chef and head of guesthouse housekeeping, January 2019.  
Photo by Michael Tucker. Story page 3.



# Where in the World is Kulanu in this Issue

Kulanu is in touch with dozens of communities around the world. If a community contacts us, our first step is always to listen carefully to their needs. Afterwards, we brainstorm, finance, and carry out projects to help them further their study and practice of Judaism and build their communities. This map highlights communities featured in this issue. To see a full list of all our partner communities, visit [kulanu.org/communities](http://kulanu.org/communities).

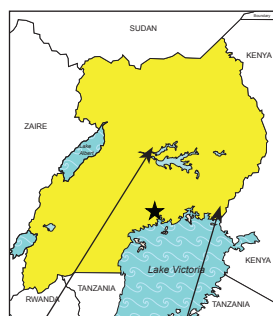


**Zimbabwe, p3**



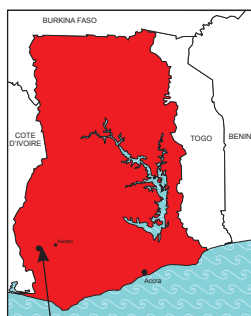
Harare,  
Guesthouse

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Apac Nabugoya Hill  
Guest house

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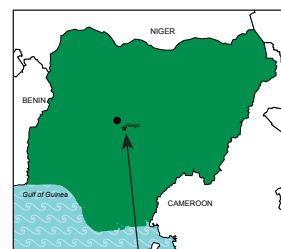
Sefwi Wiawso,  
Guesthouse

**India, p8**



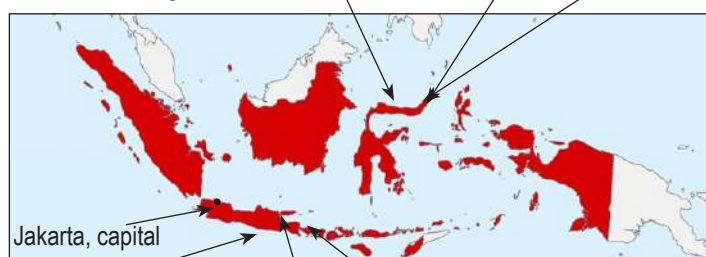
Erode, guest accommodations

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Abuja

**Indonesia, p21**



Jakarta, capital  
Island of Java Surabaya Bali

**Mexico, p9**



Monterrey

**Latin America, p9**



Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa  
Rica, El Salvador, and Guatemala

# Kulanu Guesthouses: a Home Away From Home

By Miriam (Mickey) Feinberg

*Mickey and her husband Mordy have volunteered as teachers of Jewish life and practices with organizations such as the American Jewish World Service, Volunteers for Israel, Jewish Renewal in Poland, and Kulanu. Since their retirement from their professional work, the Feinbergs spend a great deal of time traveling to Israel and Columbus, Ohio visiting with their children and grandchildren, in addition to volunteering with Kulanu's partner communities in Africa.*

Have you ever stayed at a guesthouse in Africa? Kulanu has assisted in creating guesthouses in many partner communities to ensure visitors have a welcoming place to stay. It's an amazing experience! It's fascinating, fun, interactive, and comfortable!

My husband and I stayed in the guesthouse connected with the Abayudaya village of **Nabugoya Hill, Uganda** in 2014. The guesthouse had several bedrooms, and ours was quiet, private, comfortably furnished, and had an ensuite bathroom. We would have felt comfortable just relaxing by ourselves in our room if we had chosen to do that but there was so much of interest to engage us in the large public room, interacting with local residents and other visitors who had unusual personal stories to share. In that large room, we talked with Rachel as she freshly cooked our meals; with Samson, a high school student from Kenya who was living in the guesthouse while he attended the Abayudaya high school; with Jonathan, an American Jewish university student from Michigan who was on his

way to enjoy the nearby safari sights; and with occasional other visitors who had fascinating tales to tell.

In 2015, we stayed in the guesthouse by Kulanu run by the Lemba in **Harare, Zimbabwe** for what was a bit different but equally interesting experience. We lived there with a young Lemba family: the father, Modreck, who is the leader of the Lemba community; his wife Brenda; their two young children, Aviv and Shlomo; Modreck's nephew George; and a few extended family members.

We lived in the guest room, which was a very large and comfortable master bedroom with a huge bed, a TV, and a well-equipped, large ensuite bathroom. Because we lived in the house with Modreck and Brenda and their family, we got to know and love them very quickly.

The guesthouse in Harare was different from the one in Uganda. While the Abayudaya guesthouse is in a remote village surrounded by gorgeous mountains and the calmness of nature, the one in Harare is in a residential area of the capital city and within a short walk to a shopping center with a variety of stores and eating places.



Mickey making challah with Lemba children in Harare, Zimbabwe, 2015



Mordy helping these Lemba children prepare for their b'nai mitzvah in Harare, Zimbabwe, 2015

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**Kulanu Guesthouses:** *continued from previous page*

While living in the Abayudaya village we were able to walk through nature to the nearby synagogue for services, Talmud classes taught by Rabbi Gershom three times weekly, and Divrei Torah delivered by the rabbi every Shabbat. In Harare, we had only to walk to the community room in the house in which we were staying, where we found religious services, community meetings, Hebrew classes, and Jewish history and culture lessons, or we could walk to the dining room where we ate meals together with Modreck, Brenda, and their household.

We found that we very soon became part of the Harare Lemba household in Harare, enjoying our meals, lessons, and religious services together, baking challah with Brenda, watching tv together in the evening, and learning about Modrek's family and the Lemba culture.

We're very grateful for having stayed at these guesthouses because of the exceptional opportunities to become friends with the Abayudaya and Lemba families and communities, and we look forward to enjoying many more years of friendship with them. We often talk about visiting guest accommodations in Kulanu communities that we haven't yet visited in Ghana (see article on the next page), Nigeria (photo below), India (see photos on page 8), and Brazil, and imagine how fascinating it would be to stay in them. As we approach a time when we feel more comfortable traveling, we look forward to spending vacation time at some of the guesthouses in other Kulanu partner communities. If you are interested in staying at a Kulanu community in a guesthouse, contact Kulanu at [kulanu.org/contact](http://kulanu.org/contact). \*



Living/dining room in the Abayudaya guesthouse in Uganda with long-time Kulanu volunteer Shep Wahnon (see article page 18) in blue shirt, January 2019. Photo by Michael Tucker.



Abayudaya guesthouse, January 2019. Photo by Michael Tucker.



Guesthouse in Nigeria



Harare Lemba Synagogue with guest room inside, Zimbabwe, 2014

# Remembering Dr. Michael Gershowitz: Welcome to the Gershowitz Guesthouse in Ghana

by Harriet Bograd, President of Kulanu

How has Kulanu accomplished so much over the years, first as an all-volunteer organization and in later years with a relatively small staff? One key to our success is our committed team of volunteer regional coordinators. They serve as friends and liaisons between communities, in Kulanu leadership roles, and in many other capacities. Dr. Michael Gershowitz, z"l, an expert grant writing consultant to public and nonprofit organizations around the world, was one of the trail-blazers who created the regional coordinator role. He died in 2014, and we are so grateful that his family and the Tiffereth Israel Jewish Community of Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana have decided to honor him by dedicating the community's guesthouse in his memory. We hope many visitors will have joyous visits to this community in the future as Michael Gershowitz and his family did, and as my family did after him. (See Kulanu's new web page, [kulanu.org/visit-ghana](http://kulanu.org/visit-ghana).)

Michael first visited in 1999 after reading about a previous visit to Sefwi Wiawso by Daniel Baiden, a Ghanaian-American Jew. Michael visited with his daughter, Abby, who recalls:

I went to Ghana with my dad for two weeks in the summer of 1999 when I was ten years old. We spent a lovely Shabbat with the Jewish community in Sefwi. It was way off the beaten path and at one point on the journey

our bus became mired in the mud so that everyone was told to get off and push it out. We started to get off and help as well, but the other passengers wouldn't let us since we were visitors. I was pretty blown away by that. When we arrived in the village, we prayed with everyone in the one-room synagogue. I played with some of the other children who showed me around the area, and we ate delicious home-cooked meals. While I don't remember every detail of our trip because I was young, I will never forget the feeling of being graciously welcomed into everyone's homes and how special it felt to spend time with people who loved being Jewish with their own distinct culture and customs. I traveled extensively with my dad throughout my childhood, and while he would always seek out the local Jewish community wherever we went, I would venture that Sefwi was one of his favorite places in the world. On subsequent trips, he brought along my brothers and other family and friends and he arranged for gifts of prayer books and prayer shawls to be sent to the synagogue. For the rest of his life he lovingly spoke of the warm and wonderful community of Sefwi Wiawso.

**Karen Primack, Kulanu's former vice president and past editor of our newsletter, remembers:**

Michael Gershowitz was a quintessential Kulanuite: Even before Kulanu existed, it had been his custom to spend Shabbat with local Jewish communities all over the world. Just a few years after Kulanu's birth, and after some difficulty, he found and celebrated with the Jewish community of Ghana in Sefwi Wiawso.

A few weeks after this trip, his shul in Iowa shipped 200 siddurim to Sefwi Wiawso.

And Michael's beautiful reporting skills introduced this vibrant community to Kulanu's international audience.



The Gershowitz Family at Abby's wedding. From left to right: Gabriel, Michael, z"l, Abigail (Persky), Tova, and Nathaniel (courtesy of the Gershowitz family)

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Michael's report on a visit was a three-part article for Kulanu's newsletter, reprinted as *A Visit to the Jewish Community of Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana* which you can read here: <https://kulanu.org/communities/ghana/visit-jewish-community-sefwi-wiawso-ghana>).

Michael also paved the way for others to volunteer and visit the community. In the summer of 2000, his son Gabriel Gershowitz and Gabe's friend Nate Asher spent the summer teaching Jewish subjects and Hebrew in the community. Michael encouraged Dr. David Borenstein to visit for a week in early 2001, and he encouraged my daughter, now Rabbi Margie Klein Ronkin, to visit in the summer of 2001. My husband and I joined Margie for a week and fell in love with the community. That was my joyous initiation to Kulanu! Then he sent his son Nathaniel to a year of high school in nearby Kumasi. Nathaniel spent every other Shabbat with the community in Sefwi Wiawso and stayed in touch with the community for many years.

Jack Zeller, Kulanu's president emeritus, wrote:

Michael was a teacher by example. He knew that long-term commitment was not just personally rewarding, but a method that worked. Kulanu learned by his example. Even more, Michael lifted us all in his ascent to a fuller Jewish identity, embracing of Jewish values, and joyous Jewish living.



Havdalah in Sefwi Wiawso at the close of Shabbat, 2021. Visitors have the opportunity to participate in this and many other experiences in this community while staying at the guesthouse. Photo by Ezra Waxman

Jay Sand, global music educator and world traveler, shared this recollection:

I visited the community in Sefwi Wiawso in late 1999, not so long after Michael Gershowitz. He and his daughter had made quite an impact! Throughout my time there, the community members . . . told me all about how Michael had reacted to things I was seeing and doing. Most memorably, when I sat down to eat with the community for the first time, they served me a generous portion of fufu and explained to me how to dip it in groundnut soup and swallow it without chewing. When I dipped the first bit of fufu and picked it up to swallow it, everyone covered their faces and laughed. Apparently, Michael, or maybe Abby, had an experience with fufu that wasn't, let's say, smooth! As some of you know, I'm a music teacher who teaches international songs to very young children. When I introduce my lesson from Ghana I often tell the fufu story and, in my mind, thank Michael (whether or not he was the one) for inspiring my new friends in Ghana to greet my first bite of dinner with a laugh.

Alex Armah, the spiritual leader of the community for many years, went to study in the Abayudaya Jewish community of Uganda in 2008, where he saw the success of a guesthouse for visitors. He encouraged the Sefwi community to use earnings from their sales of challah covers (which the community members continue to make) to help build the guesthouse. See or purchase challah covers at: [kulanuboutique.com/challah-covers](http://kulanuboutique.com/challah-covers).

Alex wrote:

Thanks so much for letting me put my voice in this issue of Kulanu Magazine about the history of Sefwi Wiawso Guest House. I am happy my dream to make the guesthouse operable is coming to reality, dedicated to Dr. Michael Gershowitz. He came to our community in order to help us grow. Through him we were able to have our prayer books. His son Gabriel and Gabriel's friend Nate

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**Gershowitz Ghana Guesthouse:** *continued from previous page*

Asher did their best for the community and helped us by teaching us Hebrew and many things about Judaism to both children and adults. I remember him with good memories.

The guesthouse was planned by the leaders at that time. I was one of them. When we received guests, it was a problem to host them if they were more than five. We had land close to the synagogue, so we discussed building a guesthouse to host visitors and at the same time to serve as income-generating to the community. We started farming, and visitors also helped us with donations. I congratulate Mama Harriet and her husband Ken, and Margie. They are the most amazing people. They contributed towards the guesthouse by the sales of our challah covers and tallitot [through Kulanu] and put much effort to make things happen. I remember that we also received money from Michael Gershowitz to support the guesthouse.

May the soul of Michael Gershowitz rest in peace. I will always remember him.

From the first visitors in the late 1990s until 2012, most visitors stayed in the home of Joseph Armah and his family, and some stayed with Kofi Kwarteng and family. Starting in 2013, visitors have stayed in the guesthouse. Notably, filmmaker Gabrielle Zilkha and the crew of her much-viewed film *Doing Jewish: A Story from Ghana* stayed there. The film is available on Amazon Prime. You can tour the digital village at [www.doingjewishthefilm.com](http://www.doingjewishthefilm.com). The link to

the trailer is at [kulanu.org/film#zilkha](http://kulanu.org/film#zilkha).

Other guests have included Loren Berman, a rabbinical student who served as a Kulanu Global Teaching Fellow in 2017, and Rabbi Eli Courante from Canada in 2020.

But the building was not yet completed in 2013 when guests began using it. Therefore, when Gabriel Gershowitz came to Kulanu

in 2015 after his father died, we agreed that he and his family would donate funds to complete construction of the guesthouse and dedicate it in his memory.

Kulanu Canada, our partner organization, also supports this community in Sefwi Wiawso, Ghana. Their generous donor, Alexia Emmanuel, was inspired by Gabrielle Zilkha's film and has donated more than \$5,000 for this community. These funds were used to buy 22 smartphones

## You Can Help!

Much work has been done by now: adding security gates, finishing floors, painting, improving drainage, and adding a western flush toilet. But more support is needed. To add your donation in Michael Gershowitz's memory, please visit [kulanu.org/donate](http://kulanu.org/donate) and write "Ghana Guest House" in the comments, or mail a check to Kulanu, 165 West End Ave, 3R, NY, NY 10023 and write "Ghana Guest House" in the memo.

The Gershowitz Guest House still needs:

\$1,700 for furniture

\$578 for room decoration

\$684 for electrical appliances

**\$2,962 Total needed**



Sefwi Wiawso Guest House, January 2021, photo by Michael Owusu Ansa



Guesthouse dining room, 2012, photo by Ike Swetlitz

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### **Gershowitz Ghana Guesthouse:** *continued from previous page*

so that community members can learn together on WhatsApp with teachers from Israel, Nigeria, Canada, and the USA, and to help with guesthouse renovations. The community will honor Alexia by naming a room in the guesthouse after her.

If you're planning a trip to Ghana, please add the community of Sefwi Wiawso to your itinerary and enjoy a stay at the Gershowitz Guesthouse. \*



A guest room in Ghana, 2012, photo by Ike Swetlitz

## **Guest Accomodations in India**

If you have the itch to travel to India, consider visiting and/or volunteering with the Zion Torah Jewish community in Erode, Tamil Nadu.

Photos provided by Anne Samuel, 2021. Photo descriptions, clockwise starting to the right: One of the two new guest rooms, each with its own bathroom; dining and kitchen area; lobby area shared by guests; one of the guest bathrooms (note the beautiful door detail!)





# From Food Relief to Jewish Learning: Kulanu's Work With Emerging Communities in Latin America

By Genie Milgrom, Anusim Coordinator for Kulanu



*Genie (pictured left), born in Cuba to a Catholic family of Spanish ancestry, is an author, researcher, and lecturer. In an unparalleled work of genealogy, she was able to fully document that she was Jewish through her unbroken maternal lineage of 22 generations, going back as far as 1405 to Pre-Inquisition Spain and Portugal. To learn more about Genie*

*and her all-encompassing work, see <https://kulanu.org/board-and-staff#milgrom>.*

Being a direct descendant of the Crypto-Jews (descendents of the Secret Jews, known as anusim in Hebrew, who were forced to convert to Christianity during the Inquisition) of Spain and Portugal, I was looking for an organization where I could easily use my personal experiences to help out anusim (literally, “forced ones,” those compelled to renounce Judaism) communities, and Kulanu was a slam dunk.

Having been involved with emerging communities for over 25 years, Kulanu certainly had the contacts, the far reach, and the desire to have the Latin American communities looked after. It was a true match made in heaven!



Food assistance during pandemic, Armenia, El Salvador, 2020

The time was smack in the middle of the pandemic when I received a call from Harriet (Kulanu's president) and Bonita (Kulanu's vice president) asking me what we could do to help out with food or supplies for those isolated communities in



Congregation Shaar Hashamaim in Guatemala City, Guatemala, *Bedikat Chametz* (the search for chametz just before Passover), March 2021

Latin America that found themselves without an ability to work or even leave their homes.

It was an incredible challenge for me as I had just started to meet the leaders of the communities and had not yet made real personal connections. I began a phone campaign to work out the details. This entailed not just the challenge of

sending the monies to the different locations such as Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Guatemala, but also arranging logistics on the ground to prepare “care packages” for each family.

As the pandemic worsened, I was able to arrange a wholesaler to put together huge packages containing rice, oil, flour, sugar, salt, corn, some sweets for the children, and much more. Volunteers were needed to deliver these packages directly to the families. To make the pandemic issues worse, hurricanes and severe flooding during this time affected the Honduran community. One of our volunteers got as far as he could in a jeep and then rented canoes to get the supplies down the river. It was the first of many experiences I would have with these beautiful and sensitive people returning to the whispers of their ancestors.

Slowly, relationships were forged not only with the leaders of the communities, but with the women and other members. I shared my direct phone number with them and somehow that

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**Latin America:** *continued from previous page*

small gesture made them feel that they were a part of something bigger. For the first time, they felt that someone was looking out for them. We chatted often by phone and video, and finally by Zoom, which became the method of communication. They asked me to teach them. Soon we were meeting on Zoom and I was teaching them, in Spanish, various subjects including Jewish history, kashrut, holidays, laws of family purity, and much more. I coordinated with other volunteers who taught Hebrew (from Spanish) to the children as well as to the adults. Michael, my husband, taught classes in English and French. As the days during the pandemic passed, the communities began to learn and yearn for more.

They grew stronger in the Jewish faith, and conversions were held in several countries. Along with those conversions came the need for kosher *mikvahs* (Jewish ritual baths sourced from rain) and we managed to build two. One was built in Guatemala just in time to be used in the conversions and another in El Salvador in an established community of anusim known as Armenia. We were elated to be a part of this amazing accomplishment.

In the middle of the worst part of the pandemic, we were fortunate that Congregation Beth Shalom of Whittier, California donated a Torah to Kulanu, and, just as fortunately, a community in Honduras was eager to receive it. Much planning and maneuvering resulted in retrieving the Torah

in California and bringing it to Miami and then to Honduras. It was Chanukah 2020 and we had a lovely outdoor ceremony with rabbis, representatives from the Israeli Consulate and the Honduran Consulate in Miami, community members, and many more. It was a truly lovely passage of a well-loved Torah leaving to start a new life. In Honduras, another large and beautiful celebration was held with rabbis from several countries all participating on Zoom along with a small delegation from Kulanu.

A community in Monterrey, Mexico was gifted with a beautiful Purim Megillah, and we are proud to have sent tallis, tefillin, Hebrew books for children, and so much more to these emerging communities.

We feel we have a true partnership with these anusim communities and are only getting started. It has been a blessing that I have been able to move into a leadership role, helping these communities join with each other to meet and discuss their options for living strong Jewish lives in their countries. \*



Building the Mikvah, Armenia, El Salvador, 2020



Torah donated by Congregation Beth Shalom of Whittier, California and received by Jewish community in Honduras, December 2020

For more information about the anusim communities that Kulanu serves, go to [kulanu.org/communities](http://kulanu.org/communities) and see the web pages for Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Nicaragua.



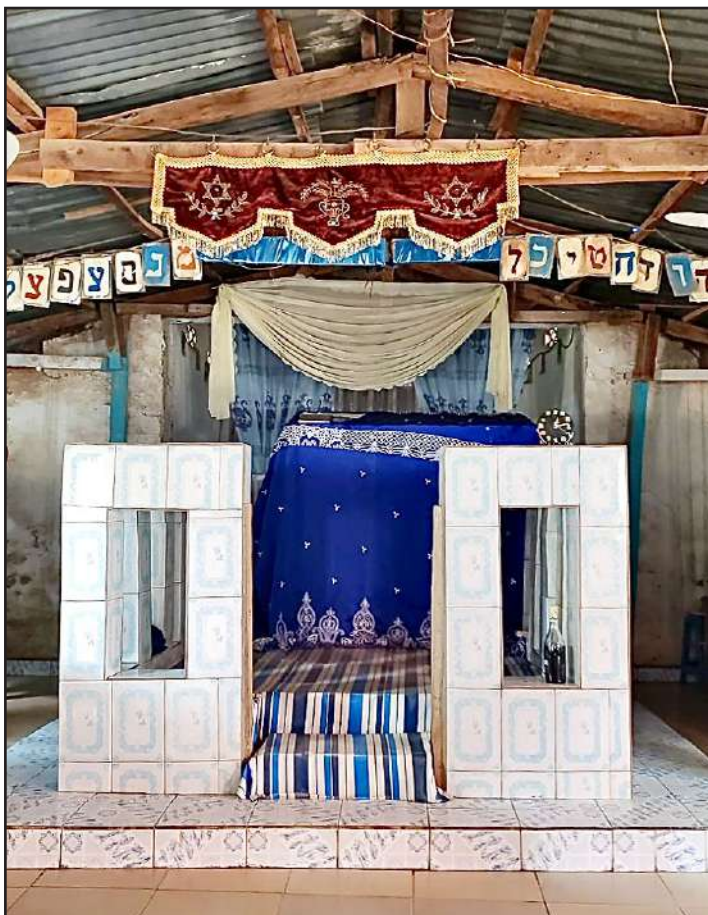
# Becoming Jewish:

## A Dream Come True in Nigeria

By Bonita Nathan Sussman, First Vice President of Kulanu

This photo montage tells the story of 94 conversions to Judaism and 10 weddings that took place in Abuja, Nigeria in August 2021; these took place in the Igbo community of Tikvat Israel, a community founded by Habbakuk Nwafor now assisted by his son Moshe Hezekiah. Rabbi Gerald and Bonita Sussman of New York traveled there with Rabbi Moshe and Meira Saks, currently from New York, as well as their son and daughter-in-law Rabbi Ari and Rachel Saks, and others. Rabbi Gerald and Rabbi Moshe were joined by Rabbi Gershom Sizomu of Uganda, who served on the *beit din*, the rabbinical court, that interviewed the conversion candidates as part of the conversion process which included immersion in the mikveh and the *hatafat dam brit* (drawing of blood for the men).

This community of Igbos, who claim descentance from the tribe of Gad, has practiced Judaism for over 15 years. They have studied extensively and are ritually observant. They identify as a Conservative community because Conservative rabbis from America, particularly Rabbi Howard Gorin of Maryland and Rabbi Wayne Franklin of Rhode Island, spent much time training them and supporting their Jewish development. A 2012 documentary film called *Re-Emerging: the Jews of Nigeria* (by Jeff Lieberman) tells their story in detail, and Professor Bill Miles of Northeastern University in Boston has written extensively about them. These photos, taken by Bonita Sussman, are of the most recent developments in this community.



The bima and the ark in Tikvat Israel, Kubwa, Abuja



Women's class preparing for the conversions, mikvah, and weddings, led by Rebbitzin Rachel Saks



Gathering in the sanctuary for Rosh Chodesh prayers

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The beit din signing the conversion documents (from left to right: Rabbi Moshe Saks, Rabbi Gerald Sussman, and Rabbi Gershom Sizomu)



The Sephardic custom to wrap a talit around the couple at end of the wedding ceremony



Wedding ceremony: each couple stands under their own chuppah



Members of the Tikvat Israel community

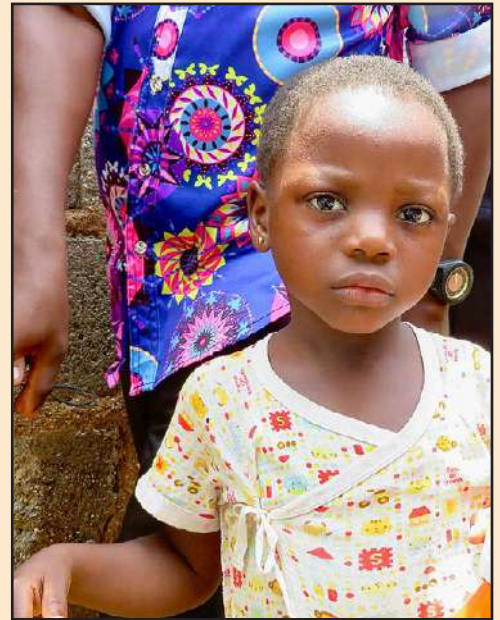


Men of the community waiting for the beit din





These children were exceptionally learned in the Jewish traditions and loved to ask Rebbetzin Bonita Sussman questions about various subjects. They can all read and *daven* (pray) in Hebrew. This was taken in the sanctuary.



One of the many children in the Tikvat Israel community



This young boy loved to *daven* and *shuckle* (moving back and forth) during the Amidah



Women taking out braided hair extensions before entering the mikvah



A family of the community

Another little girl of the community



\*



# Kulanu Notes

## Kulanu's Photo Archive

Kulanu is proud to have one of the largest photo archives in the world dedicated to isolated, emerging, and returning Jewish communities. The online photo archive is available at [kulanu.smugmug.com](http://kulanu.smugmug.com) and has over 30,000 photos. The photos are categorized by country and then by the year taken. There are also general folders that include "Best Pictures" and "Jewish Holidays around the World." Take a look around to see photos from from long ago through present-day. (Photo by Chaya Weinstein.)



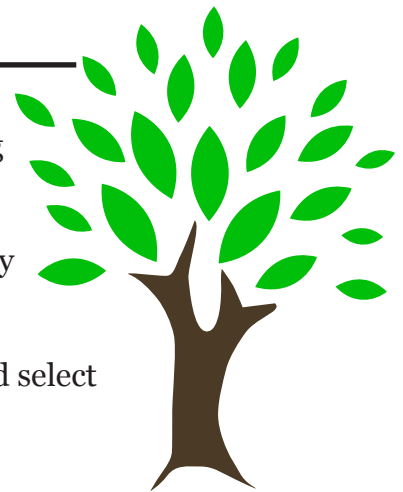
## Cappuccino and Kulanu



Last Spring, Kulanu created "Cappuccino and Kulanu," a group for young people with a connection to Kulanu to come together in order to discuss relevant issues. The two Zoom sessions thus far included about 30 participants total and were led by Kulanu board members Benjamin Lefkowitz (left) and Bonita Nathan Sussman. One result from the sessions is that two individuals were invited to join the different Kulanu committees of interest; one serves on the Grants Committee and the other serves on the Website Committee. This effort ensures that more young people are involved in Kulanu's mission and are committed to its future. If you would like to be involved in the next session, keep an eye on our email communications.

## Join Ohavei Olam

Kulanu's monthly supporters' program is called *Ohavei Olam*, which means "lovers of the world" in Hebrew. It gives Kulanu stability in funding to carry out projects at short notice wherever and whenever the need is greatest. Monthly donors give us the flexibility to take advantage of opportunities such as getting hard-to-source Judaica items to a community in need quickly. *Ohavei Olam* will help us to sustain ongoing efforts, for example providing internet connections in rural Jewish communities. To become a member of *Ohavei Olam*, simply visit [kulanu.org/donate](http://kulanu.org/donate) and select "monthly" under Gift Information. Any amount makes a big difference.



## Keep Up with Kulanu



*Kulanutalk* is a Google group where members can share interesting stories and events related to Kulanu's work and/or partner communities. Shep Wahnnon (featured on page 18) is a very active member of the group and often contributes news articles that he finds on the internet. To join the Google group, please send a blank email to [kulanutalk+subscribe@googlegroups.com](mailto:kulanutalk+subscribe@googlegroups.com). To send a message to the group after joining, address it to [kulanutalk@googlegroups.com](mailto:kulanutalk@googlegroups.com).

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## Mini-Grants Update

Kulanu has given out several mini-grants this year to partner communities. Mini-grants helped cover expenses for Shabbat and holiday celebrations in Cameroon, Tanzania, and Pakistan (below), assisted with the cemetery and museum project in Suriname, the beit din in Nigeria, the printing shop in Madagascar, and building a latrine in Uganda.



In addition, two community leaders were awarded mini-grants to assist with funding their studies in seminary. Rebeca Orantes (pictured left) of Guatemala received a mini-grant to attend Hebrew Union College Rabbinical School and Guershon Nduwa (pictured right) will attend an online program of Seminario Rabinico located in Buenos Aires, Argentina.



Thanks to a Kulanu mini-grant, this Pakistan Jewish community celebrated a joyous Purim.

## School and Community Center in Apac, Uganda

Kulanu is contributing to the building of a new school and a community center being built by community members in the rural Abayudaya Jewish community in Apac, Uganda. This is a project of the Tikkun Olam Abayudaya Fund led by Congregation P'nai Or of Portland, Oregon. It is focused on education, agriculture, microcredit, and savings. The school, known as Ben David School, consists of three log classrooms that will allow the students to learn closer to home. There is also a thatched roof building being used as a synagogue and classroom. The community center is a small brick building that will include a savings and loan office, a guest room, and living quarters.



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**Notes:** continued from previous page

## Watch Recorded Online Speaker Series

Kulanu has produced 20 Zoom programs during the pandemic to date. The speakers have included community leaders from different partner communities around the world, notable scholars, and more. Dani Rotstein telling the story of the Jews of Majorca is pictured. Each session runs about an hour and the recordings are available online at [kulanu.org/recorded-sessions](https://kulanu.org/recorded-sessions). Go to the link to check out the various programs and view what you missed, and even watch some for a second time! Please share the link with others, too. You can also watch our 2020 Zoom-a-Thon: “Kulanu in Song” Chanukah Benefit at [kulanu.org/watch](https://kulanu.org/watch).



## Thank you from the Lemba

In November 2021, Kulanu received a letter from a group of people from the Bedza community in Zimbabwe, thanking our organization for the life-changing projects that their community accomplished with Kulanu’s assistance between 2017 and today. Here is that letter, along with a few of the photos which accompanied it.



Tomatoes in the garden yemubatanidzwa (community garden)



Mbuya Terence (Terence's Grandmother) in the drip irrigation installed field with her grandchildren Sophia and Shlomo, getting pruned down vegetables for goats.

### Greetings from the Bedza community!

*It's 9 o'clock in the morning and, in Zvakavapano village, Mbuya Terrence (Terrence's grandmother) watches as cattle from around the community congregate at the drinking trough by her homestead. The water is being pumped from a powered solar borehole half a kilometer away. It is first pumped into tanks halfway up the mountain, from where it rushes down hidden pipes into the community.*

*A kilometer away, there is a place called Sekutamba Bridge. It used to be a bridge in name only, for to get across, vehicles needed to wade through waters reaching a quarter of the way up their doors. Now, there is a real crossing where people going kugarden yemubatanidzwa, to the community garden, can cross without fear of getting their feet wet.*

*Up the same stream, there is a place where a concrete wall cuts right across the stream. Behind this “dam” wall of the Bedza Kulanu Reservoir, as it is now called, precious water has now been tamed. The cattle that do not make it to Mbuya Terrence's drinking trough find their sustenance here, for the summers can be long and dry here.*

*In another part of the village, a stone's throw away from the mountain, one gets greeted by mounds of fresh earth. Upon further inspection, one notices evidence of recent drilling. There is hope on the faces of those living nearby, for the promised water means community gardens tenderly tended to. These together with the evergreen plot of dripped irrigation will keep away the pangs of hunger during lean months.*

*Another season and the elusive rains have finally come. Pass by the village, and you are likely to see a tractor working the 14 hectares of land that were recently fenced. It's a much-needed respite for the sometimes emaciated cattle. The smell of the freshly churned earth promises further relief for the time-worn village.*

continued on next page





One of the many cows we lost due to water shortages



Now cattle and sheep are healthier drinking from the reservoirs and feeding on the grass that grows on the banks.



Cattle eating the grass that grew inside the fence



Left, below, below right:  
Kulanu Bedza Reservoir  
overflowing, reservoir at  
Sekutamba Bridge, and  
Rosenbloom Reservoir



*The Bedza community says thank you to Kulanu for extending a helping hand. All these projects would not have been possible without your generous donations.*

*Yes, we started this on our own, with a dollar donated here and there, but without your help, we wouldn't have taken it this far.*

*Today, most parts of the village now have water for domestic use. In other parts of the community, projects are underway to ensure that there is enough water for livestock, nutritional gardens, and a multitude of other activities. Your generous hand has also seen villagers building healthy relations with one another through working together on various projects.*

*Traditionally the Lemba have always been looked up to by our neighbors as a people who would help them in time of need. When there was a drought our Lemba elders helped our neighbors with grain when we had surplus cattle for milking and for plowing their fields we loaned some to our neighbors. Lately, our status as people who always chipped in to help our neighbors had diminished. We now lacked the means to do so since we needed help ourselves. You have helped bring back some of that status to us. You came to help when we needed you the most and our community and our lives are being transformed before our eyes. Hundreds of cattle from far away villages came to drink water from our village last year in 2020 after the most horrible drought in recent years. You empowered us to help our neighbors once again.*

*The projects you have helped us to work on have brought a good vibe between us and our neighbors. They gave us a platform to work together, to forget our differences, big and small, and brought us together to confront our common problems. Friendships, alliances, and strong inter-community ties were fostered. That you did that from thousands of miles away is a miracle.*

*By the drinking trough, a smile appears on Mbuya Terrence's face as she watches the last of the cows taking their leave...*

*Thank you and God bless you,  
Tapiwa Zvakavapano, Mrs. E Bishi, Mrs. Getrude Chigwedere \**

# Volunteer Spotlight: Shep Wahnnon

## Pioneering, Plurality, and a Prime Minister

In Shep's words, based on an interview with and written by Ben Lefkowitz, Kulanu Board Member

*Ben's note: This past October, I had the pleasure of interviewing veteran Kulanu volunteer Shep Wahnnon. Shep is a longtime activist for the Jewish people and for humanity. He has an incredible wealth of stories which I feel like I've only scratched the surface of. Shep: I recommend writing a memoir.*

### Origin Story

#### First Connection

My earliest kind of connection to isolated, emerging, and returning communities was way back in 1964. We went to a Conservative synagogue where I grew up in Long Island, New York. In those days, they had this monthly magazine called *World Over*, which would highlight different things — mostly things that I wasn't particularly interested in. But when I was only around 12 years old, I saw this article that blew me away. It was an article about the Abayudaya in Uganda. I had never heard of a tribe of African Jews living out in the bush. It was surprising.

### A Jewish Awakening

I was kind of an assimilated Jew, and then I got unassimilated. I went to college, and it happened in the first two to three weeks. It was a sudden thing, like an epiphany. It changed me completely, turned me all around.

I became observant — a practicing Jew. I got into studying Hebrew, which I could never do as a kid. I even studied Ladino in a Portuguese synagogue.



Shep with one of the women from the Abayudaya in Uganda

I immediately became a Zionist and had to go to Israel, and I did go the following year. I attended Tel Aviv University. I connected with being a Jew in every way. Part of it was this interest in other Jews . . . Maybe it was because I'm *Mizrahi* (Jews of Middle Eastern ancestry, including what is now Iran, Iraq, and Yemen). I started to get involved in the American Association for Ethiopian Jews.

*Ben's Note: Shep would begin to raise money for the Association of Ethiopian Jews around this time. Between 1972 and 1976, he corresponded with Abayudayan and Nigerian Jews through mail, especially with his close Abayudayan friend, Samuel Mugambe, z"l, who was lost to AIDS. He became friends with the Kaifeng Jew and historian Shi Lei (who did two speaking tours for Kulanu), and connected with Amishav, Kulanu's predecessor, led by Rabbi Avichal. With help from Dr. Shmuel Watnick, Shep visited the Lemba community in South Africa and Zimbabwe, and stayed with the Lemba's leader, Dr. Mathiva. He would continue to seek out and volunteer in isolated, emerging, and returning Jewish communities. In recent years, he has done much of his work alongside Kulanu.*

### The Wahnnon Family

#### What's in a Name?

I've always been interested in my family name. It's a known Jewish-Arabic-Berber name from North Africa — my family's from Morocco. The "wa" in the Berber language means *ben*, in Hebrew, or "son of." The Berbers were the original inhabitants of North Africa until the Muslim Arab conquest in the 7th century C.E. Chanun comes from Hebrew and Arabic, and it means compassionate, as in what is recited in the Yom Kippur liturgy *rachum v'chanun*.

I was always interested in genealogy and, because I had such an unusual name in the United States, I never knew anyone other than my immediate family that had the name. My father told me that everyone with that name is related. So, before the internet years, I was trying to piece together and meet different members of my family.

*continued on next page*



## Family in Cape Verde

My ancestors emigrated from Morocco in the 1700s to the British colony of Gibraltar, where a lot of my family still lives. Yitzchak and Rachel Wahnon — distant family — moved in the 1850s to the Portuguese colony of Cape Verde, which is now a country (an island country that is off the coast of Senegal, Africa), with many other Jews from Morocco and Gibraltar. Many members of my extended family are in Cape Verde.

In 2013, I went to Cape Verde on a special mission with the Cape Verde Jewish History Project; my friend Carol Castiel is its president. They try to restore sites such as cemeteries and other sites important to Jews there. At the end of the trip we went to a home where they had put a party together. An incredible number of Wahnons were there. It was an absolutely amazing experience.

One of my cousins became the prime minister of Cape Verde. He may have been the first democratically elected leader in all of African

history. His name is Carlos Alberto Wahnon de Carvalho Veiga.

I wanted to visit him. So I went to the United Nations and asked, “Do you know where the prime minister of Cape Verde is staying?” I was told, “Oh yes, he’s staying at the Hilton.” (They would never share that information today!) I went to the Hilton Hotel down the block, and went to the front desk and said, “I’d like to speak to Prime Minister Carlos.” The clerk responded, “Who shall I say is here?” I answered, “His cousin.” We went into the room, and there were these big secret service tough guys. I walked in and there he was. I didn’t act like he was the prime minister — I greeted him with, “Hi, Cousin,” and we just started talking. All he knew was that all Wahnons are related, we come from Morocco, and we’re Jews or descended from Jews. It was a great relationship.

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*“My dream is for emerging, returning, and isolated Jewish communities... to create their own natural communities with their own culture and their own identity.”*

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## Thoughts and Dreams for these Communities

I remember when I first met Rabbi Gershom of the Abayudaya, back in the early 2000s. I recall saying to him, “I love your music. There’s no one way to be Jewish. Don’t be sucked into singing our melodies instead of your melodies, saying the white people’s melodies are so much better.”

My dream is for emerging, returning, and isolated Jewish communities to grow stronger. I hope that they will create their own natural communities with their own culture and their own identity. I don’t want them to just be turned into African or Asian Ashkenazi Jews, which sometimes happens.

I like the fact that many of the communities Kulanu works with have a strong cultural and ethnic identity of their own, as part of the great



Shep learning to play the marimba while some in this Abayudayan community in Uganda sing and dance along, January 2019

*continued on next page*

mosaic of the Jewish people. It would be nice if some of them decide to immigrate to Israel. If they are happy where they are, we should support them where they are, as they are.

Often, these communities find it hard to maintain their separate customs. For example, because of the larger Jewish community, the Jews of Belmonte, Portugal became normative Jews. They lost their 500-year old female-dominated culture. In Ethiopia, the Jews survived with their Ethiopian-Jewish religion and culture. And then they settled in Israel, and many Israeli Jews said, “Oh, that version is not the right one. We have the right one.” But the Ethiopian Jews have a wonderful religion. It isn’t like mainstream Judaism — it’s different.

I don’t understand Jews who aren’t really thrilled by this idea that we have Jewish people in these remote parts of the world. I think my commitment to Jewish diversity in the Diaspora (Jews living outside of Israel) stems from my desire to maintain my Sephardic identity apart from the Ashkenazi world. I enjoy traveling and meeting all kinds of people in these different countries. It’s thrilling in a way.

My dream is that the Diaspora and the state of Israel get along, and that elements of the



Shep with Shi Lei who is an active member of the Kaifeng Jewish Community in China, New York City, 2010

Diaspora can survive and thrive outside of Israel. Of course, with our connection to Israel, we have to be able to send our kids there on Birthright trips. We have to be able to go to school there, as I did. A certain percentage of us will immigrate

to Israel. But we must still maintain these small communities.

### **Moments and Memories**

I’ve been corresponding with the Abayudaya since the 1970s. When I first went to Uganda, I did not tell them I was coming. And when I showed up, young people like Shoshana Nambi and Sarah Nabagala, as well as Rabbi Gershon, were so excited. It was very affirming. It was one of the most touching moments for me; it was like coming home.

I’ll tell you a non-Kulanu thing that happened when I was in Ethiopia with Barbara Ribacove of the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry. I went to Addis Ababa, and we delivered assorted medicines and other items to people who were in need of them. We brought them a Torah from Israel. It was as if we were bringing them gold. It was like a postcard out of National Geographic. They were dancing all the way. They were joyful. They were so happy to see a Torah.

When I went with my Chinese Jewish friend, Shi Lei (pictured on this page), to the Jewish Theological Seminary, located in New York, we saw one of the few Chinese Torah scrolls from Kaifeng. These scrolls are written on parchment, but they’re not attached by sinew. They’re attached by silk. Shi Lei was the first Chinese Jew to touch or lay hands on a Chinese Torah scroll in over 100 years. That was very emotional, it really was! Here’s an Ashkenazi Yiddish term: I get *verklemt* (emotional) a lot, I do!

*Ben’s Note: Shep Wahnnon has been making an impact in isolated, returning, and emerging Jewish communities longer than Kulanu has been around. He’s been to an incredible number of places and reached out to Jews the world over, motivated by both a sense of adventure and curiosity, and ahavat yisroel — love of his people. There are about ten more incredible stories he told me that I couldn’t fit in here. And, knowing Shep, there’s more to come.*

*Shep’s work stretches beyond Kulanu, and epitomizes it. We at Kulanu want to thank Shep for the incredible amount of time and energy spent volunteering for Kulanu’s partner communities. \**



# From the Trading Routes of the Past: The Jewish Community in Indonesia

Written by and photos provided by Yaakov Baruch

*Yaakov Baruch is founder of Shaar HaShamayim Synagogue and President of the Jewish Community of Indonesia. He is of Dutch Jewish heritage, and grew up in Jakarta, Indonesia, as did his wife Leah. Yaakov and Leah live with their two children in Manado. Yaakov was given his Hebrew name by his mother after her grandfather, Jacob van Beugen, z"l. Currently, Yaakov is a lecturer in law at Samratulangi University in Indonesia.*

The existence of the Jewish community in Indonesia has a very long history. Starting in the 17th century, when Indonesia (also known as Dutch East Indies) was still under the umbrella of Dutch colonialism, Jews entered Indonesia through the trade routes. The majority of Jews came from Western Europe such as the Netherlands, Germany, and surrounding countries. At the same time, from another direction, Jews from Iraq who had transited through India began to enter the Dutch East Indies with the aim of trading because the Dutch East Indies was one of the centers of world trade at that time.

On the island of Java, the cities of Batavia (now Jakarta) and Surabaya became the center of the largest Jewish community in Indonesia at that time because they emerged as centers of government and trade. Geographically, Jakarta and Surabaya are the two largest cities in Indonesia today. The island of North Sulawesi

also became a center of Jewish life during Dutch rule because it was the center of coffee plantations.

Jewish life in Indonesia was at one time considered very stable and secure. In the 1930s, a synagogue was established in Surabaya. The synagogue was founded by the Surabaya Jewish community, better known as Soerabaia Israelitische Gemeente. The situation changed during World War 2 when in 1942 Japan invaded and began occupying Indonesia, ending Dutch rule. During the Japanese occupation, Jews experienced *pogroms* (organized destruction and massacres) and many were sent to Japanese internment camps; this happened at the insistence of Nazi Germany which was allied with Japan to exterminate the Jews in Asia, especially in Indonesia.

After three years in the shadow of Japan, Indonesia finally became an independent nation. This also affected the lives of the Jews in Indonesia. With the high spirit of nationalism at that time among the indigenous Indonesians, the hostility and expulsion of foreigners such as the Dutch, including the Dutch Jews, resulted in many Indonesian Jews deciding to move to Israel, Australia, and Los Angeles, California, USA. Many Iraqi Jews who grew up in Surabaya and Jakarta moved to Los Angeles and built the Kahal



Yaakov and Leah and their children, Levi Yitzhak and Rachel Chana, with the new menorah fashioned after one at the Western Wall in Israel, located outside the synagogue in Tondano, Hanukkah 2021



Mussry family bar mitzvah in Surabaya Synagogue in Surabaya, Indonesia, probably 1930s

*continued on next page*

**Indonesia**, continued from previous page

Joseph Synagogue together with Iraqi Jewish immigrants from Singapore. The Iraqi Jews from Manado went to Egypt.

As fewer and fewer Jews settled in Indonesia, the Surabaya Synagogue gradually fell out of operation. In 1965, the synagogue officially ceased operations. Thereafter, there had been almost no Jewish religious activity in the country because Judaism was considered unregistered in Indonesia. However, in the early 2000s, I took the initiative to rebuild the community and reunite the remaining Jews in Indonesia, including the elderly Jews of Soerabaia Israelitische Gemeente: David Mussry, David Abraham, and Maureen Elias. Since then, we and our families have been active in making Jewish celebrations such as Pesach, Sukkot, and

Hanukkah with the Jews in Jakarta, Surabaya, and Bali. They celebrate together with the remaining Indonesian Jews and expatriate Jews.

In 2003 the Shaar HaShamayim Synagogue was established in Tondano, Indonesia under my leadership. Apart from being active in Jakarta, I also began to serve the descendants of the Dutch and Iraqi Jews who were in North Sulawesi.

According to Professor Rotem Kowner of the University of Haifa in Israel, prior to the second world war, it was estimated that there were 3,000 Jews living in Indonesia. In 2018, World Jewish Congress Diplomatic Corps member Philip Rosenberg visited Indonesia and estimated that Indonesia's Jewish community numbers about 200; this includes the descendants of those traders from Europe and Iraq, others who have chosen to convert to Judaism, and expatriate Jews who now live here.

Around the beginning of 2010 there was a new phenomenon, namely the Israeli euphoria. There were people who claimed they were of Jewish descent and practiced Judaism. Because the community that the Jewish elders and I built together is basically a community of Jewish descent (not a religious community), its members felt that these people claiming Jewish descent could not be part of the community due to lack of evidence that they were of Jewish descent. However, the Shaar HaShamayim Synagogue continues to facilitate programs for those who want to learn Judaism and to supervise those who are serious until finally they are ready to carry out conversions according to *halakha* (Jewish law).

On the other hand, because the process of Orthodox conversion was very difficult at that time (potential converts had to travel to Australia), many people ended up taking other paths to conversion such as contacting rabbis who were banned by their own rabbinical associations. Therefore, neither the Shaar HaShamayim Synagogue, which adheres to Orthodox standards, nor non-Orthodox denominations would accept them.



Leah, wife of Yaakov Baruch, lighting Yom Tov candle. From left: Yaakov's grand-aunt Fredrica van Beugen, Leah, Maureen Hanna (president of the Jewish Community of Indonesia), and Mr. David Mussry (former president of the Jewish Community of Indonesia), Pesach 2011



Yaakov and Leah's children lighting the Shabbat candles and reciting the blessings, 2018





Front door of the Shaar HaShamayim Synagogue in Tondano, Indonesia, built in 2003

After struggling for approximately sixteen years, the Shaar HaShamayim Synagogue was finally inaugurated by the local government in 2019. Shaar HaShamayim is now the only official synagogue in Indonesia. We now hope for recognition not only by the local city government, but by the Indonesian government in Jakarta. We wish to develop our Jewish community throughout Indonesia.

Shaar HaShamayim Synagogue is one of the most unique places in Indonesia and it is so special to us. This is not just because of the spirit of the Jews themselves, but also because of the enthusiasm of the local people who are moved to learn and embrace Judaism despite the challenges to Jews here. \*

Editor's Note: To learn more about Kulanu's partner communities in another part of Indonesia, please go to [kulanu.org/communities/indonesia](http://kulanu.org/communities/indonesia). Also, see our Fall 2017 issue [kulanu.org/wp-content/uploads/magazines/2017-fall.pdf](http://kulanu.org/wp-content/uploads/magazines/2017-fall.pdf), page 14-15, to read more and see photos.

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## Many Menorahs Around the World

Kulanu's  
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dispel the  
darkness by  
lighting their  
many varied  
menorahs.



Top row: El Salvador, 2012; India, 2020; Indonesia, 2019; Ecuador, 2020. Middle row: Uganda, 2011; Latin America; Nicaragua, 2019; Madagascar, 2018. Bottom row: Indonesia, 2021; Madagascar, 2019; Ecuador, 2019