



# "All of Us" Kulanu

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



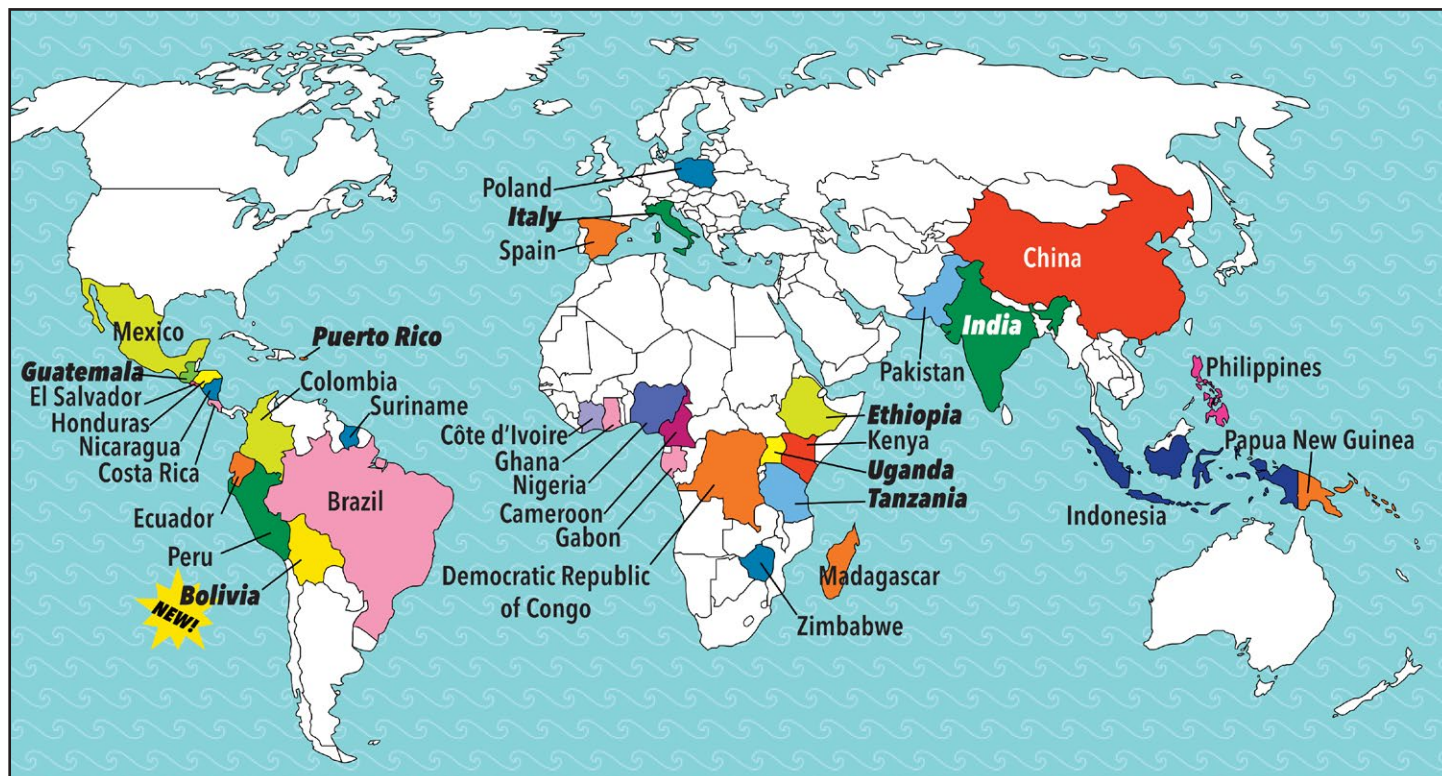
Wine, juice, challah (under the challah cover), and a seven-branch menorah are ready to welcome six "new Jews" who are b'nei anusim (their ancestors were forced to convert to Catholicism during the Inquisition). They recently discovered their Italian Jewish roots and have embraced them through study, a beit din (court of rabbis), and, on this special day in August 2025, a mikveh (ritual immersion) in the Mediterranean Sea. See story page 7.

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# Where in the World is Kulanu in this Issue

Kulanu partners with 150+ communities in 34 countries, shown on the world map below. The countries featured in this issue are ***bold and italic***. To see a full list of all our partner communities, visit [kulanu.org/communities](http://kulanu.org/communities).



## Letter from Kulanu's President



This year has been one of remarkable growth and collaboration for Kulanu. We have partner communities in 34 countries — and some countries have multiple communities, such as in ***Cameroon***, where there are five, and ***Nigeria***, which has close to 100. These communities

are educating thousands of children. Recently, we have seen in some of these communities, second-, third-, and fourth-generation Jews who are raising their children Jewish. Some communities, for various reasons, are coming to Judaism anew, while others are going back to their roots.

We are proud to have deepened our relationships with organizations such as ***OLAM, Global Village Connect, MyZuzah, Jewish Federation of Men's Clubs, 70 Faces***

***Media, Global Jewry, Tikun HaYam, and Points East.***

Looking ahead, we are filled with anticipation for 2026. After years of study, preparation, and commitment, a local community of Anusim in ***Brazil*** has asked us to help plan their conversions. I am also honored to be speaking with many other Kulanu representatives at the International Society for the Study of African Jewry (ISSAJ) Conference in Paris, where I will share the inspiring stories of the growth of sub-Saharan Jewry and discuss my books that explore the richness and diversity of these Jewish communities.

Together, we continue to build a stronger, more connected Jewish future.

With gratitude,

*Bonita Nathan Sussman \**



# A Eulogy in Praise of Lili Kaufmann Z"l

## How Many Jews Does it Take to Climb Mount Kilimanjaro?

By David Breakstone, Kulanu board member



What a privilege it was to have gotten to know Lili personally and to have had the opportunity to work with her as well. My first engagement with this extraordinary woman was when I was serving as deputy chair of the Jewish Agency Executive, the operational

arm of the Jewish Agency for Israel, and heading its committee on small and emerging Jewish communities. Among members of the American Jewish fundraising establishment, this committee wasn't a particularly sought-after task force. So I was pleasantly surprised when Lili approached me and asked to be a part of it.

Generally, Lili's colleagues were more focused on the large and established Jewish communities around the world, with very little awareness — if any — of those scattered in more remote areas, such as India, Africa, and far-flung towns and villages throughout South America. Lili was different, very far from the typical mold of the Jewish Federation leader. She certainly had the pedigree and credentials equal to the best of them: from her early days of training in the Tampa Jewish Federation Young Leadership Program, she would eventually become president of its Women's Division, and then go on to chair its annual fundraising campaign (the first woman to do so). She would also be tapped to serve as treasurer and president of the Tampa JCC, to become a member of the national UJA Women's Board, and to represent her community as a member of the Jewish Agency's Board of Governors. She was a founding member of Congregation Beth Am (a local Reform synagogue) and initiated the Lila Tov Overnight Camper Scholarship.

But, unlike any of her esteemed colleagues, Lili's resume also included things that took her far

off the beaten path, quite literally. How many of her associates could claim to have climbed Machu Picchu, to have reached the base camp of Mount Everest, to have climbed Mount Whitney not once but five times, and to have spent years exploring the Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and the Sierra Nevada mountains, often on solo journeys or women-led wilderness expeditions?

It was actually an encounter on one such expedition to Tanzania that launched her decades-long journey on behalf of isolated and emerging Jewish communities that were barely known and generally not recognized by the organized Jewish community in which she circulated. (You can learn more about this blessed

### Kulanu Mourns the Passing of Lili Kaufmann

*"Kol Yisrael arevim zeh ba zeh – All of Israel is responsible for each other."*

This guiding principle defined Lili Kaufmann's extraordinary contributions to Kulanu and the global Jewish community. As the treasurer of the Kulanu Board of Directors and a dedicated volunteer, Lili worked tirelessly to connect and support Jewish communities around the world, fostering meaningful partnerships and empowering individuals to take leadership roles in philanthropy. Her focus, discipline, and vision helped strengthen Kulanu, as she created our endowment and built lasting relationships with the Jews of Arusha, Tanzania. Through her work, Lili embodied the belief that we are a world family, responsible for one another, leaving an enduring legacy of connection, care, and leadership.

Kulanu honors Lili's memory and celebrates the profound impact of her life and work.

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**Lili Kaufmann, Z"l:** *continued from previous page* meeting from Yehudah's article below.) Lili's deep involvement with the Jewish community of Tanzania served to raise her consciousness regarding the entire world of Jews of Color, and others whose origins were outside the norm of the familiar Jewish communities of North America, Europe, Australia, and South Africa. Thus began her long and tireless struggle to bring about the recognition of these communities and to provide them with the same resources available to the more traditional ones.

It was only natural that Lili's deep commitment to seeing these communities flourish would ultimately lead to her becoming an active member of the Kulanu board, serving as the organization's treasurer until just before her passing. It was in this capacity that she was so instrumental in ensuring that funds would be

available for services and resources to meet the needs of Kulanu's partner communities and to facilitate their path to self-sufficiency.

In the process, with her vast experience in Jewish philanthropic life, Lili contributed tremendously to Kulanu's financial organization. Just as importantly, if not more so, she infused the rest of us with her indefatigable spirit and deep-rooted dedication. But as much as we on the Kulanu board will miss her, her absence will be felt even more strongly by all those scattered around the world who benefited so greatly from her determination to help them prosper.

May the memory of Lili Kaufmann be for a blessing. I pray that we can all be inspired by her legacy and continue to labor for the people to whom she energetically and selflessly dedicated so much of her life. \*

## Lili Kaufmann Z"l: Friend, Mother, Leader

Written by and photos provided by Yehudah Amir Kahalani, leader of the Arusha Jewish Community in Tanzania

It was at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro in northern Tanzania, in the early 2000s, where I first met Lili Kaufmann. At that time, I was a young Orthodox Jewish student from East Africa, originally descended from the ancient Jewish communities of South Yemen. I had dedicated



Shabbat with Yehudah's family: his wife Efrat and their daughters, Arieella (Seyiun) and Emunah, with Lili, Tanzania, 2016 (photo taken by safari driver)

part of my time to volunteering as a guide and helper for hikers coming to climb Africa's highest peak.

That morning began like any other — until I noticed her. Among the climbers gathering for the briefing

stood a woman whose quiet dignity immediately caught my attention. There was something different about her presence — an aura of compassion, depth, and spiritual grace. She, too, seemed to sense something distinct about me.

As I went around the group, asking each climber where they were from, I found myself speaking words that surprised even me. When I reached her, I didn't ask, "Where are you from?" Instead, I asked, "Are you Jewish?"

She looked at me with wide eyes and asked, "Yes . . . and are you Jewish too? You're wearing a kippah, and no one else here is."

That moment felt like a spark from Heaven. We both stood there, speechless. As an Orthodox man and woman, we could not embrace or shake hands, but tears filled our eyes. It was as if a long-lost mother and son had just found each other again on the roof of Africa.

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**Lili Kaufmann, Z"l:** *continued from previous page*

### A Gift of Light

After returning to the United States, Lili wrote to me. “What do you need most for your Jewish life there?” she asked.

At that time, Israel and Tanzania had no diplomatic ties, and Judaica items were nearly impossible to obtain. I told her, “We need Shabbat candles, and any Judaica items you can send. Those things cannot be found here.”

She asked again, “And what about financial help?” I answered, “Thank you, but we can find those things ourselves. What we need most is *light*.”

A few months later, a large package arrived — a precious box filled with candles, kiddush cups, mezuzot, prayer books, and tallitot. It felt as though a piece of Jerusalem had come to Africa. Those items became the heartbeat of our small Jewish community. Every Shabbat, as the candles flickered, I could feel her care reaching across the ocean.

### A Friend Who Never Forgot

As I returned to university, life became busy, and sometimes I failed to write. But **Lili never forgot**. She always remembered. Every few months, a message would arrive, warm, personal, and full of encouragement.



In 2016, Lili and Dr. Barry had an opportunity to visit and lay out the foundation for Shalem Al Shabbazi Beit Knesset, the Kaufmann ha Torah Jewish Centre. The author, Yehudah, is pictured with his wife Efrat and their daughter.

When I married in 2006, she and her husband, Dr. Barry Kaufmann, planned to attend the wedding. Unfortunately, travel difficulties prevented them, but they sent generous gifts that filled our home with beauty and holiness.

Her kindness was never about charity— it was about connection. She saw our community not as distant strangers but as fellow Jews, children of the same covenant.

### Building and Rebuilding

In 2009, Lili finally came to visit us in Tanzania, together with Dr. Barry. That visit changed everything. They came not as tourists, but as partners and family. Together, we laid the foundation for the renovation of our synagogue, which had fallen into disrepair. Lili’s eyes shone with joy as she watched local artisans rebuild the walls where our ancestors had prayed.

It was more than a renovation; it was a restoration of hope. She reminded us that we were not forgotten — Jews in East Africa had friends who cared, who believed, and who would stand with us.

During her visit, we also traveled to the Serengeti and Arusha. She was delighted to see my children, now grown, lighting the same candles she had once sent years before. It was a full circle of faith and family.

### Lili and Kulanu

Later in her life, Lili joined Kulanu, an organization that assists Jewish communities all over the world. Her involvement with Kulanu gave her a broader platform to help emerging and isolated Jewish communities — from Africa to Asia and Latin America.

Through this role, she became a recognized member of the organization’s leadership body and used her position to strengthen our East African Jewish community even further. With her encouragement, Kulanu connected even more closely with Jews of African descent, providing educational resources, Judaica, Mishnah Torah, and global awareness of our existence.

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**Lili Kaufmann, Z"l:** *continued from previous page*

Her influence within Kulanu was not only administrative — it was deeply personal. She embodied the organization's mission of inclusiveness and mutual respect. Through her, our small community has felt seen, valued, and part of the global Jewish family.

### **Beyond Borders**

Lili's love and leadership went far beyond Tanzania. I remember her visit to Mbale, Uganda, where she supported the Abayudaya Jewish community, encouraging their education and synagogue work. She believed every Jewish soul — no matter how remote — deserved connection, dignity, and access to Torah.

Whenever I traveled to Israel or abroad, Lili and Dr. Barry were always there, offering support, guidance, and friendship. They became spiritual parents not only to me but to many across Africa and beyond. Their generosity was never condescending. It was a partnership rooted in shared faith and humanity.

### **Her Last Words to Me**

The last time I heard from Lili was about a week before she passed away. She had read an article I wrote and sent me a short message:

"The article was amazing."

Those were her final words to me. I didn't realize at the time that it was her farewell, a quiet blessing from a mother to her son.

When she left this world, I felt an emptiness that words cannot fill. I had lost not only a friend but

a mother, a prophetess, a beacon of light who had guided me through the darkness.

### **A Mother and a Leader**

Lili Kaufmann was not an ordinary woman. She was a leader in the truest sense — not by title or position, but by her heart. She led through kindness, integrity, and unwavering faith. She saw beyond race, borders, and language, uniting people through the simple truth of compassion.

For me, she embodied the virtues of Sarah's hospitality, Ruth's devotion, and Deborah's courage. She nurtured without controlling, guided without imposing, and gave without expecting anything in return.

Every candle we light on Shabbat, every Torah lesson we teach, and every child who grows up with Jewish pride in East Africa is touched by her legacy. The flames she kindled continue to burn in our hearts and homes.

### **Leadership is Love in Action**

Lili Kaufmann's story is a testimony to how one soul can illuminate many. She bridged continents, connected generations, and brought light where there was darkness. She showed us that leadership is love in action, and that one act of faith can awaken entire communities.

As Yehudah Kahalani, a son of the ancient Jews of South Yemen and a servant of Jewish life in East Africa, I can say without hesitation: Lili was my mother in faith. She believed in me before the world noticed me. She carried me through years of challenge, always reminding me that the Jewish spirit is one family.

Today, I still see her smile in the Shabbat candles she sent. I still hear her voice in the prayers of our community. And I still feel her presence in every act of kindness that continues her light.

**Lili Kaufmann was, and will always remain, a friend, a mother, and a leader.**

Her memory is a blessing, and her light will never fade. ✧



Yehudah's wife Efrat had an opportunity to visit the Kaufmann family in Tampa earlier this year (2025), not knowing that Hashem had sent her to say goodbye to Lili. Lili passed away one month later.

# Joyfully Jewish: Italy's B'nei Anusim Synagogue

By Rabbi Barbara Aiello

*Rabbi Barbara Aiello is the first woman rabbi in Italy. In addition, she is the first modern liberal rabbi who lives and works in Italy, where she serves Congregation Ner Tamid del Sud, The Eternal Light of the South, the first active synagogue in Calabria in 500 years since Inquisition times.*

*As an international expert on Italian b'nei anusim (descendants of Jews coerced into converting to Christianity due to persecution), Rabbi Barbara was invited to present her work at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, at the United Nations special committee on religious pluralism, and as a scholar-in-residence for synagogues and for Italian and Jewish organizations throughout Europe and the USA. She is the vice president of Kulanu, and is a founding member of the International Federation of Rabbis.*

*For ten years, Rabbi Barbara served the Aviva Campus for Senior Life (Sarasota, Florida) as resident rabbi. Her book, Aging Jewishly: What Our Traditions Tell Us About Growing Old, featuring a collection of her most popular guest columns, is available from Amazon Books. Rabbi Barbara can be contacted at Rabbi@RabbiBarbara.com.*

When she was told by a local rabbi that “the only real Jews are the dead ones,” *bat anusim* (female descendant of Jews coerced into converting) Emma D. was devastated. Having spent years carefully explaining her crypto-Jewish ancestry and begging synagogues to accept her, Emma was bitterly disappointed to learn that after having been forced, under pain of death, into Christian conversion, her ancestors’ preserving of Jewish

traditions qualified them as *apostates* (having forsaken their religion) and nothing more.

Not long afterward, Emma made her way to Sinagoga Ner Tamid del Sud, southern Italy’s first and only synagogue in 500 years since Inquisition times. The synagogue is a Kulanu community where Emma was warmly welcomed, accepted as a legitimate Jew, and now serves the synagogue as a member of the board.

As the synagogue approaches its 20th birthday, the Calabrian congregation has moved from the basement cantina where my great-grandfather secretly led Hebrew prayers, to a stand-alone building that boasts a separate sanctuary, Judaica museum, library, and even three Torah scrolls — one dating back to 1783.

As rabbi of Sinagoga Ner Tamid del Sud, I am constantly amazed at how our b’nei anusim congregation is truly the eternal light of southern Italy. Hundreds of emails, phone calls, and requests to visit from Calabrians, Sicilians, and descendants of Italian immigrants worldwide inspire us to continue our mission, which is to extend the hand of Jewish welcome to all those who want to discover and embrace their Jewish roots.

“During the war, I was secretly baptized,” says Ernesto, one of our first congregants. “Because Mussolini had aligned with Hitler, my mother had the children baptized to save the family from deportation. When I tried to explain this to a traditional community, the leader scoffed at my story. I was humiliated, and it was 40 years before I ever mentioned my Jewish heritage again.”

Nearly 500 years ago, when my own ancestors were expelled from Toledo, Spain, they fled with nothing — holy books and Jewish documents had been burned or confiscated by Inquisition authorities. As a result, only word-of-mouth kept Jewish heritage alive. So it is not surprising that members of our congregation approach me



Children from the local area visit Congregation Ner Tamid del Sud during the “Joyfully Jewish” program, autumn 2025

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with stories of lost traditions, such as the kosher practice of removing the blood spot from an egg, or the traditional Sephardic Jewish practice of sweeping the floor to the center of the room, never to the door, where the mezuzah had once been placed. And how is it that to this day, my Calabrian family describes bread crumbs as *chametz* (leavened bread or any food that contains wheat, rye, barley, oats, or spelt)? Could it be that because they never had the opportunity to learn that the word is Hebrew, they assumed it was just one more example of Calabrian dialect?

When these stories come to me, lovingly explained by b'nei anusim who tentatively but courageously share them, I feel honored to receive their testimony and literally feel as though I am in the presence of an eternal light that, although a tiny flame, was never extinguished.

"*Bentornata*," I say. "Welcome home." And welcome they are. With each Kabbalat Shabbat service around the dining table where we help our b'nei anusim learn the prayers and songs to welcome Shabbat, to the Shacharit Saturday morning service where eighty-year-olds haltingly read Torah, to the mystical Havdalah candle whose flame is doused in dark red homemade wine, we acknowledge the blessings that are brought to our community by each and every secret Jew.



The Mediterranean Mikveh: Preparing for the ritual immersion, August 2025

Many of our b'nei anusim choose our one-year study program that culminates in formal conversion. Our students appear before three rabbis who comprise the *beit din* — the traditional examining body that determines whether a candidate is ready for conversion. When accepted, our conversion candidates gather for *mikveh* (ritual cleansing in water) in the Mediterranean Sea. They then join our congregation of men, women, and children whose Jewish heritage derives from their patrilineal line and who are accepted as "real" Jews, along with interfaith, gay and lesbian families, and diverse Jews who represent a variety of ethnic backgrounds.

*Kulanu* is the Hebrew word for "all of us," and our synagogue represents inclusion, acceptance, and respect. This past October, our members joined with the local Catholic community to celebrate Sukkot, a holiday celebrated by local Christians as "La Festa delle Capanne" (the festival of the little huts). Each March, we share Purim with our Catholic neighbors, a festival that survived the Inquisition to become the "Feast of Saint Esther!" And every January, I pack up dozens of Jewish ritual items and display them in local schools as part of a program that introduces third and fourth graders to the beauty of Jewish culture and tradition.

Joyfully Jewish? When we rabbis open our doors and open our hearts to b'nei anusim and to all manner of Jewish diversity, joy abounds. Pluralistic in nature and recognized by Reconstructing Judaism, our synagogue embraces rituals and observances that are accessible, inclusive, and sensible.

As Uncle Mario says when asked why, at 83 years of age, he goes to the synagogue, he responds, "I like to sing with the rabbi!" When asked how he came to know the melodies, Uncle Mario smiles, opens his hand, and gently pats his chest. "In here," he says. "The Jewish songs, they are in my heart." \*



# From Margins to Mainstream: Global Jewry Speaks Out in New October 7 Anthology

A Book Review of *7 October 2023: Jewish Reflections*, by Professor Marla Brettschneider (Professor of Political Theory, University of New Hampshire) and Bonita Nathan Sussman (president of Kulanu)

By Hilary Ash

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A new anthology about October 7 does something rare — it connects the trauma in Israel with its reverberations in the most far-flung Jewish communities.



The anthology *7 October 2023: Book I* is not an easy read. Nor should it be.

It is a complex, emotionally charged, and at times harrowing collection of 43 contributions by Jewish and some non-Jewish writers from around the world, all confronting a central question: What does it mean to speak or remain silent as a Jew, or about Jews, in the wake of trauma?

The 7 October 2023 massacre and its aftermath have fractured discourse in Jewish communities globally; this book serves as both a raw wound and a bridge between experiences, geographies, and ideological perspectives.

The editors, Marla Brettschneider and Bonita Nathan Sussman, volunteer with Kulanu, which supports diverse Jewish-affiliated communities — many of them isolated or marginalised in Africa, Asia, and the diaspora more broadly.

These voices, often silenced or unheard, have space here to articulate trauma, memory, loyalty,

fear, and resilience. The result is an anthology that is both geographically global and deeply personal.

Several essays stand out not only for their content but also for their context. Accounts from Ethiopian Jews fleeing to refugee camps in Sudan, where they face rape, hunger, and marginalisation, offer a piercing insight into the compounded suffering of minority Jews stranded within larger humanitarian crises.

A 92-year-old Iraqi-born man recalls the Farhud pogrom of 1941, drawing parallels to modern threats. Pakistani B'nei Efraim Jews anonymously share their heartbreak over October 7, their isolation deepened by living in a society where Hamas propaganda dominates the media.

These voices bring a layer of emotional urgency and immediacy that is largely absent from Western discourse.

At the same time, the book also mirrors the fracture lines in Jewish thought itself. It documents, sometimes painfully, the divisions within the Jewish world between Israelis and American Jews, religious and secular voices, Zionist and anti-Zionist perspectives. The complexity of Jewish peoplehood is revealed, not as a single narrative but as a mosaic of contradictions and overlapping truths.

One especially poignant reflection from the mother of Malki Roth tells of losing her son-in-law following October 7 and painful reactions, or lack thereof, of former friends. Another contributor, Rabbi Gerald Sussman, voices the despair of many diaspora Jews, describing Israel as the hoped-for place of refuge, now transformed into a site of horror.

These personal reckonings expose the psychological rupture within global Jewry, where 'before and after' no longer describes only the physical attack, but also the subsequent emotional and ideological aftershock.

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Media commentary and political dithering have lifted antisemitism to the mainstream. Viva Hammer's personal essay about unfettered antisemitism at Sydney University is an example of this toxic recipe: Has the war caused division? Or has the epic flood of commentary enjoyed opaque funding?

David Suissa's essay, quoting Yossi Klein Halevi, powerfully frames antisemitism as an adaptable, shape-shifting hate that absorbs the most reviled traits of the age and projects them onto Jews. Whether as Christ-killers in Christian Europe, capitalists under Communism, or colonialists in modern leftist rhetoric, Jews have repeatedly been scapegoated by the cultures they inhabit.

Antisemitism, disguised in one costume or another, is the lazy bigot's scapegoat. The suggestion here isn't simply that antisemitism has returned, but that it has been rebranded, camouflaged in the contemporary language of human rights, anti-racism, and anti-colonialism.

Some essays criticise what they see as a parochial American view of Israel's challenges. Writers note the alienation that arises when American Jews project their domestic political ideologies onto Israel. A sharp essay captures this sentiment through the concept of *Shomrei N'gi'ah*, loosely translated here as "hands off": not your body, not your country, not your decision.

The rift between identification with Israel and attempts to reshape it from afar reflects a deeper discomfort: diaspora Jews are now being forced to declare a position in a crisis that is not geographically theirs, but emotionally inescapable.

At its most poignant, the book draws attention to communities that do not enjoy a luxury of division. In the West, Jews may argue politics and identity;

in Muslim-majority nations, to identify with Israel is to risk violence, ostracism, and death.

One essay from the Danites in Ivory Coast recounts a private ceremony expressing solidarity with Israel that was hamstrung by harassment and exorbitant "security" fees. In this way, *7 October 2023* does something rare: it connects the trauma in Israel with its reverberations in the most far-flung Jewish communities.

Not every contribution is equally compelling. Some read more like polemics, others as journal entries. A few writers struggle to transcend ideological rigidity. Still, this unevenness expresses the book's broader truth: Jewish identity is not a monolith. For every writer drawing comfort from Israeli resilience, another finds it alienating. For every call to Jewish unity, another voices discomfort with Zionism.

Reading *7 October 2023* is emotionally exhausting. It demands that the reader navigate grief, rage, ideological confrontation, and deep sorrow. But in that exhaustion lies its strength. In between stories of horror and resolve, the book reveals the raw nerve of Jewish life in a time of global disarray.

In the end, the anthology isn't just about October 7. It's about everything that day symbolises: the eruption of history into the present; the precarity of minority identity; the danger of misunderstood loyalty; and the difficulty, and urgency, of speaking out.

The real gift of the book is that it allows the most marginalised Jews to speak alongside the most visible. In a moment when it feels like so much is being said about Jews, this book insists on the importance of Jews speaking for themselves, no matter how fractured, contradictory, or painful those voices may be.

[*7 October 2023 Book I: Jewish Reflections from Around the Globe*, edited by Marla Brettschneider and Bonita Nathan Sussman, is available here: <https://bit.ly/Oct7Book>]

Hilary Ash is a graduate of the joint Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance Australia (JOFA) and The Jewish Independent (TJI) Opinion-Editorial Writing Course. \*



Source: National Library of Israel



# Kulanu Notes

## Kulanu High Holidays Grants Awarded

This year, partner communities in 16 countries celebrated the High Holidays together thanks to Kulanu grants. These funds supported holiday meals and celebrations for 57 partner communities, welcoming Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, and Sukkot across **Uganda, Nigeria, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, India, Cuba, El Salvador, Mexico, and Venezuela.**

In **Nigeria**, for example, a community used its grant to purchase solar lights (see left side photo) and food items, ensuring everyone could safely gather and celebrate together. In **Pakistan** (see right side photo), the funds helped sponsor festive community celebrations, while in **Uganda**, 27 Abayudaya communities baked challah together in preparation for upcoming festivals.



## High Holiday Matching Gift Campaign Fundraiser



The recent High Holiday Matching Gift Campaign surpassed its \$10,000 goal with 85 donors, doubling the impact of every contribution. Thanks to supporters like you, Jewish communities around the globe can continue to celebrate, connect, and thrive.

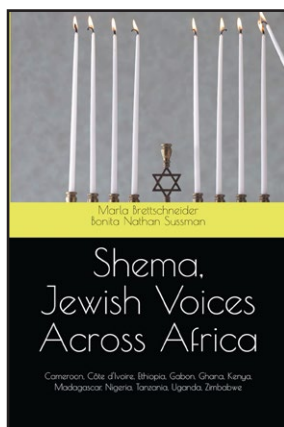
## African Jewish Communities Make Historic Strides

Kulanu is proud to celebrate remarkable milestones in African Jewish life. In Mukono, **Uganda**, the ZIMU movement — the Zionist Movement of Uganda — was officially launched, securing Uganda's first-ever inclusion in the World Zionist Organization (WZO) Congress. The WZO, which brings together Jewish communities from around the world to participate in global Jewish decision-making, provides a platform for communities to share their perspectives, advocate for resources, and strengthen connections across continents. Rabbi Gershom Sizomu represented these emerging communities at the WZO, helping amplify their voices and support their growing leadership on the international stage. Meanwhile, in Akwa Ibom State, **Nigeria**, the Judaism Fellowship Initiative (JFI) launched its newest chapter, marking a historic step in empowering emerging Jewish communities through learning, connection, and shared celebration.



These milestones reflect the resilience, leadership, and visibility of African Jewish communities. With Kulanu's support and Rabbi Gershom's active participation at the WZO, these communities are gaining unprecedented recognition and influence in global Jewish life.

## Mini Book Review: *Shema, Jewish Voices Across Africa*



*Book by Marla Brettschneider and Bonita Nathan Sussman; review by Genie Milgrom*  
*Shema, Jewish Voices Across Africa* is a powerful and emotionally charged book that documents the diverse Jewish communities across the African continent. Through striking portraits, personal stories, and cultural glimpses, the reader is drawn into the lives of these lesser-known communities.

The book highlights African Jews who remain deeply committed to Jewish faith and tradition, despite facing isolation and discrimination. It's both humbling and awe-inspiring to witness the resilience of practicing Jews who live so far from established Jewish centers — so far, in fact, that their perseverance feels nothing short of miraculous. You can purchase the book here: <https://bit.ly/ShemaBook>.

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## Kulanu Screening: Puerto Rico

This fall, Kulanu offered a unique window into the Jewish community of **Puerto Rico** through the lens of the Reemerge Project via an online screening with **Kulanu Canada**.

Filmmakers Dani Rotstein and Patricio Serna Salazar brought the island's Jewish stories to life, sharing personal insights, community perspectives, and behind-the-scenes glimpses from their exclusive 18-minute film. The two filmmakers also answered questions from the audience.

The screening highlighted how Puerto Rico's Jewish community has preserved its traditions, celebrated holidays, and nurtured connections despite challenges over the years. From small-town congregations to urban hubs, the film captures the resilience, creativity, and spirit of a vibrant community whose stories often go untold.



## New Synagogue Construction in Ethiopia



We're proud to share a heartfelt message of appreciation with our Kulanu supporters around the world from the Jewish community of North Shewa, who are known as the hidden Jews of **Ethiopia**. Their ability to build a synagogue would not be possible without your partnership. Thank you for helping make it happen!

*"We would like to express our sincere appreciation and heartfelt thanks to all the generous supporters*

*of the Rayya Bandira Bete Kinset building. Your unwavering support, dedication, and contributions have played a vital role in making this vision a reality. Your kindness has not only helped in the construction of this important building but also strengthened our community and inspired hope for future generations. We are deeply grateful for your trust and commitment."*

## Online Film Discussion: *Between the Stone and the Flower*

In June, audiences joined a discussion with filmmaker Genie Milgrom about her documentary *Between the Stone and the Flower*. Registered participants received a code to watch the film prior to the discussion.

Milgrom took viewers behind the scenes of her film, sharing the life experiences that led her to this moment.

This documentary chronicles Milgrom's quest to uncover her Jewish lineage. Born in Cuba and raised Catholic in Miami, she navigated a journey full of twists and turns, ultimately making the difficult decision to convert to Judaism. Her search for the "breadcrumbs" left by her ancestors took her through Medieval archives and several European countries, unraveling a web of secrecy that her family had maintained to protect themselves during some of Europe's darkest periods.

Together with her husband, Michael, an Ashkenazi Jew of Romanian origins, Milgrom finally discovered the truth about her family, presenting it in a compelling and deeply personal film. \*





# News from Latin America

## Welcome Bolivia!

*La Comunidad Judía Am Israel Jai de Sucre* is a small yet significant Orthodox congregation founded by Jewish families who arrived in Bolivia after World War II. Seeking a new beginning, they established a place of faith, culture, and unity in the city of Sucre, the constitutional capital of Bolivia.



Above: Couples standing under the chuppah getting married in Bolivia's *La Comunidad Judía Am Israel Jai de Sucre*

Over the years, the community has faithfully preserved its customs and ancestral traditions, as well as continuing its study of Torah. It also maintains a small cemetery of its own — a symbol of continuity and the deep spiritual bond its members share with this historic Bolivian city.

We are thrilled to welcome this congregation, our first community in Bolivia, to Kulanu!



## Guatemala's Special Visitor

*A note from Jeannette Orantes, past-president of Adat Israel Guatemala and former Kulanu board member:*

For the High Holy Days, we had the honor of a visit from Rabbi Jack Shlachter, who has led both Reform and Conservative congregations and was recently offered the position of rabbi at a Reform synagogue. He is an active member of OHALAH, the professional association of rabbis and cantors who promote the renewal of Judaism, and is

also a member of the New York City Council of Rabbis.

This experience was wonderful for Adat Israel Guatemala, thanks to the invaluable assistance of Kulanu, which provided the travel tickets for him and his wife. We learned new chants and prayers that we have incorporated into our weekly services.

Adat Israel will always be grateful to the donors who made Rabbi Shlachter and his wife's visit possible, enriching our Jewish life. The High



Holy Days are always a time of reflection and joy, and the rabbi contributed perfectly to that purpose. Thanks to Rabbi Shlachter, to Kulanu, to our donors, but especially thanks to the Eternal, our G-d, who has allowed us to celebrate these festivals once again. \*



Rabbi Jack Shlachter reading from the Torah during the High Holy Days

Torah service at Adat Israel Guatemala



# Called to Serve My Abayudaya Community

By Dr. Samson Wamani

In the rolling hills of Eastern Uganda lies the Abayudaya community, a small yet vibrant Jewish community that has practiced our faith for more than a century. Our story is one of resilience, identity, and survival amid political turmoil, poverty, and marginalization. Yet within our community, a new chapter is unfolding — one that I am helping to write as the first-ever Abayudaya medical doctor. I am very proud to be serving my community at Budaka Health Center IV, a government-owned facility that caters to thousands of people in Budaka District and neighboring communities. As one of the three doctors in the facility — and indeed the only doctor from the Abayudaya community — my presence carries profound meaning.

Growing up in the Abayudaya community, I experienced firsthand the challenges we faced: limited access to healthcare, preventable illnesses, and the difficult choices families had to make when medical services were far away. Inspired by these realities, I pursued medicine not only as a career but as a calling. I always knew that my community needed someone who understood both their health needs and their cultural identity. Becoming a doctor was my way of giving back.

My journey was not without obstacles. The Abayudaya, being a minority in Uganda, often face socio-economic limitations. Educational

opportunities are scarce, and pursuing advanced studies such as medicine requires extraordinary determination. My dream was sustained by resilience, perseverance, community support, and an unyielding sense of purpose.

At Budaka Health Center IV, I provide a lifeline to hundreds of patients daily. From antenatal (prenatal) care and family planning, to surgery, emergency medicine, and public health initiatives, my work spans across many specialties. The facility is often overstretched, has inadequate equipment, too few health workers, and a heavy patient load, but I continue to serve with commitment.

Being one of the few doctors in the district is both rewarding and challenging. On one hand, I can make a direct difference in people's lives. On the other hand, the demands can be overwhelming — patients wait long hours, emergencies come without warning, and resources are limited. I am grateful to have earned the respect and trust of the people I serve. For many, simply having a doctor who listens, understands, and offers compassionate care is transformative.

I also advocate for public health within the community, teaching about preventive care, maternal health, genetic conditions, nutrition, and hygiene. My dual role as a community member and physician enables me to bridge gaps



Celebrating the opening of the Beit Midrash at Nasenyi Abayudaya community, with Ugandan Chief Rabbi Gershom Sizomu, January 2025



Dr. Samson Wamani at home with his daughter and wife

*continued on next page*



between traditional beliefs, faith, and modern medicine.

I dream of starting up a Jewish-founded health facility, a center of excellence where other doctors can send patients for specialized care. This facility would be well-equipped and would attract Jewish medical specialists from around the world to extend their "healing hand" to desperate Ugandans, regardless of their religion, and expand quality healthcare access in the community and beyond. I envision improved infrastructure, more trained professionals in the community, and outreach services that reach the most vulnerable. I also hope to inspire more young people in the Abayudaya community to join the medical profession, ensuring that my journey is only the beginning of a broader transformation. Medicine is not just about treating disease — it's about restoring dignity and giving people a chance to live healthier, fuller lives.

For the Abayudaya community, my achievement of becoming a medical doctor is more than just a medical accomplishment — it is symbolic. My presence affirms the community's place in Uganda's story and demonstrates the possibilities for the next generation. Parents point to me as proof that their children, too, can overcome barriers and contribute to society.

As we Abayudaya continue our journey of resilience, my story stands as a testament to what is possible when personal dedication meets communal responsibility. My life is both a healing force and a beacon of hope — one doctor carrying the dreams of an entire community. \*

Dr. Wamani consulting with a woman during her prenatal visit in a clinic in Uganda's Mbale region, 2014



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**Magazine Editor** Judi Kloper

**Editorial Team** Molly Levine, Lisa Yagoda,  
Barbara Vinick

**Layout and Photography Editor** Lisa Yagoda

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## **A Stunning Sukkah in India**



In Andhra Pradesh, **India**, the Bene Ephraim community elders, with support from their youth, built this beautiful sukkah with natural bamboo sticks tied with coconut threads. For the roof and three walls, they used coconut, date, and wild date palm tree branches. Seven types of hanging fruits added to the festive atmosphere. Supporting ropes were tied to two trees, which they didn't touch on the first and last days of Succot.

This photo shows Bene Ephraim members enjoying a delicious festival meal on the first day of Succot. Every day they gathered to study Torah, and, as these High Holidays and Succot were the first holidays without their beloved leader, Sadok Yacobi, his family offered much support to the community and recited Kaddish in his memory.

They shared with us: "We hope The Divine Shekinah was with us during the Sukkoth as Hashem was during the journey in the desert."