

Be'chol Lashon Update 4/8/05

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DVD Release: *In Every Tongue: A Story of Eternity*

Idan Raichel Project
Institute for Jewish & Community Research
Israel Center of San Francisco
Shari & Avishai Mekonen

Check out this exciting new DVD entitled *In Every Tongue: A Story of Eternity*, co-created by the Idan Raichel Project, the Institute for Jewish & Community Research, the Israel Center of San Francisco and Shari & Avishai Mekonen. The DVD celebrates the racial and ethnic diversity of the Jewish people.

This DVD features the Idan Raichel Project, one of the most popular performing groups in Israel today, blending modern and traditional music in Hebrew and Amharic. The Idan Raichel Project exemplifies the "Israeli melting pot" with people of every nationality and color. Coinciding with their first college campus tour in America, this DVD is being distributed to tens of thousands of students at colleges and universities across the country. It tells the story of the Ethiopian aliyah — the journey of Ethiopians to the Jewish homeland. It reinforces Israel's role as a haven for Jews of all races — from Africa, Asia, Latin America and all around the world.

As a music DVD, both the medium and the content resonate with a young audience and inspires people of all ages to relate to the Jewish people as they really are — a composite of the human family.

To view the DVD on our website [click here](#). Contact info@JewishResearch.org to receive a free DVD. Inquire about school and organizational quantity orders.



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Live at Grinnell College: The Afro-Semitic Experience Program

Saturday, April 9-14, 2005

**Co- Sponsored by Grinnell College's Chaltuzim and Concerned Black Student Group
FREE And OPEN to the Public**

Calendar of Events for the Afro-Semitic Experience Program sponsored by CBS/Chalutzim. CBS and Chalutzim have organized a week-long program that will further discuss Black/Jewish relations in this country. Please feel free to email Chalutzim@grinnell.edu or CBS@grinnell.edu with any questions.

Sat. April 9th

Afro-Semitic Experience Jazz Duo Warren Byrd and David Chevan

7:00 pm @ Forum South Lounge

African-American jazz pianist Warren Byrd, and Jewish-American jazz bassist David Chevan present a unique musical program that merges their distinct cultures and heritages and delivers a positive and meaningful message about Black-Jewish relations. The duo weave stories and music together as they interpret and explain pieces from the Jewish and African-American sacred traditions. The combination of their sophisticated jazz artistry, wit, and reverence for the material makes for a moving, one-of-a-kind musical experience. This concert presentation is an appropriate and relevant program for audiences of all ages. ** Stay after the performance to have an informal discussion with the duo about the ensemble and the importance of their work in bridging the black and Jewish communities**

Sun. April 10th

***PBS Documentary "From Swastika to Jim Crow"**

7:00 pm @ Forum South Lounge

***In the 1930s Jewish intellectuals who escaped Nazi Germany and immigrated to the U.S. faced an uncertain future. Confronted with anti-Semitism at American universities and a public distrust of foreigners, many sought refuge in an unlikely place-traditionally black colleges in the segregated South. Securing teaching positions, these scholars came to form lasting relationships with their students, and**

made significant contributions to the communities in which they lived and worked. Based on the book by Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb, From Swastika to Jim Crow tells the little-known story of two very different cultures sharing a common burden of oppression. The scholars found new meaning and purpose in their adopted homeland. Their students, benefiting from the knowledge brought to them by these refugees, were able to go on and develop their own academic careers. The video also highlights the role of African Americans, like Ralph Bunche, in securing positions for these refugee scholars at places like Howard University, Tougaloo College and Hampton Institute.

Mon. April 11th

Panel Discussion facilitated by Prof. Katya Azoulay -Jewish Identities: Quintessential Diversity

Followed by a short DVD presentation by Be'chol Lashon intern, Elena Rubin 7:00 pm @ Forum South Lounge

Tues. April 12th

Presentation by Professor Ralph Russell- Fusions of Musical Traditions in the Creation of Jazz

12:00 pm @ Forum South Lounge

Thurs. April 14th

MEGA CLASS with Prof. Katya Azoulay, Prof. Ira Strauber, and Prof. Jonathan Brand: Discussion on St. Francis College et al. v. Majid Ghaidan Al Khazraji and Shaare Tefila Congregation v. William Cobb et al. A landmark class-action suit heard by the U.S. Supreme Court (and decided 18 May 1987) in which Jews and Arabs are recognized as racial groups for the specific purpose of filing complaints of racial discrimination 11:00 am @ ARH Building Room 302

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Pope's Will Points to Future Ties with Jews-Rabbi

Reuters

Friday, April 8, 2005

Pope John Paul's decision to mention a Jew in his will was a sign to his successor to continue and improve his record of opening to Judaism, Rome's former Chief Rabbi Elio Toaff has said. Toaff, who welcomed the Pope on his ground-breaking visit to the city's synagogue in 1986, said in interviews with Italian newspapers published on Friday that he was surprised to be named along with two Roman Catholic prelates. John Paul, the first pope to set foot in a synagogue, is seen as the pontiff who most helped heal Jewish rifts with the Christian world after the Holocaust.

"It is a very important, moving fact that I did not expect," Toaff told the daily La Repubblica. "It is a significant and profound gesture for Jews. But I think it is also an indication to the Catholic world." Toaff said: "Pope Wojtyla wanted to indicate a road aimed at further destroying all the obstacles that have divided Jews and Christians through the centuries."

Toaff, who attended the Pope's funeral on Friday, said he hoped the next pope would uphold John Paul II's legacy and "do even better ... But it is unlikely that there will be someone else like him. Even if we are optimistic, I see many difficulties in finding a successor of his stature." The two other people mentioned in the will released on Thursday were the Pope's mentor, the late Polish Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, and his long-time personal secretary Archbishop Stanisław Dziwisz.

Pope John Paul has been praised by Jewish leaders for his repeated condemnation of anti-Semitism and apologies for the historical mistreatment of Jews, whom he called "dearly beloved elder brothers." John Paul established full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1993, and in 2000 visited Israel's memorial to the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust. He also prayed at Jerusalem's Western Wall for forgiveness for historical Christian mistreatment of Jews. "The request for forgiveness was one of the greatest gestures of Pope John Paul," Toaff said.

Remembering his first meeting with the Pope, Toaff told *Corriere della Sera*, another Italian newspaper: "He was ill, I went to see him. He was sleeping. I sent him my recovery and birthday wishes. The secretary came back with his eyes wide open. He had told him I should see him immediately. As soon as he saw me, he threw his arms around me."

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Group Helps Brazilian Jews Find Jobs, Health Care and Self-respect

By Michael Kepp
JTA email Edition
March 28, 2005

Jamila Ejnesman of Rio de Janeiro recently got a job as a secretary. Her \$190 monthly salary replaced the \$190 monthly pension her ex-husband stopped giving her in February, when their divorce was finalized. Financially speaking, it's fair to say that Ejnesman, 50, is back at square one. But she says she's now an independent woman, and credits *Voluntarios da Alianca*, or Alliance Volunteers, a Rio-based Jewish social outreach program, with finding her job and restoring her self-esteem.

"Though I and my two youngest kids still live on the same meager income, it's income I earn, not money doled out by my now ex-husband," Ejnesman said. "I have *Voluntarios da Alianca* to thank for getting me the job that allowed me to live independently and with a greater self of self worth. I feel better about myself because I feel useful again." Ejnesman is one of 36 Jews whom *Voluntarios da Alianca* has placed in jobs since the organization began in 2000. That number isn't high, in part because V.A.'s main focus has been on finding health care for needy patients. But the organization expects to find jobs for 200 more of Rio's Jews this year, now that the economy is reviving and people are being hired, not fired. V.A. was created when Brazil's economy deteriorated in the mid-1990s, a slump that extended through 2003.

But increased macroeconomic stability, along with the new government's growth-oriented industrial and developmental policies, helped the economy grow by 4 percent in 2004. A similar or higher rate of growth is expected this year. The stagnating economy was particularly hard on the country's small middle class, which included members of Rio de Janeiro's Jewish community. By the late 1990s, many of them had lost jobs or taken salary cuts, canceled health insurance coverage, transferred their children from private Jewish schools to free public ones, canceled memberships to Jewish clubs and synagogues and sold personal assets to offset income loss. In 2000, Sami Goldstein, a retired IBM executive, founded V.A. by organizing a group of Jewish volunteers from 12 Rio synagogues and social clubs. Their mission was to help provide the growing ranks of unemployed, increasingly impoverished Jews with health care and employment opportunities.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee helped provide V.A. with startup and assistance capital during its first three years of operation. "I started V.A. because I was confronted with the problem of the growing impoverishment of Rio's Jewish middle class, and felt something needed to be done," Goldstein said. "And since I've always been a Jewish community leader, I embraced the cause." The group has 44 volunteers, most of them retired women. They interview unemployed people in synagogues and pass their resumes and job applications on to the local chapter of B'nai B'rith, which tries to place them in jobs, mainly in Jewish-run businesses. V.A. also matches people needing medical care with doctors; there are 142 Jewish doctors who volunteer their services. Lise Barochel, 66, a retired multilingual secretary, became a V.A. volunteer in 2000. "It's gratifying to be able to interview someone urgently in need of medical help, make a phone call to B'nai B'rith and then, on the spot, tell them they've got a doctor's appointment sometime that same day," she said. So far, V.A. has helped more than 2,500 people receive free medical care. The doctors are satisfied because once the patients' economic problems end, some of them become paying patients.

Families, grateful for the VA's help, have begun returning to Jewish congregations, whose membership is increasing. Mirian Wertman, 44, an unemployed teacher who did not have health insurance, went to V.A. in 2004 because she had a breast cyst she feared might be malignant. Free gynecological and radiological exams showed it was benign. "I'm so grateful to the gynecologist who treated me that when I get a job I will return to her as a paying patient," Wertman said. "And I heard about V.A. at my synagogue, which reinforces its importance in my life." V.A. helped Gracia Mizrahi, 77, a widow living on a \$100 monthly pension, to get free physiotherapy after she fell earlier this year and injured her knee and hands.

"Thank God my daughter, a rabbi's secretary, knew about V.A. and advised me to go there for medical help," Mizrahi said. "Because I didn't have a health plan, I could not have otherwise afforded physiotherapy." Though the V.A.'s greatest success so far has been in providing medical care, it plans to increase its efforts to find people jobs. Not only does the organization hope to find work for 200 people in 2005, it's offering an 18-month night course in electronics to unemployed Jews. The course teaches high-school graduates

how to maintain and repair cellular phones, home computers and more sophisticated electronic equipment. The local arm of ORT, a London-based network of technical and vocational schools, will run the program. B'nai B'rith, together with ORT, is giving participants scholarships; some will cover the full amount of tuition. "The course is geared for high-school graduates who don't have professional degrees or skills that the market needs," said Hugo Malajovich, national director of ORT Brasil. "It will help people to reenter the market by providing them with skills that the market needs." V.A. also will offer Jewish parents help with day school payments. The money is expected to come from a fund-raising drive within the local community. Negotiations aimed at receiving matching funds from an unnamed U.S. institution reportedly are under way as well.

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Crypto-Jews Gather to Recall a Forgotten Jewish Hero

Israel National News April 6, 2005

Nearly 100 descendants of Spanish and Portuguese crypto-Jews will gather this weekend in northern Portugal for a special 3-day seminar being organized by the Jerusalem-based *Shavei* Israel organization, which reaches out and assists "lost Jews" seeking to return to the Jewish people. The seminar, entitled "The Challenges of Jewish Belief in a Post-Modern World", will be held in the coastal city of Oporto, and will include rabbis, professors and authors from Israel, Spain and Portugal. The gathering will be dedicated to the memory of Portuguese Captain Arthur Barros Basto, a decorated World War I hero from a crypto-Jewish family who returned to Judaism and then launched an outreach movement to encourage other "hidden Jews" to do the same.

In addition to starting a Jewish newspaper and a yeshiva, Capt. Barros Basto opened the synagogue in Oporto, which is where the *Shavei* Israel seminar in his memory is being held. Eventually, however, his activities ran afoul of Portuguese government and church authorities, and he was driven out of the military on trumped-up charges in the early 1940s. Historians have dubbed him the "Portuguese Dreyfus", after French General Staff officer Alfred Dreyfus, a Jew who was wrongly accused and convicted of treason in 1894 due to anti-Semitism. "Captain Barros Basto was a Jewish hero whose only transgression was that he sought to restore the Bnei Anousim [Hebrew for people whose ancestors were forcibly converted to Catholicism during the time of the Inquisition] to Judaism," said *Shavei* Israel Chairman Michael Freund. "He was a man of action and vision, and it is only fitting that we pay homage to his memory by convening a seminar for *Bnei Anousim* in the very same synagogue that he was responsible for having built."

Freund noted that for the past two years, *Shavei* Israel has been waging a public campaign to get the government of Portugal to posthumously clear Capt. Barros Basto's name as well as issue a formal apology for what was done to him. As a result of these efforts, letters have been sent by US Congressmen and various Jewish organizations to Portuguese officials, but they have thus far refused to reopen his case.

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High Court in Israel Accepts Some Non-Orthodox Conversions

By Dan Baron JTA Email Edition March 31, 2005

After 22 years of living as an Israeli, Justina Hilaria Chipana can finally consider herself a full-fledged member of the Jewish state. The 50-year-old native of Peru was one of 17 petitioners who won High Court of Justice recognition of their non-Orthodox conversions to Judaism on Thursday, in what the Conservative and Reform movements hailed as a breakthrough for efforts to introduce more religious pluralism to Israel. Orthodox rabbis and politicians disagreed. By a vote of 7-4, the High Court ordered the state to recognize leaping converts — so called because they study in Israeli institutes but then convert with Reform or Conservative rabbis abroad — as eligible to immigrate under the Law of Return. The ruling was a small step in a decades-long controversy in Israel over who is a Jew, who can turn a non-Jew into a Jew and who can decide whether that process was done correctly.

Thursday's ruling also broadened a 1989 decision recognizing immigrants who arrive having gone through the entire non-Orthodox conversion process abroad; those immigrants are considered to be Jews and the Law of Return applies to them. But the ruling did not endorse Reform and Conservative conversions performed in Israel, a move that effectively would end Orthodoxy's de facto hegemony in the Jewish state and could stir up a government crisis. In response to a demand presented by the fervently Orthodox Shas party and signed by 25 legislators, the Knesset will meet in special session next week to debate the court decision. Shas Chairman Eli Yishai called the ruling an explosives belt that has brought about a suicide attack against the Jewish people, according

to Ha'aretz.

The Orthodox Rabbinate, which controls the observance of life-cycle events in Israel — including births, weddings and funerals — also cried foul. “There aren’t two movements or three movements in Judaism. There is only one Judaism,” Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar told Israel Radio. “Whoever doesn’t go through a halachic conversion is not a Jew. Yet with many Israelis increasingly concerned about the lack of a unifying religious identity in the country — where some 300,000 citizens are non-Jews from the former Soviet Union — the Conservative and Reform movement remained confident that their more lenient conversions would provide a solution.

“We believe that with this precedent, it is just a matter of time until alternatives to Orthodox Judaism are fully recognized,” said attorney Sharon Tal of the Israel Religious Action Center, a pro-pluralism lobby associated with the Reform movement. “It could mean filing more High Court petitions, or just waiting for Israel to come to its senses. The Jerusalem Post reported that the Reform movement was unsatisfied that the court didn’t issue a more far-reaching decision, and plans to bring another petition in hopes of forcing the state to recognize Reform conversions performed in Israel.

The only way for the Orthodox to counter Thursday’s ruling would be to have a new law passed defining their stream as the only legitimate form of Judaism in Israel. But repeated efforts to mount such legislation in the past failed to muster majorities for even preliminary Knesset readings. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon counts one Orthodox political party, United Torah Judaism, in his coalition, and he has been courting Shas. Still, it seems unlikely that either party would be able to apply enough pressure on the government to push through motions against the High Court ruling.

“We have no coalition agreement regarding this,” UTJ leader Rabbi Avraham Ravitz said. “I’m sure there will be discussions about what can be done, but I’m not especially hopeful.” The High Court ruling is immediately binding on the government. That’s a relief for Chipana and her fellow petitioners, who filed their suit in 1999. “We are going to implement the decision in a crystal-clear manner,” Interior Minister Ophir Pines-Paz of the Labor Party told Army Radio. I think that it provides an answer for many people who are living among us and are forced to go through a very tough journey, exhausting and tiring, that causes many to lose hope.”

In the United States, reaction to the decision broke along denominational lines. “As a Conservative rabbi, I am of course delighted that the High Court in Israel has mandated the recognition of conversions performed by Conservative rabbis in America,” said Joel Roth, a scholar Jewish law and the former head of the Jewish Theological Seminary’s Law Committee.

“I’m very much aware that some segments of the Jewish world will continue to refuse to accept as valid conversions performed by Conservative and Reform rabbis, and the court’s decision will create problems in those communities,” he said. “I accept as valid any conversation that complies with halachic requirements, and conversions that do not, I do not accept. The Orthodox Union, on the other hand, said it is deeply concerned by the ruling.

“The decision of the court may eventually lead to the division of the people of Israel into two camps. There will be a group of halachically valid Jews and a group of people who are Jewish only by the ruling of the Supreme Court,” the union said in a news release signed by its president, Stephen Savitsky, and executive vice president, Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb. “The consequences of this ruling will be tragic.”

For the petitioners, however, the ruling was a long-overdue relief. “I always dreamed of really belonging to the country,” Chipana, who first came to Israel in 1983, told JTA. In 1993 she converted at a Reform congregation in Argentina, and filed the lawsuit in 1999. “Now perhaps it can really happen.” But should she want to marry to her Israeli-born boyfriend, Yosef Ben-Moshe, she will have to go on waiting or do it abroad: The chief rabbinate in Israel remains exclusively Orthodox, and its grip on life-cycle events remains unchallenged. That’s the way the UTJ’s Ravitz wants it. Asked what will happen if “leaping converts” apply for marriage licenses in Israel,” he said, “I imagine they will be told to take a flying leap.” Sallai Meridor, chairman of the Jewish Agency for Israel, sees the question of Orthodox control as a larger problem than the one the High Court addressed. “The entire acrobatic phenomenon in which people are forced to marry or convert abroad does no honor to Judaism or the State of Israel,” he said.

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Adopted Children Face Conversion Problems

By Ruth Sinai
Ha'aretz Newspaper
March 20, 2005

The center for converting children adopted overseas ceased functioning some two months ago and is on the verge of closing down permanently. The Conversion Administration in the Prime Minister’s Office plans to shut down the Shapira Center, an Orthodox Rabbinical Conversion Court near Ashkelon, and transfer its authority to the Ashdod Rabbinical Court. Dozens of parents have recently asked Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to reopen this court, which was considered liberal, and is very popular among former

Soviet Jews requiring conversion. Most children who were adopted abroad were converted in the Shapira Center, headed by Rabbi Haim Druckman. The center is run by Rabbi Yossef Avior, who has gained the trust of adoptive parents due to his moderate approach.

However, the Rabbinical Courts management believes that Avior is not strict enough and did not renew the contract with the Or Etzion yeshiva, in which the court operates, in January 2004. Although the center's computer was removed and the payments to the staff stopped, Avior continued working and converted about 1,000 people last year, including 186 adopted children, with volunteer staff. But in the last two months those calling the center have get a recorded announcement asking them not to leave a message. "I have letters from dozens of parents asking to convert children they adopted, and it hurts me not to be able to help them," Avior said. Some of the children, who have already passed the conversion process, have not received their certificates yet.

"We, adoptive families who after years of suffering and prolonged waiting finally got to be called 'parents,' find the door to the children's conversion court closed," dozens of parents wrote in a joint letter to Sharon. The parents fear a "long, foot-dragging process" in which the children would be forced to resort to Reform and Conservative conversion. Sources from the Prime Minister's Bureau said: "These days a decision is supposed to be made about the court's location. When it is made, the court will no doubt be supplied with all the logistic means for effective routine activity." However, the bureau did not answer most of Haaretz's questions and the adoptive parents say they received no reply to their letter. The children's services department at the Social Affairs Ministry, which supervises the adoption of children from overseas, also received queries from worried parents wishing to convert their children. "We are trying to solve the problem," ministry spokesman Nahum Ido said.

Avior fears the Rabbinical Courts management's intention to transfer the Shapira Center's activity to the Ashdod Rabbinical Court would deter potential converts. "We meet the convert as an equal, rather than sit in judgment of him. Our center is in a blooming garden, and we provide the convert with a home. For us conversion is an ideology, not a necessary evil. We don't make conversion easy. You don't have to buy a shtreiml and live in Bnei Brak to convert with us," he said. The Shapira Center converted 182 children who were adopted abroad during 2003 and 186 in 2004. In the past two years, an average of 235 children were adopted annually.

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Jewish America's Changing Faces

Adoptions are Accelerating a Trend Toward more Diversity.

By Leslie A. Pappas
Philadelphia Inquirer
March 27, 2005

Ken Podell looks at his 6-year-old and sees a beautiful little Jewish girl. But when Alexandra, who was adopted from China, showed up at one Jewish classmate's birthday party, the host took one look and turned her away -until he saw his wife signaling frantically behind him that Alexandra was on the guest list. "I laughed afterward," said her father, "but I was not laughing at the time." International and trans-racial adoptions are changing the face of Jewish America. For decades, diversity from conversions and intermarriage has trickled slowly into a population made up mostly of white Eastern European Jews. Now increasing numbers of adoptions from countries such as Korea, Guatemala and China are accelerating that trend. According to the United Jewish Communities' National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01, just over 5 percent of Jewish families had adopted children in the household, accounting for about 35,000 children. "In one fell swoop, a nice white Jewish couple adopts a Chinese girl, and suddenly, what a Jewish kid looks like we have to reconsider," said Adam Pertman, author of *Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution Is Transforming America*. Adopted children, said Pertman, potentially could face both anti-Semitism and racism - not to mention prejudice within the Jewish community itself. "We should expect it," Pertman said. "... It would foolish for us not to acknowledge that race is an issue in our culture." The Jewish community worldwide is already very diverse, says Abby Ruder, a family therapist in Wyndmoor, whose adopted daughter is of Irish and African descent. Adoption is simply making that reality more visible.

"It's about embracing in a larger sense who we really are," said Ruder. "A Jewish soul is a Jewish soul. It doesn't require a particular outer coating." But for the Jewish children with Asian, African and Latin American faces popping up in synagogues and Hebrew schools, being accepted holds its challenges. Podell is preparing Alexandra and her 4-year-old adopted sister, Daria, for a comment that he hopes they will never hear: "You can't be a real Jew; you don't look like a Jew!" "They are going to have to know more" than most children about what it means to be Jewish, Podell said. While the girls attend important Chinese festivals, they also celebrate Shabbat every Friday night, go to synagogue on Saturday, and learn Hebrew, not Chinese. "My daughters look in the mirror and they see Jewish little girls," said their mother, Jeanne DeVine. And Alexandra was confused to learn that no one else in her kindergarten was Jewish. Who else isn't Jewish? she grilled her father. Is Aunt Melanie Jewish? Is Ga-ga (her grandmother) Jewish? Podell asked, "Do you think Jake is Jewish?" With an exasperated eye-roll, Alexandra replied, "Of course he's Jewish! He looks Jewish!" Jake is the family poodle.

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Discovering Jewish Roots on Caribbean Soil

By Boris Fishman
New York Times
March 27, 2005

When Lisa Hock's son Corey was about to turn 13 and she began looking for an alternative to the routine and occasional excess of banquet-hall bar mitzvahs in Toronto, her hometown, she hardly imagined that he would end up reciting the blessings while shuffling through sand on a Caribbean island. But Corey wasn't on the beach; his bar mitzvah took place at the United Netherlands Portuguese Congregation Mikvé Israel-Emanuel in Willemstad, Curaçao, the island north of Venezuela that is an autonomous part of the Netherlands and home to the oldest continuously operating synagogue in the Western Hemisphere. There, the blanket of soft white sand that coats the floor commemorates the clandestine means by which forcefully Christianized Jews in Inquisition-era Spain and Portugal continued to conduct Jewish prayers.

In choosing Curaçao, Ms. Hock joined a growing number of North American Jewish tourists flocking to some Caribbean islands partly for their Jewish histories and the vibrant Jewish communities active there today. The increasing fashion for destination "life-cycle events" like weddings and *bnai mitzvah* (which refers to both boys and girls) has encouraged the trend. As niche-market operators have refined on-the-go accommodation of religious requirements, the Caribbean has also become a popular destination for kosher holiday tours, particularly for Passover.

"We weren't interested in a traditional service, and then the luncheon, the big party," Ms. Hock, a lawyer, said. "We wanted to expose Corey to a different part of the world because we thought it would have more meaning that way, but we weren't comfortable going to Israel. It was so beautiful, we were in tears - the sand on the floor, the open windows with the sun beaming in. We just wouldn't have felt the same way in Toronto, where our congregation is one of the largest in the city. It was so intimate there. Corey will never forget it."

Julie Borish's daughter Isabel celebrated her bat mitzvah at the Curaçao synagogue last March. "I'm not that observant, but the walls speak to you," Ms. Borish said. "I mean, my daughter used a Torah that is one of the three oldest in the world, from 1320. Isabel didn't even want a bat mitzvah, but after 45 bar and bat mitzvahs in New York, from Tavern on the Green to the Pierre, she decided hers was the best." The maize-colored synagogue, which was consecrated in 1732 and is modeled after the Portuguese Synagogue in Amsterdam, stands behind a wall. Inside, a tiled courtyard leads to a soaring room with azure stained-glass windows and a mahogany ark.

"It's a shrine, in the Jewish sense," Rabbi Gerald Zelermyer, the American-born spiritual leader of the congregation since 2002, said. (There is a smaller Orthodox synagogue, Shaarei Tzedek, on the island as well, attended mainly by Ashkenazi Jews, who descend from Jewish communities in Central and Eastern Europe.) Rabbi Zelermyer estimates that tourists, most of whom are American, outnumber community regulars two to one during Friday night services during the tourist season. He believes that the persistence of Jewish life on a remote island that helped introduce Jewry to the Western Hemisphere summons unique feelings of spirituality among Jewish visitors, however unobservant. "When the cruise ship people come to the synagogue, I see them mouthing prayers to themselves, assuming a very worshipful posture," Rabbi Zelermyer said. "I was eavesdropping on this one conversation where a woman said, 'I'd like to come to Friday night services here,' and her son said, 'Why, you don't even belong to a synagogue in the U.S.' And she just looked at him and said, 'This is different.'"

Bernice Kaufman, a Houston retiree, has visited the Curaçao synagogue. "There are members of the congregation who trace their roots to the 1700's," she said. "I'm of Ashkenazi descent. My history in America begins in the 1920's, when my mother came from the shtetl to the United States. The experience of Jews in the Caribbean has been so different." Subjected to forced conversion and the Inquisition in Spain and Portugal, Sephardic Jews sought refuge among the relatively tolerant Dutch and on their even more liberal island outpost in the Caribbean, which Holland seized from Spain in 1634. Jews settled on Curaçao in 1651, three years before the first Jews reached America. They dominated the island's shipping and trade, and by the 18th century formed more than half of Curaçao's white population. The community grew so wealthy that its contributions sustained fledgling Jewish communities in Colonial America. To this day, Yom Kippur services at Shearith Israel, a Sephardic synagogue on Manhattan's Upper West Side, and the oldest congregation in the United States, features a special prayer of gratitude to the Curaçao community.

"It's a powerful lesson, which I try to give to every kid who celebrates a bar or bat mitzvah here," said Rabbi Arthur Starr, a transplant from New Hampshire who is the leader of the Congregation of Blessing and Peace and Loving Deeds in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, which in 1996 celebrated its 200th anniversary. The St. Thomas community also originated with fleeing Sephardim, and the synagogue likewise features a sand floor to symbolize its covert preservation of the Jewish faith back home. "They risked their lives to keep Judaism alive so you could have it, I tell them. When putting a statue of the Madonna by the front door of their house, they'd hollow out the bottom of the foot to put a mezuzah there, so that when they kissed the Virgin Mary, they were really kissing the mezuzah." Rabbi Starr performed twice as many *bnai mitzvah* in 2004 as the year before, and at least 60 weddings since his arrival in the summer of 2002, most among the crystal chandeliers, mahogany pews and brass candelabra of the synagogue, whose fixtures

mainly date to its last reconstruction, in 1833. "I've done more weddings here in two and a half years than in 31 years in New Hampshire," he said. He is already receiving calls for life-cycle events in 2008.

On Curaçao, the tourism authorities have noticed the trend, and have been promoting the destination within the American Jewish community. Though there are no figures on the travel of American Jews to the Caribbean, Joel Grossman, the director of the Curaçao Tourist Board's United States branch, estimated that nearly 15 percent of American tourists to Curaçao were Jewish, and that their numbers had kept pace with a general rise in American travel to the island, which had increased by about 20 percent since 2002, to some 45,000 visitors a year. Gigi Scheper, who directs a Jewish heritage tour through Willemstad for a company called Taber Tours, said the number of participants had more than doubled in 2004.

"Probably 20 percent of the informational calls we get are American Jewish tourists looking to find out about Jewish aspects of a trip to Curaçao," Mr. Grossman said. The office has been working with such theme-travel operators as Kosher Expeditions, based in Atlanta, which will inaugurate a Curaçao trip in August, though the scarcity of kosher food on the island means the company has to take along a chef and a mashgiach, the religious figure who certifies kosher food. Though some operators of kosher holiday tours tend to choose Caribbean destinations because of the warm weather, the Jewish heritage of some of the islands enhances the religious experience. "You're in a place where you don't expect to find Jewish history," said Stanley Bernstein, a New York lawyer who has taken Passover trips to Aruba eight times with Presidential Kosher Holidays, which schedules a tour of Jewish sites on the island, as well as a day trip to Curaçao. "It allows you to connect."

Heightened Jewish interest in the islands, however, can be a little overwhelming. For instance, until several years ago, the Curaçao Jewish community, wary of trivializing its birthright, resisted requests for use of the synagogue by those outside the congregation. Even now, it requires that certain aspects of life-cycle ceremonies reflect Sephardic practice. At weddings, a glass must be pitched by the bridegroom into a large silver tray rather than crushed underfoot, which is the typical Ashkenazi Jewish practice; b'nai mitzvah must chant the Torah in a tone and rhythm particular to Sephardic Jews. "It's always been our congregation; we're not renting out the space," René Maduro, a past president of the congregation and the descendant of one of Curaçao's early Jewish families, said. "If you want to do it, you have to do it according to our customs."

On St. Thomas, Rabbi Starr is similarly stringent. He does not officiate at interfaith weddings and will not perform a life-cycle ceremony unless the celebrant belongs to a synagogue back home. Steve Gottlieb, a mortgage loan officer in Smithtown, on Long Island, whose son, Jeremy, was bar mitzvahed on Curaçao, said his son was obliged to produce monthly progress reports on his Hebrew recitation, adding that the degree of devotion only made the experience more meaningful. As for the ceremony, Mr. Gottlieb said, "It was so overwhelming. It felt like you were walking through time." And Jeremy's reaction? "He wants to get married there," Mr. Gottlieb said.

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Rabbinate Recognizes B'nei Menashe as "Descendants of Israel"

IsraelNationalNews.com
April 3, 2005

In a historic decision, Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar has decided to formally recognize the Bnei Menashe community of northeastern India as "descendants of Israel." The Chief Rabbinate has also agreed to send a beit din (rabbinical court) on its behalf to the region to formally convert them to Judaism. The Bnei Menashe claim descent from the tribe of Menashe, one of the ten tribes exiled from the Land of Israel by the Assyrian empire over 2,700 years ago. They reside primarily in the two Indian states of Mizoram and Manipur, along the border with Burma and Bangladesh. In recent years, over 800 members of the community have made Aliyah [immigration to Israel], thanks largely to the efforts of Shavei Israel, a Jerusalem-based group that reaches out and assists "lost Jews" seeking to return to the Jewish people.

Shavei Israel Chairman Michael Freund, who took part in yesterday's meeting with the Chief Rabbi, praised the decision. "This is a momentous day," he said, "and we are very grateful to the Chief Rabbinate for the openness and sensitivity that they have demonstrated in addressing the issue of the Bnei Menashe. This is the breakthrough that we have all been waiting for, and thank G-d, the remaining 6,000 members of the community still in India will at last be able to come home to Zion."

In June 2003, then-Interior Minister Avraham Poraz of the Shinui Party decided to halt the Bnei Menashe aliyah, reportedly because he objected to the fact that they were all religiously-observant and many chose to live in Jewish communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. After Poraz' decision was announced, Freund turned to the Chief Rabbinate, and began lobbying to receive official rabbinical recognition of the Bnei Menashe as a means of circumventing the Interior Minister's decision. Yesterday's meeting with the Chief Rabbi marked the culmination of those efforts.

Rabbi Eliyahu Birnbaum, a dayan (rabbinical court judge) and spokesman for Rabbi Amar, said that the decision had come after careful consideration and study of the issue. "The Chief Rabbi sent a delegation of two dayanim (judges) to India last year," Rabbi

Birnbaum said, "to conduct a thorough investigation of the community and its origins. After a thorough review of their findings, it was decided that the Bnei Menashe are in fact descendants of Israel and should be drawn closer to the Jewish people."

Rabbi Birnbaum added that once various conditions laid down by the Chief Rabbi are fulfilled, such as the construction of mikvaot (ritual baths) in India, and the dispatch of additional teachers, the Chief Rabbinate would send a beit din of its own to the area to convert members of the community to Judaism, thereby allowing them to make Aliyah to Israel. The first of the Bnei Menashe to arrive in Israel did so in 1979. More members of the community continued arriving slowly during the coming years, and large groups came in 1993 and 1994. Several hundred of them now reside in Israel, mainly in Kiryat Arba, Gush Katif, Beit El and Ofrah.

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Mass Bar Mitzvah Held At Western Wall For Ethiopian Jews

Israelnationalnews.com
April 5, 2005

A mass Bar Mitzvah ceremony was celebrated for 50 Ethiopian immigrants at the Western Wall in Jerusalem last month. The 50 new immigrants, ages 20 to 30, had never celebrated their Bar Mitzvahs - the ceremony marking a Jew's acceptance of responsibility for the observance of religious laws at the age of 13 (12, for girls). The immigrants are registered in a Jewish Agency program called Kedma, which prepares new immigrants for academic pursuits and to serve in the IDF.

During the nine-month program, which takes place at the Jewish Agency's absorption center in Hadera, the students study Hebrew, English and mathematics, together with Jewish studies and courses on Israeli culture and society. One of the key elements of the program is the process of conversion. Although Ethiopian Falash Mura are brought to Israel due to their Jewish roots, they must undergo a conversion process in order to rejoin the Jewish people according to Jewish Law. With the assistance of a resident rabbi, the olim [immigrants] study Judaism, and by the end of the Kedma program they are able to convert. The Bar Mitzvah service was arranged by the Jewish Agency's staff and the Rabbi of the Kotel (Western Wall of the Temple Mount, in Jerusalem). The Jewish Federation of Jacksonville, Florida donated the 50 sets of tefillin for the service.

In other Aliyah news, among 80 new immigrants who immigrated to Israel last week from all over the globe was Nadim Mizrachi, who was injured in the massive terror attack on a synagogue in Istanbul, Turkey in 2003. In November of that year, two car bombs were detonated near two synagogues in Istanbul, killing 23 people, including six Jews, and wounding more than 300. Nadim, who volunteered to provide security services to the worshippers, was seriously wounded in the blast. He will spend his first months in Israel studying Hebrew at the Jewish Agency's Kalanit absorption center in Ashkelon.

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Montreal Ethiopian Jew Battles for Kidney Donation

By Janice Arnold
Canadian Jewish News
April 7, 2005

Baruch Tegegne, the man credited with rescuing untold numbers of his fellow Ethiopian Jews, is now in a fight for his own life. Tegegne, 61, needs a kidney transplant and a group of his friends, led by Toronto filmmaker Simcha Jacobovici, thought they had found one, from a man in India, through a website that connects live persons willing to donate an organ - without compensation - to strangers. The Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH), the leading Montreal transplant centre, refuses to conduct transplants under such circumstances, for both ethical and practical reasons. The buying and selling of organs is illegal in Canada, but there is no law explicitly prohibiting so-called "altruistic" donations from unrelated persons.

Last week Tegegne's lawyer, Michael Bergman, launched what he called precedent-setting legal action against the RVH, part of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC). In a letter to RVH director general Timothy Meagher, Bergman states that the hospital's refusal to "even consider" testing the potential donor for his compatibility, let alone perform the transplant, endangers Tegegne's life and, thereby, his rights under the Canadian and Quebec charters. Bergman also says it violates the right to medical treatment under the Canada Health Act and Quebec health-care legislation, as well as the medical profession's Hippocratic oath. If the RVH does not act "within a reasonable delay," the letter states that Bergman will seek a court order to force it to do so. MUHC spokesperson Seeta Ramdass said the hospital is making no comment now that the matter is the subject of legal action. In February, Dr. Douglas Keith, head of the RVH's living donor transplant program, was quoted in the National Post as saying the hospital has never performed a

transplant between strangers as a result of an altruistic donation. He said the RVH could not be sure there is no "quid pro quo" agreement between Tegegne and the potential donor, and that it looks suspicious because the latter is from the Third World and the contact was made via the Internet.

Tegegne, who undergoes dialysis four times a week at the Jewish General Hospital, has been waiting for a transplant for more than two years and his health is said to be deteriorating. None of his seven brothers in Israel are able to donate a kidney, he said at a media conference where the legal action was announced. Speaking softly and looking somewhat frail, Tegegne said: "I want to live like everybody... When the donor in India was found, I was so happy – I thought I would have another life." Tegegne, a pioneer of the Ethiopian Jewish aliyah movement, moved to Montreal 1979 and is believed to be the first Ethiopian Jew to settle in Canada. His dramatic escape by foot from Ethiopia in 1974 to get to Israel and his activism in persuading the Israeli government to rescue the little-known Jews of Ethiopia was featured in Jacobovici's 1983 documentary *Falasha: Exile of the Black Jews*. Tegegne has spent much of the past 20 years working among the Ethiopian community in Africa and Israel. Jacobovici, also at the conference, called Tegegne "a hero who has saved hundreds, if not thousands, from the refugee camps in war-torn Ethiopia."

Jacobovici paid a \$441 (US) fee to advertise Tegegne's request for a kidney on www.matchingdonors.com for three months. It was answered by a 30-year-old Indian man, Shree Dhar, who participated in the conference by telephone hook-up. Jacobovici said he, and other friends of Tegegne, will pay for Dhar's travel expenses to Canada, as well as a "reasonable" amount to compensate him for lost wages during his recovery. Speaking in an English that was not always clear, Dhar repeated that his "motives are pure," that he is not looking for money, beyond his costs, or to immigrate to Canada. Married and the father of two, he said he made 9,500 rupees a month as an investment consultant, and described his circumstances as middle class. He said he is motivated by religious conviction – he is Hindu – and was touched by Tegegne's story of his often risky work among Ethiopian Jews. He also said his grandfather, an army general, died of kidney disease.

Asked why he has not donated a kidney to someone in India, Dhar said he and his wife are registered with an Indian organ bank, but he would have to pay part of his medical costs in India. He also feels the level of health care is higher in Canada. He said he understands the risks of having a kidney removed from speaking to a nephrologist in his area of southern India. "I believe God will be with me," he said. Jacobovici accused the RVH of "obstructing compassion" and of "arrogance, paranoia and a bit of racism" because, he says, it assumes that anyone donating kidney, especially if they are from the Third World, are doing it for the money and not for noble reasons. He doubts any policy exists, and the RVH is "just making one up as it goes along." Jacobovici said a donor's word that he is not going to take compensation for an organ should be enough for a hospital and, if not, an affidavit could be drawn up. In this case, he said Dhar is "totally credible," a point Bergman agreed upon.

Bergman and Jacobovici refuted suggestions that, if a Canadian hospital accepts Dhar's donation, Tegegne is "jumping the queue" because he has the advantage of a lawyer and the public advocacy of a well-known filmmaker. On the contrary, they say that if the legal action is successful, it will benefit everyone by changing the way organ donations are managed in Canada. "There's an unwritten policy in Canada that, other than family members, no one can donate a kidney to anyone else" to avoid the chance that the organ was actually purchased, said Jacobovici. "In other words, they treat live donors as guilty until proven innocent. On the off chance that a bad apple may slip through the system, compassion is obstructed and thousands of Canadians are left to die." Bergman and Jacobovici say about 3,000 Canadians are on the kidney transplant waiting list, and on average 200 die each year before an organ is available. "I believe I am opening doors for others," Tegegne added.

Also participating by conference call was Dr. Robert Hickey, a Canadian living in the United States, who recently underwent the transplant of a kidney donated by a young American man with whom he made contact through www.matchingdonors.com. The operation was done at Presbyterian/St. Luke's Medical Centre in Denver after its clinical ethics committee approved the arrangement. Hickey said he has made inquiries with British Columbia's transplant authority and St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver to see if it will undertake to test Dhar and perform the transplant if he is found compatible.

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New Chief Rabbi Eager to Regroup SA Flock

Jeremy Gordin
Pretoria News
IOL Online
April 04 2005

President Thabo Mbeki has warmly welcomed Chief Rabbi Warren Goldstein into the group of "nation builders" who have the "honesty and compassion" needed to strengthen South Africa's moral vision. Addressing dignitaries at Sunday's inauguration of South Africa's fifth - and first South-African born - Chief Rabbi, Mbeki said he agreed with Goldstein that societies were "held together by a shared moral and spiritual vision". Besides being an accomplished scholar of Jewish law, Goldstein, 33, had a doctorate in human rights law, Mbeki noted, and was therefore well placed to assist in the country's moral regeneration as well as "our struggle to uplift the poor and marginalised". "The kind of values espoused by the Chief Rabbi are the very ones that we need to instill in society.

"The Jewish community has always enriched the tapestry that is South Africa," Mbeki said, "and you need to remember, Chief Rabbi, that the doors of the office of the president will always be open to you." The inauguration of Goldstein was held on Sunday morning at the Sandton Synagogue, Bet Ha-midrash Ha-gadol. Those present, besides members of the congregation, included Minister of Education Naledi Pandor, judges of the Supreme Court of Appeal and the High Court, members of the National Religious Leaders' Forum, and scores of local rabbis. Both Mbeki and Goldstein sent their condolences to Catholics and Christians worldwide over the death of Pope John Paul II. Both also sent their good wishes to Goldstein's predecessor, former Chief Rabbi and now Chief Rabbi Emeritus, Cyril Harris, who is ill and was unable to attend the inauguration.

In his address, Goldstein said that "the rainbow was designated by the Almighty as a symbol of hope for the world after the enormous destruction of the flood, just as our own rainbow nation has emerged from the vortex of apartheid. "South Africa is a beacon of hope for humanity, showing the world that racial conflict... can be overcome with respect and compassion". Goldstein said that the covenant made between Jews and the Almighty "guides us to some of the most important values of South Africa: non-racialism and equality. "The Almighty chose to create all of humankind from one man and one woman... to eradicate racism by ensuring that we human beings are all brothers and sisters."

Goldstein also said that the conflict in the Middle East was "a war between brothers" and that the local Jewish community hoped, along with Jews all over the world, that it would soon be settled peacefully. Goldstein, an advocate with a BA, LLB and PhD in human rights law, qualified at a Johannesburg rabbinical seminary in 1996. He was appointed Chief Rabbi last year but underwent a year of "apprenticeship" with Harris. At 33, Goldstein is the youngest man ever to have been appointed to the post in this country. His selection as the fifth official spiritual leader of the South African Jewish community reflects the religious revival and return to religious principles by a new generation of young South Africans in recent years. Goldstein's own family "returned to God" when he was a boy growing up in Pretoria. When Goldstein's father, High Court judge Ezra Goldstein, made the decision to observe the Sabbath, "it was life-changing". For Goldstein, his appointment is also tied closely to where South Africa is as a country.

"The Mbeki era is about a nation at work... the new struggle is about creating jobs, tackling poverty and disease." His interest is in fostering a shared moral vision which "must include creating a better life for all. "It sounds like a political slogan but it's a very important moral vision. We need to enable and facilitate South Africans to give full expression to the greatness that lies within them. It's very difficult for a person to realise their potential if they're living in grinding poverty or with the threat of disease or crime." Goldstein began his Rabbinical studies at 17, and studied law and philosophy through Unisa at the same time. He completed his LLB while working as a Rabbi. The intention was always to practise law - he has been admitted as an advocate of the High Court - but those plans fell by the way as he became a rabbi. He has a doctorate on Jewish law's relevance to human rights and modern constitutional law, and he is author of African Soul Talk with Dumani Mandela (grandson of Nelson), a dialogue debating their visions for South Africa.

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