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Urgent

Hurricane Katrina Disaster Relief

American Joint distribution Committee (JDC)

We know that you share the horror that we feel when we see the scenes of devastation in Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama brought on by Hurricane Katrina. Officials fear that the death toll may be as high as 10,000. Damage in the affected areas is expected to be in the billions of dollars. Traditionally, JDC and the JCDR (Jewish Coalition for Disaster Relief which is coordinated by JDC) collect funds and respond to disasters outside of North America. Responses to domestic crises have always been implemented through the Federation system. This disaster is no different. UJC (United Jewish Communities) has taken the lead role for the Federation system, and has set up a special fund that will be used to help Jewish and non-Jewish hurricane survivors. UJC is now planning its response and identifying implementing partners.

If you wish to donate to the **UJC Hurricane Katrina Disaster Relief Fund**, please send your check to:

UJC, Inc. Hurricane Katrina Disaster Relief
P.O. Box 30, Old Chelsea Station, New York, NY 10113

Donations may also be made online at www.ujc.org.

For additional information please call UJC Hurricane Disaster Relief at 877.277.2477.

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Floods destroy Sifrei Torah in Mumbai, India

Send tax-deductible donations to:

Romiel Daniel, Presiding Officer, Indian Jewish Congregation of USA

Indian Jewish Congregation of USA

98-41 64th Road, Apt 1G, Rego Park, NY 11374

www.jewsofindia@yahoo.com Tel: 718-897-8718

The recent floods because of the monsoons in Mumbai on July 26th 2005 left the large industrial city of Mumbai reeling. 39 inches of rain in one day. This downpour of rain caught the people of Mumbai totally unawares. There has been a huge loss of more than 3000 lives and destruction of property running into millions of dollars.

One of the most important synagogues **The Beth-El Synagogue in Panvel, Mumbai** was the worst hit. All the **SIX Sifrei Torah were totally damaged** by the floods along with the prayer books, the Bima, roof and some furniture.

The synagogue at Panvel, India. It was built in 1849 and even today has more than 100 members with their families. However this Synagogue is where most of the Jewish Community in India as well as those outside India from Israel, UK and USA make a pilgrimage. The sole objective of saying prayers in this particular synagogue as well as having the unique Bene Israel EliyaHoo Malida ceremony, an ancient Temple parched grain sacrificial practice, a ceremony of thanksgiving for the peace and happiness of the family and the community.

The high Holydays are approaching and an ancient synagogue being used daily is in jeopardy of not being able to hold services not only for the High Holydays but also the daily and the Sabbath services. Replacing the lost Sifrei Torah is very essential for the continuity of tradition and religious practices.

The "**Indian Jewish Congregation of USA**" based in New York makes this appeal to our fellow citizens and Jews around the world to show your support in reviving this synagogue essential for the continuity of tradition and religious practices. We will make all the necessary arrangements to transport and insure the Sifrei Torah reach Mumbai. This is a matter of utmost urgency. These vital spiritual necessities costing about \$25,000 each are of primary importance.

We need your help, so we can donate Sifrei Torah to the synagogue.

The contributions will go towards purchasing Sifrei Torah that would be sent to 'The Indian Jewish Federation' Mumbai, a reputed Jewish organization in Mumbai, India. They have taken the responsibility for the proper disbursement of funds as also to guarantee the safe deposition of the Sifrei Torah in the Panvel Synagogue. Your help in this matter would be greatly appreciated.

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Events

RE:TURN AGAIN: A High Holy Day WakeUp

THIS SATURDAY NIGHT!!! September 17, 2005; 8pm The Actors Temple, 339 West 47th Street (8th & 9th)

Tickets at the Door: \$15 General Admission/\$10 Students & AT Members

www.storahtelling.org/office@storahtelling.org

KICK OFF 5766 with a call for the soul! Join Storahtelling's Amichai Lau-Lavie, and guest artists as we celebrate our return to The Actors Temple - back by popular demand. Awaken to the music and meaning of Selichot with mystic tales, instrumental interludes and the art of the spoken word. Join us as we adapt an old ritual for a new era and a new year...with Eugene Carr, Galeet Dardashti. Ayelet Gottlieb, Amichai Lau-Lavie, Chana Rothman and Akiva Wharton.

and...DON'T FORGET to start your new year right with Storahtelling at The Actors Temple for a full schedule of High Holy programs and events! Storahtelling: Jewish Ritual Theater Revived! In Residence at the Bronfman Center at New York University 7 East 10th Street, 3rd Floor, New York, NY 10003

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Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Services of the Bene Israel in New York

**From Romiel Daniel The Village Temple
33E, 12th Street, New York, NY 10003
Services are free/Donations are welcome**

The Indian Jewish Community will be conducting the High Holyday Services for the eleventh consecutive year in 2005 as per the Bene Israel liturgy.

The schedule will be as follows:

Rosh Hashanah Eve Monday, October 3rd at 6:15pm

Rosh Hashanah Day Tuesday, October 4th at 8:00am

Yom Kippur Eve (Kol Nidre) Wednesday, October 12th at 5:45pm

Yom Kippur Day Thursday, October 13th at 7:30am

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Fall Jewish Multicultural Programs

Jewish Community Center In Manhattan
334 Amsterdam Avenue at West 76th Street
www.jccmanhattan.org

**The Days of Awe
Thu, Sept 22 8 pm \$15/\$20**

Performed by David Chevan and the Afro-Semitic Experience. The multicultural soul of acclaimed bass player David Chevan, virtuosic pianist Warren Byrd and members of the Afro-Semitic Experience will get you in the spirit of the high holidays. Drawing on the rich traditions of gospel, klezmer, Yourban drumming, niggunim, spirituals and funk, the Afro-Semitic Experience takes on the high holiday liturgy with a unique and soul stirring concept, not to be missed. The Afro-Semitic Experience rocks the house." The Jewish Week

**Ethiopian Sigd Holiday Celebration
Sun, Oct 9 10 am-2:30 pm
\$20 JCC & Chassida Shmella members/\$24 nonmembers**

Don't miss this unique celebration, which will be recreated in New York City for the first time! This holiday, established to commemorate the giving of the Torah and the ancient communal gathering in Jerusalem in the days of the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah, was integral to Jewish observance in Ethiopia. It brought together thousands of Jews, who traveled by foot from throughout Gondar Province to the village of Ambober. Observance included prayer and fasting, as well as a joyous celebration of the covenant between God and Moses on Mt. Sinai. Today, the holiday commemorates the return of Ethiopian Jewry to their ancient homeland. For our celebration, we will gather at the JCC at 10 am to walk as a group to Central Park, led by two Ethiopian Kessoth (rabbis) in the traditional manner. In the park, prayers and Torah readings will be conducted in Gez, the ancient language of Ethiopia. At noon, we will return to the JCC for lunch and a program of Ethiopian/Israeli music. Families and children are welcome. Pre-registration required. Co-sponsored with Chassida Shmella.

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Call for Papers: International Sephardic Journal

ISSN: 1547-5808 Volume 2. No. 2. Summer 2005

<http://sephardicjournal.org/sub.html>

The deadline- September 20, 2005

The International Society for Sephardic Progress is welcoming submissions for its official publication, the International Sephardic Journal, a multi-disciplinary publication featuring scholarly works related to Sephardim (the descendants of the Jews of historic Spain, Portugal, North Africa and the former Ottoman Empire who share common religious and cultural bonds).

The International Sephardic Journal, is the only primarily English language refereed Jewish publication focusing on Sephardic Jewry.

The majority of papers selected for publication are in English, with a limited amount accepted in Castilian, French, and Portuguese.

All interested scholars, professionals, including university students and independent researchers, as well as members of the rabbinate are invited to submit papers. Proposed topics may include, but are not limited to: Sephardic/Mizrahi history, culture, language, religion (halakhot, minhagim), Diaspora, translations, biographies, Sephardic life and experience in the Americas, Europe, Asia or Africa. Topics related to converso descendants (descendants of Anusim / crypto- Jewish populations), as well as Sephardic interaction with non-Jewish communities are also welcome.

In addition, contemporary topics such as modern Sephardic society, politics, literature, religion, psychology, and science related to Sephardim will be considered. The International Sephardic Journal also welcomes first-person memoirs of the Sephardic experience for its "Portals to the Past" section, and book reviews of current publications relating to Sephardic life, culture, or religion.

Submissions may be made by e-mail. Please include name, institutional affiliation (if applicable), address, phone number, e-mail address, paper title, and short abstract in the body of the e-mail. Attach the article, in MS Word format. The deadline for submissions is September 20, 2005. Questions regarding potential submissions are welcome, please email them to: email@isfsp.org

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Recent Articles:

Reuben Greenberg: Hail to the Chief

How a black, Jewish Texan cleaned up an old Confederate city

Michael Ledeen

August 18, 2005

Reuben Greenberg, the longtime (23-plus years) chief of the Charleston, South Carolina, police department, retired on Tuesday. In the words of Charleston Post and Courier reporter David Slade, he "turned the . . . Police Department into a national model. In the process, he became a celebrity and a source of pride for the city . . .

"Reuben Greenberg was undoubtedly the ultimate "man bites dog" story, for what could be more unlikely than a black, Orthodox Jew from Texas transforming a city in the heart of the Confederacy from a crime-ridden center of corruption to a uniquely well-managed place that cracked down on crime at the same time it virtually eliminated police brutality ó and even rudeness? Greenberg told his cops that their job was not to punish (that was up to the courts), but to make arrests, and in order to do that they had to be on good terms with the citizens. Thus, he said early on in his memorable tenure, he would defend a policeman for using "excessive force" to make an arrest, but he would fire anyone who used abusive language with a citizen.

So he put his cops out on the streets, not in cars. They walked, they rode bicycles and horses, and were accessible to "normal people," who might not have wanted to call or visit headquarters. It worked, and Reuben soon became a media celebrity. The Los Angeles Times headlined its profile, "A Black, Jewish, Roller-Skating Cop Brings A New Way to Fight Crime to the Old South," and even 60 Minutes gave him his 20 minutes of fame. He was in great demand by urban police forces looking for solutions to their crime problems, and it may well be that he contributed broadly to the nation-wide drop in crime that we now see across the country. Although he was offered numerous high-profile and high-paying jobs (including, I believe, New York, Washington, and Los Angeles), he was happy and remained in Charleston.

I met him on a trip to South Africa while apartheid still existed; during the trip there were two unforgettable events. The first came in a public meeting. Reuben was on stage with the South African interior minister, who asked Reuben what he thought about the regime's handling of anti-racist demonstrations. Greenberg at first declined to speak, saying it was not proper for him to come to a foreign country and speak publicly about their methods, but the minister insisted, and so Greenberg laid him out. "Your men beat up demonstrators, they deliberately hurt the people for demanding their civil rights. That is not the job of police, and it guarantees that the police will not be able to do their real job, which is protecting the people from criminals. You are doing it entirely wrong, and it turns my stomach." He was never one to mince words, once his opinions were solicited.

The other event came on a Friday night. Reuben and his wife, Sarah, needed to go to the synagogue in Johannesburg, and we went with them. As he approached the entrance, a towering Zulu guard stepped in front of him. "Sorry, sir, you can't go in there." "And why is that?" Greenberg asked mildly. "This place is just for Jewish people, sir." "That's us, we're Jewish." There was no way to bridge that cultural chasm. Nothing could convince him that a black man with a Texas accent - his father was a Russian immigrant who married a black woman in Texas, where Reuben grew up and a similarly black woman were Jewish; he had never seen such a thing, he did not believe what Reuben was saying, and he was going to do his job. But Reuben Greenberg was equally determined to pray on Sabbath eve. So Barbara and I went inside and got the rabbi to come out and give Reuben a brief quiz on Judaism, after which we all went inside and prayed together.

I have long cherished that moment, because it reminded me of the unique nature of Americans (something the multiculturalists often forget, preferring to see us as separate communities living inside a common boundary) and Jews, who have assimilated so well because, like our countrymen, we come in all different colors from all over the world.

Reuben Greenberg is going to rest for a while, but I do not think he will ease into retirement. It isn't his way. He's got advanced degrees, he's been a college professor, and he's one of the most eloquent and charismatic speakers in America. No doubt some institution of higher learning will recognize that Greenberg's a natural for a great university or think-tank. The next generation has as much to learn from him as we have.

Michael Ledeen, an NRO contributing editor, is most recently the author of The War Against the Terror Masters. He is resident scholar in the Freedom Chair at the American Enterprise Institute.

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Carolivia Herron: Finding Answers in Judaism District Author-educator Celebrates Dual Identities

HBy Jacqueline Sternberg
Washington Jewish Week
August 31, 2005

When she was 3 years old, Carolivia Herron witnessed the death of her baby brother – at the hand of a relative, she maintains, although no crime was ever reported. Although she says this terrible thing was "the event of my life," she also says, "It kick-started my career. ... I wrote my first poem at age 4 to try to get a handle on it." And her subsequent quest to grasp the problem of evil led to her puzzling many adults. "Not many adults realized that I read the Bible straight through around age 6 or 7," Herron, 58, says, recalling that her early reading skills were fostered by her father, Oscar, "a brilliant man ... with only a high school education," who used to read Greek classic literature to her as a child. She read both the Christian and Hebrew bibles. "I found most troubling the story of Abraham and Isaac," recalls the District resident and author. "Why would God ask anyone to kill his own son?"

Questioning her Baptist Sunday school teachers, she did not get answers that satisfied her. As she grew older, she developed a great curiosity to meet a Jew, she says, having never known any growing up in Northeast's Mayfair Mansions neighborhood. At 10, she finally met one – a Jewish grocer in the neighborhood. "The other neighborhood children did not like him," Herron says, but she went right up to him and asked, "Have you met Moses?" Her forthright curiosity led to a special relationship between herself and the grocer, whom she describes as the first white person who did not scare her. In fact, she adds, she did not even think of him as white.

In the 1960s, as schools nationwide integrated, Herron met more Jews in junior high and high school when her family moved farther uptown to what had been a predominantly Jewish neighborhood. Herron credits a Jewish school chum for sensitizing her about issues of "otherness" among Jews when he clued her in on how uncomfortable many of the Jewish students were when they heard their new black schoolmates sing Christmas carols. After she went to college at D.C.'s predominantly black Howard University, Herron says she became completely "disenchanted" with her Baptist faith. Still, when protesting students shut the District university down, Herron went on to Eastern Baptist College in Wayne, Pa., to earn a bachelor's degree in English literature. Remaining in Pennsylvania, she later earned two master's degrees in the field of literature and a doctorate in literary theory from the University of Pennsylvania in 1985.

A few years later, Herron took up Judaic studies while a visiting scholar at Massachusetts' Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge and at Newton's Hebrew College. Around this time, she had an epiphany while attending Baptist church services. "I don't belong to this congregation," she found herself thinking. So Herron began studying Judaism under a rabbi to prepare for conversion, completing the process with a bat mitzvah ceremony at Harvard Hillel a year later, in 1994. Now a member of the District's Conservative Tifereth Israel Congregation, Herron says she has found in Judaism more satisfying answers to the questions she has struggled with throughout her life, such as the problem of evil. She says she feels in sync with the notion that people – not God – do evil because of their free will. "And I love the concept of God-wrestling," she says. Instead of meekly accepting God's will, "God wants us to fight with him," Herron says with a certain amount of glee.

Her synagogue activities include serving on its social action committee and welcoming new congregation members who are Jews of

color. That reiterates the message of the "Jewish-Africana" listserv – an online discussion group she created more than a decade ago that "Jews come in all colors." Initially, says Herron, the listserv – with the motto, "We're 100 percent both," black and Jewish – attracted "mostly scholars and mostly African Americans" of Jewish descent from intermarried families. Any conflicts over identity or Jewish-black relations, she says, "have come from outside the group," not within it, where its members accept one another in a welcoming online ambiance dedicated to understanding both cultures. Yet, in its early days, she recalls, "A lot of people joined, not always with the best intentions."

Some gained access to the group in order to harass members and spread messages of intolerance. These people were never Jews, Herron adds, but sometimes ranted about Christianity. Today, says Herron, its members come from across the country, blacks, whites and "even a few Israelis." Dedicated to exploring diversity in Judaism, Herron last month led a class in "Jewish-Africana Midrash" at the Philadelphia-based National Havurah Committee's Summer Institute in Rindge, N.H. She returned home in time to take part in Tifereth Israel's Tisha B'Av services, where she sang a Sephardic version of North African trop, Torah chant, from Morocco, which she taught herself from a CD.

Herron's musical interests are not confined to trop. Last year, she created a libretto for the Boston Landmarks Orchestra, a work titled *Journies of Phillis Wheatley*. Next Tuesday, Herron is set to teach a creative Jewish writing workshop at the Sixth & I Historic Synagogue, through the Jewish Study Center. She also is preparing to teach classic literature this fall at Montgomery College, at its Takoma Park and Rockville campuses. Meanwhile, Herron also does duty on the board for Jews United for Justice, running its text study program, and just became the fiction editor for *Bridges*, a Jewish feminist journal based out of Indiana University. The author has sometimes focused her writings' themes on celebrating diversity, rather than fearing "otherness," a lesson she learned from the Jewish grocer and Jewish students she met as a youngster. Her first, once-controversial, now popular 1997 children's book, *Nappy Hair*, was a joyful paean to a black child's naturally unruly, nappy (kinky) hair. (She based the girl character with the nappy hair on herself.)

Her first novel for adults, *Thereafter Johnnie*, published six years earlier, treated the theme more somberly. In the futuristic novel, the downfall of a black middle-class family in a dying city – Washington, D.C. – showed how the failure to deal with "otherness" leads to "moral decay and destruction," Herron explains. A new fictionalized autobiography she is working on may shed some light, perhaps, on Herron's own epic family history. That history, which she first learned at her great-grandmother's knee – which she had supposed was a "fairy tale" when she first heard it, but has since researched – includes a great-great-great-great-grandmother named Sarah Bat Asher, who was apparently Jewish. That ancestor, from a Mediterranean country, had been abducted by Barbary Coast pirates, escaped, made her way to America in 1805, and settled into the Georgia Sea Islands. Her progeny married into the free blacks, the Geechee people, who lived there.

The story, Herron says, led her to conclude that her ancestors had not been slaves, as she had supposed growing up. She believes it also explains why her Methodist grandmother lit Shabbat-like candles on Friday nights, even though her grandmother herself did not have a firm explanation for why she carried on the custom. Herron explains that although religious customs of the slaves were systematically stamped out by their owners, religious freedom persevered among free blacks like the Geechees and their cultural cousins, the Gullahs of the Carolina islands. In this way, some Jewish practices seem to have trickled down through her family tree. Herron plans to title her forthcoming book *Peacesong*, a rough translation of the author's own first name. "Carol is a song," she says. "Olivia refers to the olive branch of peace."

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Carlos Salas Diaz: Mitzvot in Mexico

By Carlo Remondini
The Jerusalem Post
Jul. 14, 2005

"When I was a child, I was very poor. To eat I yanked out roots from the ground or wild potatoes, whatever I found. And I told myself, 'I have to find a way to become rich.'" Carlos Salas Diaz has accomplished the self-fulfilling prophecy that he made when he was an illiterate shepherd in central Mexico. After immigrating to the United States when he was 19, he invested in various businesses, notably jewelry, which made him a millionaire. But his story would not be remarkable if he had not created in Tijuana, a Mexican city of more than a million people bordering Southern California, an exceptional community of which only a few handfuls exist around the world. Himself a converted Jew, Salas has attracted dozens of people to Judaism, which generally does not seek proselytes. After three decades, his Congregaci n Hebrea de Baja California, now comprising 114 members, almost all converts, remains an object of contention between those who label it a monstrosity and those who behold it as a marvelous jewel.

Along the hill that leads to Calle Amado Nervo 207, on the southeastern section of Tijuana, heaps of rubble alternate with newly built homes covered with stucco and fenced with iron gates. A private home now stands on the site where a sign indicated the presence of an Iglesia de Dios, and just ahead survives an abandoned church surrounded by little shops and an Internet caf . Salas's compound, including the synagogue and living quarters, has been sitting on a quiet corner of this hill since 1975. With its coarse and tall cement

walls hiding the inner courtyard, it looks like any anonymous home in the neighborhood, if it weren't for a huge seven-branched menorah affixed to the building and a blue Star of David atop a high pole.

"The teaching of the Torah should be spread to all mankind; we should share it, not keep it to ourselves," says Salas, now 72 years old, who converted at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles in 1967 and is now planning to build a center for Jewish studies in the area. He is speaking in the half-light of his office overflowing with plaques, photographs, statuettes and commemorative paintings reproducing him at various stages of his life. "When I began to build this synagogue, I did not tell anybody what it was for. I bought and built it all with my own money," he continues, hardly hiding his pride behind his light moustache, thick lips, and dark eyes that sparkle when he indulges in a long laugh. A refined exuberance emanates from his slow and controlled movements, stout figure, and confident personality, while a seven-branched menorah pin on his lapel is the only outward sign of his Jewishness.

"I cannot sit in my living room and see people starving. I prefer to use my money to fight poverty and crime," says Salas, whose reason to bring Judaism to Tijuana goes beyond swelling the ranks of the 40,000 Mexican Jews and adding another piece to the mosaic of religious groups established in the city, among which already exists a congregation of born Jews, the Orthodox Centro Social Israelita. Tijuana has to him an improbable appeal: it is a wretched metropolis stricken by poverty and degradation, where he can directly affect personal and social development; a city touching two immensely different countries where, far from established values and customs, what is elsewhere unimaginable becomes all too likely. "People born in our congregation graduate from college and are doctors, lawyers, architects, engineers. We have already seen a tremendous change," says Salas, who awards scholarships to the young generation in the congregation's name. He opens his synagogue to everybody who wants to join, keeping all services free and cash donations voluntary, boasting, "There is no other congregation that does not charge monthly dues, where teachers work for free, and the cantor works for free. In California there are congregations that closed for lack of money. Here, thank God, nobody has to pay."

Another powerful motive played a part in choosing Tijuana as a favorable ground for teaching Judaism. As Salas recalls with a wave of emotion brightening his eyes, "I would go to Tijuana and see that there were many marranos [swines] because many family names were from Spain." "Swines" was the name that Spaniards gave to the Jews who, to avoid either death or expulsion from Ferdinand and Isabella's kingdom in 1492, officially converted to Catholicism, but secretly practiced Judaism. "My maternal great-grandmother and grandmother came from Spain. I don't know the city. They were descendants of the marranos," he says, savoring the term as a mark of pride. It was on this premise that Salas set out on his mission to take "hidden Jews" out of the closet. Since the late 1960s, when Salas began advertising his Bible classes in local newspapers, his followers have been led to him by a string of family members, friends and acquaintances. Their common predicament was "no tener rumbo," not having any course? like ships that had lost their direction and sailed aimlessly across the seas. They fit various portraits, from the superficial and dissatisfied Catholic to the spiritual searcher, like Rafael "Gamaliel" Hernandez, who passed from a stint in the Catholic seminary to Buddhism and Islam, before "finding all the religions in Judaism."

One exceptional story displays a desperate need for paternal authority and guidance: Francisco "Israel" Madero, a Cora Indian from the central state of Nayarit, had a dream which led him, 12 years later, to recognize Salas as the guide revealed to him by God. "When I was 15, my father died," relates Madero, who now lives in an apartment adjacent to the synagogue. "The same day that my father died, I thought about what I was going to do, who was going to teach me. I fell asleep and had a dream. A voice proclaimed 'He is going to teach you' and I saw Rabbi Salas's face. I didn't know him. It also told me, 'Go to Tijuana.'" Eventually, Madero moved to Tijuana, where years later somebody gave him Rabbi Salas's address. "I was 27 years old when I met the rabbi. I knocked on the door, Rabbi Salas came to open it, and I recognized his face. It was the same face from the dream!" As for the crypto-Jews who were Salas's main target, Zulema Chavira Ruiz is among those eager to boast Jewish ancestors. She is one of the few members of the congregation who speaks fluent English, having attended boarding school in Hollywood in her youth.

"My grandmother and great-grandmother came from the Basque country [northern Spain]. My grandmother was blonde and blue-eyed," she says with captivating girlish friendliness, her glowing pink lipstick matching her fair complexion. "Their last name was Irigoyen. Later, I learned from a book that that name was Jewish." Since her family did not share this belief, a quarrel ensued when in 1984 she joined the first group who converted: "'Not even ten horses will take me away from this,' I said to my husband and children. They were very surprised. I told them, 'We have Jewish blood,' and they said, 'No, we don't.'"

SINCE DECEMBER 25, 1984, when 22 men, women, and children immersed in the ocean's waters off Rosarito after having been successfully examined by a panel of three rabbis from the United States, Salas's followers have always converted in large groups. Unlike the first time, they have since completed the last and official step toward conversion by driving the stretch of freeway that connects the unpromising slopes of Tijuana to the green hills of Bel Air in western Los Angeles. Here, on the University of Judaism's small and spartan campus, a bet din of three Conservative rabbis belonging to the Rabbinical Assembly evaluates the sincerity and knowledge of the candidates, before men go on to circumcision and all to the ritual immersion in the mikvah. Despite this Conservative connection, the congregation is not affiliated to any movement.

Rabbi Edward M. Tenenbaum, the Rabbinical Assembly's chairman of conversion affairs for Southern California since 1983, has participated in many of these panels. "In Salas's community, there are families who convert. Generally, there is a leader, others who followed, and friends of these," says Tenenbaum, an energetic man in his eighties with a relaxed demeanor. "He has brought many to us. He is a good businessman," he concludes with a laugh. Congregación Hebrea de Baja California now embraces three generations of Jews, who are separated by more than the distance of a physiological generational gap. It took Elba de Sotelo, who joined Salas in the 1970s, 11 years before she felt ready to convert. "A friend of mine invited me to take Salas's classes and my husband and I came

and stayed," she says. "I liked his lectures. He taught us to have direct communication with God and to believe in ourselves." A generation younger than De Sotelo, Donald "Abraham" Martinez had only two years of formal study before he converted in 1996 at 22, together with Veronica "Lea," who soon became his wife, but he had already had 10 years of Jewish practice. "The Torah makes me happy. Judaism is not a religion, but a way of life. I feel more obligated: to be a Jew is a responsibility," he says. His small sons have effortlessly acquired by birth the identity that the first generation attained only after struggling between two, or more, faiths.

WHILE THEIR parents' and grandparents' experience grows increasingly distant and forgotten, Salas's arduous search for identity, which began in the mountains of central Mexico, is worth telling. Carlos Vicente Salas Diaz was born on January 22, 1933 in an isolated home in the mountains of the state of Zacatecas. The nearest town was Fresnillo, known for its gold and silver mines. He was the youngest of seven siblings, some of whom died young. "I was fascinated by history. I always looked for my roots," says Salas, who did not go to school and did not meet his father, who had a new family, until he was nine years old. He lived with his mother and grandmother, tended the sheep and ate roots. In 1952, after attending primary school in Fresnillo and high school in Mexico City, where he worked for Jewish shopkeepers, Salas moved to Buffalo, New York, to join his brother and work as an apprentice mechanic. Drafted into the US Army during the Korean War, he served in Alaska, while setting up his first enterprise, a washing-and-drying business for soldiers. Back to Buffalo, he also worked as a reporter for the Hispanic press. "Journalism was part of my restlessness," says Salas, who went to Cuba during the revolution to interview Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. In Cuba he also met the first of his three wives, who all converted to Judaism and gave him nine children, to which he has added an adopted son. Five of them, who live in Tijuana, attend his congregation.

For a few years, Salas studied at the now-defunct United Methodist Seminary of Buffalo. He now maintains that this was an initial step toward Judaism, wanting to learn only the Old Testament, however startling this justification may sound. At the Methodist seminary, and later at the University of Judaism, he took the courses to become a pastor, or rabbi, but he was never ordained: "I didn't want to be labeled. I didn't want to be ordained in any movement. Who ordained Moses and the prophets?" In December 1960, Salas moved with his family to Los Angeles, where he felt at home because of its strong Mexican community. When he enrolled at the University of Judaism, he was a successful businessman who flaunted his wealth by riding to his Beverly Hills office in a chauffeured limousine. By the time he converted, five years later, he had got rid of his limousine and taken on the name "Samuel." Of his several trips to Israel he says, "I feel happy. It is a great privilege," while its conflicting political situation leaves him clueless: "I am a religious man. I don't have any opinion. I let the politicians take care of that." But his transformation was not complete until he began going regularly to Tijuana to visit his mother: here, in the bleakness of a Mexican border town, he found the most receptive audience to Judaism.

However happy Salas may be teaching the Torah in Tijuana, he remains restless. He keeps looking for his identity, digging madly in his childhood to find a logical beginning to what he is today. To grasp the extent of his search, one might look at the articles in the San Diego and Los Angeles press, which initially portrayed him as a Catholic gradually steering toward Judaism through the intermediary step of Protestantism, and afterward as a late descendant of conversos (Jews who practiced a mock conversion), while his immediate family, being Catholic, gave him a very superficial religious education. Nowadays, he has definitely established his identity as a direct descendant of crypto-Jews from both his maternal and paternal side, although the latter was, like the majority of Mexicans and himself, mestizo, that is, the product of intermarriage between Spaniards and the native population. He travels to Belmonte, on the mountains of northern Portugal near the Spanish border, where in 1917 an exceptional crypto-Jewish community was discovered; he is eager to find his origins there and confirmation that he has always been a Jew. Extending this belief to most of his congregation, he says, "The majority are conversos, but they don't have any proof of it. The minority are converts."

Despite his fascination with crypto-Judaism, Salas has maintained his acceptance of conversions, and his "factory" of Jews remains open for business as usual. Unlike most rabbis, whose fate resides in the hands of the congregation's board liable to hire and fire them, he stands in his arena as the sole owner and ruler, even if charming and benign. By shouldering a large part of the responsibility to financially support the synagogue, he has obviously decreased the congregation's weight on any decision. "They cannot fire me, but I'm not a dictator," he answers. "If someone asks me something, I show them the Torah." It is not a coincidence that most of the proselyte communities all over the world, from the Abayudaya of Uganda to the peasants of San Nicandro in southern Italy and the Incas of Trujillo in Peru, are the product of a spontaneous adherence to Judaism influenced by a strong and charismatic personality who is, like their followers, a convert. The story is the same: One day, he (it is always a he) begins studying a book, a Protestant Old Testament, and a new world opens in front of his eyes. Donato Manduzio, the leader of the San Nicandro villagers who practiced Judaism under Fascist rule and left en masse for Israel in the late 1940s, clung to his newfound light in the most unorthodox ways, relying on his visions and dreams, which he considered direct revelations by God, to guide his undisciplined followers with an iron fist. The displeasure and self-righteousness of the rabbi who questioned him about his methods is the same that part of the Jewish world feels toward any charismatic figure who, out of their sheer power and personality, creates a Jewish community out of the blue. Salas, in his own unorthodox ways, has walked down the same path. However, he has closely observed Passover's main commandment that every Jew in their own personal life must re-enact the history of the redemption from slavery to freedom. By delivering himself from poverty and a faith that he did not feel his own, he believed he could play the patriarch Moses for others as well. After almost 40 years, this role does not tire him. Sitting relaxed at a restaurant in Tijuana, a city that he has found awash with people who react against their hopelessness and ask themselves the question of their identity, he cannot help exhorting, "B sqaese. Encu ntrase. S lgase. Look for yourself. Find yourself. Go out of yourself."

<http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1121335620195&p=1111893688911>

Romiel Daniel: Indian Jew takes reins in Rego Park

New York Daily News
August 20, 2005

Every Saturday for two years, Romiel Daniel and his family walked more than a mile from their home in Rego Park, Queens, to attend Sabbath services at an Orthodox synagogue in Forest Hills. Then, one cold day he decided to check out the Conservative synagogue one block from his home, the Rego Park Jewish Center.

There, Daniel found a mission: He just celebrated his first anniversary as president of the congregation. He is its cantor and, because the synagogue has been without a rabbi for 19 months, often leads worship services.

That is not what surprises many people, including Jews, when they first meet Daniel. The surprise is that he is an Indian Jew. "A lot of people never knew that there were Indians who are Jews," he said this week, when he issued an appeal on behalf of Jews in Mumbai, which until eight years ago was called Bombay and is where he was born 63 years ago. "They think we're all converts, but we're not."

The appeal was issued by Jews of India, which Daniel heads, to raise funds to replace two torahs lost in a recent monsoon that devastated the city. In all, six torahs in the Beth-El Synagogue of Panvel, a suburb of Mumbai, were destroyed in the flooding, and Daniel said members desperately need new torahs in time for the coming High Holy Days.

The Rego Park synagogue, which has 293 members, mostly East European, occupies most of his spare time, but his main job is being director of a lingerie import company in midtown Manhattan. When he assumed the presidency last summer, it made him the first Indian-born Jew to head a U.S. synagogue.

He is a member of Bene Israel, by far the largest of three Indian Jewish groups, with about 60,000 members, including 300 or so in the United States, about 1,000 in Canada, about 5,000 in India, and most of the rest in Israel. The other two groups are the Cochins, now down to 16 members, all in the Cochin area of India, and the Baghdadis, with about 250 members, living in Britain, Australia, Canada and elsewhere.

Their histories in India go back 2,000 or so years with the arrival of Jews, starting with the Cochins, who were fleeing the persecution of King Antiochus of Syria - the Jewish revolt against him is celebrated today as Chanukah. The Bene Israel arrived at about the same time, when Daniel's ancestors were shipwrecked near Bombay while fleeing Antiochus. The Baghdadis arrived in the late 18th century from Syria and Iraq. All are considered Oriental Jews. There are a few differences between Western and Oriental Jews. Before entering a synagogue, for example, Oriental Jews remove their shoes. They eat rice at Passover instead of matzo, and wear all white on Yom Kippur.

For the past decade, Daniel has led Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services in the Bene Israel tradition, with Oriental melodies, at the Village Temple, on the lower East Side of Manhattan. For most Indian Jews, this is the closest thing to a reunion.

About a year after he joined the synagogue, in 1996, Daniel was asked to serve as cantor. He had sung for years, at services in his homeland and Mauritius, in the Indian Ocean, where he once worked. He is now a full-fledged cantor, trained at Yeshiva University in upper Manhattan. "Oriental melodies for prayers are getting lost, and it is important to preserve them," said Daniel, who has recorded a CD of Bene Israel songs for Yom Kippur, the Sabbath, and other important holidays.

Daniel, who is married and with two sons, first arrived in the United States to study chemistry at Brandeis University, in Waltham, Mass., in 1964. He came back for good in 1994. His interests include badminton - in 1981 and 1985 he won bronze medals while competing for India at the Maccabi Games, the Jewish equivalent of the Olympics.

Asked over coffee in a fast-food restaurant at Fifth Ave. and 33rd St. if it is possible to find kosher curry in New York, Daniel laughed and said, "Sure, about a block or two from here."

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Yemenite Jews accepted as Peace Bridges by NY Arabs

Ephraim Isaac

8.24.05

Yemenite artisans, singers, and dancers form the cultural powerhouses of Israel and modern Jewish world. Even more outstanding is their contribution to the revival of Jewish learning and religious practices. They preserved traditions, lost in all other Jewish communities, such as Torah chanting in ancient Hebrew phonetic and with Aramaic-Targum. The largest number and most important Hebrew manuscripts found anywhere in the last hundred years are Qumran Scrolls, Cairo Genizah, and Yemenite. Yemenite now comprise almost 25% of Hebrew manuscripts in libraries worldwide and about 50% in American public, private, and university libraries.

The late Prof. Shlomo D. Goitein described Yemenites as the most Jewish of all Jews. "Yet Yemenite Jews also have strong affinity with Arabic Culture. They speak and sing Jewish songs at home in Arabic. They can thus also become a bridge between Arabs and Jews and contribute to furthering the cause of peace in the Middle East. The New York Arab leadership recently recognized this fact when they singled out Yemenite Jews to be invited to and included in Mayor Bloomberg's breakfast for the Arab community.

Yemenite Jews appreciate highly the Arab leadership's invitation as well as the consent of the Mayor's office for this inclusion per the desire of the Arab community leaders. Indeed, Yemenite Jews were touched to have received the invitation from those community leaders who genuinely felt we are culturally one people even if we have different religions. Yemenite Jews and the Arabic peoples have a great deal in common: given the opportunity, we believe, Yemenite Jews can be a bridge for peace between our two peoples in this country and the Middle East. We hope the American Jewish community will note how the Arab leaders feel about Yemenite Jews and strengthen their role as bridge-builders for peace between Jews and Arabs.

Featured Articles List

Exclusive: Iraqi Jews to Demand Compensation for Billions in Lost Assets

By Orly Halpern

The Jerusalem Post

August 31, 2005

Leaders of the Iraqi Jewish community from around the world are to meet soon in London to plan a strategy to demand compensation for lost assets, potentially in the billions of dollars, from the Iraqi government, The Jerusalem Post has learned. Two meetings have been scheduled for September 18 and 19 to discuss the demands of the Jews from Arab countries and to bring to the forefront a political swap. Iraqi-born Jew Mordechai Ben-Porat, chairman of Israel's Center for the Heritage of Babylonian Jewry, organized the first meeting. "The Jews left behind hospitals, schools, cemeteries, shopping markets," said Ben-Porat, who had been a leader of the Zionist underground movement in Iraq from its inception in 1942 until he immigrated to Israel in 1945.

From 1949 to 1951 he worked with the Mossad to take care of Jewish immigration. During that period, he collected a list of the Jewish communal property in Baghdad and Hila. He would not reveal how much he believed the properties were worth, "before sitting at the negotiation table." Some have estimated the value of the properties to be billions of dollars. The goal of the project is political and for that reason, Professor Hesker Haddad of Jews from Arab Countries (WOJAC) maintains support for the cause. "It will help Israel in the peace negotiations," he said. "The idea is to make an exchange. Arab countries will not compensate Jews who left Iraq and Israel will not compensate the Palestinian refugees."

The Iraqi Jewish community was among the largest Jewish Diaspora communities in the Arab world, numbering some 140,000, but

most of the community left Iraq between 1950 and 1952, after the creation of the State of Israel. They left behind homes, businesses and large pieces of land. Most of those assets were frozen, some were taken by the government and some were sold. Ben-Porat is fighting for the communal property.

That second meeting organized by Stanley Urman, an American non-Iraqi and director of Jews for Justice from Arab Countries (JJAC), will join together Jewish leaders from 16 Arab countries who will plan an international media advocacy campaign for the Jews who left Arab countries as refugees set to begin in March 2006.

"We want to collect historical narratives of mass violations of human rights and record losses of communal and private property," said Urman. "Without this documentation we won't be able to credibly assert the rights of Jews displaced from Arab countries." However Haddad, originally from Iraq and now a US citizen, told the Post that he did not expect the Iraqi government to listen to them. "I don't think anything will come of it." He explained that many of those invited had not wanted to come and that he was going because he was the head of the organization.

While he does not think the meeting is the best next step, he supports the plan to document the properties of Jews left in Arab countries and has set up a website out of his own money to assist those who want to take part in the endeavour. Ben-Porat also wants to demand that the Iraqi government fix up the graves of Jewish prophets around Iraq. "We know the tombs are in very bad shape," said Ben-Porat and claimed he had the photos and videos to prove it. He asserted that large plots of land near the grave of the Prophet Ezekiel in the city of Chifel belong to the Jews. The group also plans to demand that Iraqi synagogues and cemeteries be cared for. "There were 53 synagogues in Baghdad," said Ben-Porat. Some have been rented by Iraqis who still pay their rent to an old Jewish woman who is the accountant of the Jewish community of 16 people in Iraq.

The group, said Ben-Porat, hoped to send a delegation of Iraqi-Jews to Iraq to formally submit their demands. If so, Ben-Porat would not attend. "I won't go, I'm Israeli," he said. According to him, the group will try not "to embarrass" the Iraqi government. "We want to do demand the rights of the Jews of Iraq in a humanistic way, without getting the Iraqi government angry," said Ben-Porat. The Ministry of Justice in Israel fully backs the efforts of both WOJAC and JJAC whose leaders are in contact with their officials. "Every Jew who has left Iraq has a right to demand from the government of Iraq for their full rights," said Jean-Claude Niddam, Head of Legal Assistance at the Ministry of Justice and the Head of the Department for the Rights of the Jews from Arab Countries. "Today we are giving moral support," he said, "but I think that the Iraqi Jews will ask for more support from the Israeli government, and they will find an attentive ear."

This article can also be read at: <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull&cid=1125368484967&p=1111893688901>

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A New Museum for Ethiopian Jews

JTA Email Edition
15 July 2005

A museum focusing on Ethiopian Jewish culture and heritage will be built in the Israeli city of Rehovot. Ha'aretz reported Wednesday that the museum, which will cost some \$4.5 million, will include a model Ethiopian village and a memorial to Ethiopian Jews who died in Sudan on their way to Israel. "We view the conservation of the past as very important and believe the museum will attract young people and adults alike," Rehovot Mayor Shuki Forer said.

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Despite Cabinet pledge, Aliyah of Falash Mura Still Moving Slowly

By Rachel Pomerance
JTA email Edition
July 19, 2005

The fingers may be pointing in different directions, but they signal the same thing a delay in hastening Ethiopian Jewish immigration to Israel. The Israeli government has yet to meet its goal of doubling the immigration rate this summer of Falash Mura, Ethiopians who have returned to Judaism after their ancestors converted to Christianity. The operation, which insiders say should begin in the fall, has the full support of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, who earlier this year called for doubling Falash Mura immigration to 600 a

month, with the aim of bringing the roughly 20,000-strong population to Israel in two-and-a-half years. But sources close to the process say key legislators have stonewalled the relocation effort, failing to complete the inspection of eligible immigrants, make a deal with the Ethiopian government, or draw up a budget.

"The holdup is due to conscious or unconscious inefficiency in the Ministry of Interior," said Stephen Hoffman, the president of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland and a past president of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group of the North American Jewish federation system. "The government has been reluctant to do this altogether, and it's only because the prime minister is so clear in his belief that it's the right thing to do that it's moving forward," Hoffman said.

The Falash Mura have found champions in the UJC and its overseas partner, the Jewish Agency for Israel, which runs Zionist-education programs worldwide and handles immigration and absorption in Israel.

The UJC's board of trustees voted last month to raise \$160 million over three years for Falash Mura aliyah and the continued integration of Ethiopians already in Israel. Some board members expressed concern about raising the money, but the group committed to make its best efforts to fund the project. The Israeli government is estimating that it will cost some \$700 million to absorb the new immigrants. While the Jewish Agency is planning for 20,000 new immigrants, the Interior Ministry anticipates only 13,000.

"There is an argument between the government and the Jewish Agency," said Gilad Heimann, the media adviser to Interior Minister Ophir Pines-Paz, who heads the interministerial committee on the Falash Mura. Heimann told JTA that thousands of Falash Mura have already made aliyah, which accounts for the discrepancy between the two numbers. In any case, Heimann said, the current delay stems from an Ethiopian government request to postpone the plan because of unrest surrounding local elections in May. "The situation there is unstable, and they asked us to wait. We don't have any choice but to do what they asked us to do, because without their cooperation we can do nothing," Heimann said.

Joseph Feit, a past president of the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry, rejected that rationale. "If after six months Ethiopia has yet to receive Israel's written proposal, how can Ethiopia reasonably be blamed?" he said. Heimann said Pines-Paz is scheduled to go to Ethiopia on Aug. 8. He will be joined by representatives from the Immigration and Absorption Ministry and the Jewish Agency to sign a deal with the Ethiopian government to double the rate of Falash Mura immigration. Heimann was optimistic that immigration would speed up beginning in September. With more than 2,000 Falash Mura already cleared for relocation, the process is ready to begin. The funding needed for the project in 2005 isn't substantial.

But Mike Rosenberg, the Jewish Agency's director general for immigration and absorption, thinks it won't be so simple. For example, checking immigrants' eligibility is a painstaking process, he said. "You're talking about a country that has no documents, and these people have to prove that they are who they say they are," Rosenberg said. That requires formal interviews with friends and neighbors of a prospective immigrant family.

Additionally, "most of the ministers in the government are pretty much opposed to this," he said, since they suspect there will be no end to the number of Ethiopians who want to move to Israel. Many ministers also feel that the federation system and the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry have burdened Israel with a tremendous task and aren't raising enough funds for the effort, he said. If the action of UJC's leadership is any indication, Israel might not have to worry.

The UJC chairman, Robert Goldberg of Cleveland, is matching his annual campaign gift of \$900,000 with a donation of equal size to the Falash Mura operation, and he is asking others to do so as well. Goldberg said the UJC is just beginning to roll out fund-raising plans for the program but that he has faith in Israel's ability to follow through. "If Israel needs time to get all the ministries onboard, then great. But the prime minister is committed to bringing the Falash Mura to Israel," he said. The UJC leaders were in Israel for the Jewish Agency's board of governors meetings last month with Sharon, who described how the Falash Mura operation would finish the job begun by earlier mass Ethiopian immigrations, Goldberg said. "As long as the prime minister is out front on this and is a primary mover - and the federations feel it's something important - we're more than happy to support the prime minister," he said.

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Groups host weekend in Argentina for needy, unaffiliated Jewish families

Florencia Arbiser

Aug. 17, 2005

JTA

BUENOS AIRES - Mothers and fathers are seated in a circle, enjoying a sing-along, their enthusiastic harmonies carrying across the grassy fields of the vast park dotted with barbecue grills, tiny cabins and soccer fields. Nearby, their children are happily building towers out of plastic blocks. A few minutes later, the 19 families gather at long tables for a picnic lunch, everyone laughing, talking and relaxing on a carefree afternoon. This was the leisurely Sunday schedule at an all-expenses-paid vacation weekend in late July,

a joint initiative of Argentina's Jewish institutions with a unique objective: to give impoverished Jewish families at risk of assimilation a meaningful Jewish experience.

The Jewish Agency for Israel, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, BAMA ñ The Jewish Educator's House, the Tzedakah Foundation, the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association, and the youth group Betar Argentina organized the getaway for families that currently receive assistance from the Jewish social services system but are unaffiliated with any Argentine Jewish institution.

Most of the families involved belong to the former middle class, which was impoverished after the 2001 Argentine economic collapse. Only a few of the parents have any Jewish education; most of their children attend public schools. Few observe any Jewish holidays.

Despite the South American nation's economic rebound, some 40,000 of Argentina's 250,000 or so Jews currently live below the poverty level, which is defined as a monthly income of less than \$300 for a family of four.

The families, talkative and laughing, traveled by bus to Las Clavelinas, a vacation complex in Escobar, 27 miles north of Buenos Aires. For most parents in the group, a vacation weekend outside Buenos Aires - free of cooking, cleaning, scraping together money to buy groceries and wondering how to pay bills ó was a long-forgotten experience. "I almost forgot what leisure meant. I ate sitting down. I cannot recall if it ever happened to me before," Dora Teitelbaum, 40, a kindergarten teacher and single mother, told JTA. "Twice in my life I tried to participate in Jewish institutions, but I couldn't fit," admitted Teitelbaum, whose parents preferred that she and her brother not get involved in Jewish centers. "They feared that we would move to Israel."

Teitelbaum's children - Gonzalo, 13, Keila, 11, and Julian, 4 - attend public school, but she would like them to get involved with Judaism, too, she says. Thanks to a neighbor's helpful advice, the family is currently receiving the equivalent of \$63 a month from the Jewish social services system. Teitelbaum had also been receiving funds to cover utility bills, but she decided to stop accepting that help a few months ago. "I obtained a job as a substitute kindergarten teacher. I can try doing without that help so someone else can receive it," she explained. Her monthly income is the equivalent of \$65.

That morning the adults had gathered in discussion circles to share with each other their feelings about the weekend. "Belonging" was the word that was repeated most often. Two social psychologists who helped to coordinate the activities, Natan Sonis and Patricia Oppel, described the experience as very emotional for many of the adults. During one of the game activities on Saturday, the adults were asked to recognize prominent people pictured on two different poster boards: one showed well-known Jewish figures, the other, popular figures. While the Argentine soccer player Diego Maradona was identified by the participants, the former Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion was not.

For the younger program coordinators helping out at Las Clavelinas, getting the children to enjoy playing games was a challenge. "At the beginning, the children just jumped anxiously but were unable to play together, to understand the rules of the games. But today, they worked it out. The change was so sudden," Gustavo Rapaporte, the BAMA coordinator, told JTA. "When asked what they usually do on weekends, most children said ðl get bored." I am sure this one was a different weekend," said Rapaporte.

Organizers are determined that the vacation weekend will not be remembered as an isolated experience, Karina Rivlin, the Jewish Agency's director of youth projects, told JTA. They intend to enroll younger participants in the Jewish youth groups and eventually assign the parents to Jewish community centers, according to their profiles. Betar Argentina was the first youth group to participate in this pilot vacation-weekend experience.

Before farewells were said, the relaxed and happy group toasted each other with refreshing juice drinks, sang a thank-you song created especially for the coordinators, and exchanged phone numbers. "I made new friends," Shilda, an 11-year-old girl, told JTA enthusiastically.

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In Brazil, Gay and Lesbian Jews Struggle for Jewish Acceptance

By Marcus Moraes JTA email Edition August 1, 2005

More than 3 million gays, lesbians and their supporters many dressed in lavish Carnival costumes and waving rainbow-colored flags paraded in Brazil's two largest cities earlier this year to celebrate gay pride. Several gay Jews attended, but no Stars of David or chai symbols, the Hebrew letters for life, were seen on flags, T-shirts or floats. "We don't want overexposure in the media," said Ari Teperman, the founder of Brazil's only openly gay and lesbian Jewish group, known by its acronym, JGBR. "We are not currently engaged in the fight for civil rights, but rather for Jewish identity," he added.

The group was founded in 1999 by a man known as Akiva Bronstein. Only a few years later, Bronstein unveiled his actual identity as Ari Teperman. "It was my code name when I was still in the closet," he confessed. Today Teperman is JGBR's main face. His resume includes interviews for news magazines, Mexican television and G Magazine, the country's major gay magazine. Teperman has long

been active in Jewish Web discussion groups, including Pletzale, Brazil's largest Jewish Web forum. "Despite being the only openly gay member of the group, he gained the respect and friendship of several participants. I would always tell Bronstein to reveal his identity," Gustavo Erlichman, the founder and moderator of Pletzale, told JTA. "By adopting a pseudonym, he became a victim of self-hatred," he added.

Affiliated with the World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews: Keshet Ga'avah, JGBR was born as an online forum for Jewish men and women to talk about their homosexuality and their struggles to fit into Brazil's Jewish community. Of its 320 members, there are 90 active participants, said Teperman. Most members are male; ages vary from 18 to 60. How to reconcile homosexuality with Judaism and how the various streams of Judaism relate to homosexuality are among the major concerns of the group. Gay and lesbian Jews in Brazil had their first "off-line" experience of social exposure at the Conference of the Jewish Communities of the Americas, held in May 2004.

The event, which drew Reform and Conservative Jews from across Latin America, took place in Sao Paulo, which is not only Brazil's largest city, but also home to half of Brazil's 120,000 Jews. "It was a milestone for gay Jews in Brazil. Somehow we managed to touch the audience in a human and lovely way about our right to a Jewish identity. Also it opened the doors to more dialogue with the Jewish family," Teperman told JTA.

Estimating that Jews have the same percentage of gays and lesbians as the general population does, Teperman said some 10 percent of Brazilian Jews, or 12,000 people, are homosexual. However, being gay is still tough for Artur Feighelstein, 43, an architect living in Rio de Janeiro.

"Jewish culture values the traditional family very much. It expects from every Jewish boy to marry a nice Jewish girl and have children as fast as possible," he said. "Homosexuality is a much greater taboo within the Jewish family. A Jewish parent is still not able to picture his son or daughter making up a traditional family without getting married." For religious families, he added, it's even worse, since certain biblical passages are seen as prohibiting homosexuality. Nineteen-year-old D. agreed. He didn't want to give his name because his family doesn't know about his sexual orientation. He attends Beit Lubavitch, Rio's largest Orthodox synagogue. In an e-mail interview, D. said he thinks he'd have trouble if he came out of the closet.

"Brazilian men are expected to be macho. Jewish boys are expected to marry Jewish girls. An Orthodox Jewish male is expected to thank God for not making him a woman. I hate all these religious and social morays but I stick to them because I can't live away from my family." Dani, a 25-year-old lesbian who asked that only her first name be used, is frustrated by her inability to live a public Jewish life. "I'm not free inside a synagogue," she said. JGBR is not a religious group. "We don't intend to preach Judaism for gay Jews. Our goal is to promote social inclusion in the Jewish community," Teperman stressed.

According to him, only two out of more than 100 Brazilian synagogues both of them liberal openly welcome gays. One of them is Rio de Janeiro's Congregacao Judaica do Brasil led by Conservative Rabbi Nilton Bonder, where Teperman was once invited to lecture. The other is Sao Paulo's Congregacao Israelita Paulista led by Reform rabbi Henry Sobel and co-led by a team of Conservative rabbis. CIP is Latin America's largest synagogue, serving some 2,000 families. For CIP rabbi Alexandre Leone, the 2004 conference definitely opened the doors for gay Jews at CIP. Actually there is no organized project, but we are concerned and sensitive to welcoming gay Jew," Leone told JTA.

Leone leads the Friday evening service, Kabbalat Shabbat Neshama, where gays are invited to participate more actively, including taking part in the minyan. "Each one is welcome and valued without labels," Leone added. Teperman and his non-Jewish partner, Ray Ferro, attend the Shabbat service at CIP together. Some 10 other openly gay Jews join in. "There has never been such a visible group of gay Jews like JGBR in Brazil. We're pioneers," Teperman said.

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A Building Mikvahs in India for Bnei Menashe

Arutz Sheva Israel National News

Jul 21, 2005 / 14 Tammuz 5765

www.israelnationalnews.com/news.php3?id=86248

For the first time, a group claiming descent from a Lost Tribe of Israel will soon have their own kosher mikvahs (Jewish ritual baths) built with the approval of Israel's Chief Rabbinate. At the request of Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, construction of two mikvahs has recently begun for the Bnei Menashe community of northeastern India. The project is being undertaken by Shavei Israel a Jerusalem-based organization that reaches out and assists "lost Jews" seeking to return to the Jewish people.

The Bnei Menashe, who reside in the Indian states of Mizoram and Manipur near the border with Burma, claim descent from the tribe of Manasseh, one of the ten tribes exiled from the Land of Israel by the Assyrians over 2,700 years ago. Some 800 of them have made aliyah over the past decade thanks to Shavei Israel. Earlier this year, on March 30, Rabbi Amar decided to formally recognize

the Bnei Menashe as "descendants of Israel", and he agreed to send a Beit Din (rabbinical court) to India to convert the remaining 7,000 members of the community, thereby enabling them to make aliyah as well.

As part of his decision, the Chief Rabbi asked Shavei Israel to build mikvahs in India, which are used as part of the conversion process. The organization hired an Israeli architect who specializes in the construction of mikvahs, and he prepared detailed plans and blueprints, which were then shown to Rabbi Amar and received his personal stamp of approval. Recently, Shavei Israel Chairman Michael Freund sent the architect and a rabbi to India to oversee and implement the construction of the mikvahs, which are slated for completion within the next few months.

"The financial and logistical challenges are simply enormous," Freund said, noting that each mikvah alone will cost tens of thousands of dollars and requires an array of special materials such as chemical sealants, plumbing and heating. "But we are determined to complete this task. Once the mikvahs in India are ready, it will then be possible for the Chief Rabbinate to go ahead and send a Beit Din there to begin the process of converting the Bnei Menashe. "By facilitating their return to the Jewish people," Freund added, "we will not only be restoring a lost tribe of Israel to our people ñ we will be strengthening the Jewish state and fulfilling the Zionist vision of bringing back our lost brethren."

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What the Chinese Discovered about Tefilin

From Michelle Stein-Evers Frankl
Email 7.19.05

I don't know why this happened to me, but it's a fact that stuff comes my way; I went to Tel Aviv to visit my father and someone there asks, "Have you heard about T'fillin?" I asked, "What are you talking about?" and she tells me that her friend has an article from the Chinese Journal of Medicine written about T'fillin. Right away my curiosity was aroused and I had her immediately bring me the article - and when I got it, I saw something unbelievably amazing!!

Who of us doesn't know about Chinese Acupuncture? The Chinese discovered the medical treatment using needles to heal when they are inserted at certain points in the body. The Chinese have mapped out and named all the points of the body du 24 du 70 du 23, and so on. And the Chinese Journal of Medicine - to which everyone important in the field of Acupuncture subscribes - published an amazing article, absolutely amazing. The main article in volume 70 of the Journal deals solely with the T'fillin of the Jewish People. The article conclusively establishes that the contact and pressure points covered by the hand and head T'fillin are exactly those points at which the Acupuncture needles are inserted in order "to increase spirituality and to purify thoughts." The non-Jewish author of the article puts it that the points covered by the T'fillin are those where the Acupuncture needles are inserted. I would reverse the statement to read: The Acupuncture needles are inserted in those points which are exactly where a Jew puts on T'fillin.

The article details all of the Acupuncture points which are the same as the points-of-contact of the head T'fillin - front and back - as well as the points-of-contact of the hand T'fillin on the arm and hand. In the opinion of the expert who wrote the article, these are the only Acupuncture points that will achieve this result [to increase spirituality and to purify thoughts] which, in addition to following the Torah's command to place the T'fillin on the arm (hand) and head as a sign that HaShem brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand, is likely the reason that Jews put on T'fillin.

FYI - For more information: www.koshertorah.com/PDF/tefillin.pdf or biurchametz.blogspot.com/2005/03/tefillin-mitzvah-and-acupuncture.html

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A Jew Named Christopher

By Paul Golin
The Jerusalem Post
July 14, 2005

I know a Jew named Christopher. Yes, the word "Christ" is in his name, and yes, he's a Jew...at least according to Jewish law. When I think about how to create a more engaging, sustaining Jewish community, I do it by putting myself in Christopher's shoes. And they're big shoes. Because besides being a Jew, Christopher is also a large black man. Christopher's Jewish mother ran away with his African-American father to marry in Paris when she was just 18 years old, in the late 1950s, at a time when it was illegal in most of

the US to wed interracially and rare for a Jew to marry a non-Jew.

Was she rebelling? Probably. Was it rebellion against parents, or society, or Judaism...or all of those things? Even she may not fully understand. But what happened to Christopher is a microcosm of how the Jewish community in the last 35 years has continued to cannibalize itself rather than adjust, embrace and grow. Because Christopher's mom "betrayed" her people by marrying out, her people got payback by taking it out on Christopher, in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. "You don't look Jewish!" is an expression that many of us have uttered at some point in our lifetimes, let's admit it. We may have thought it an innocent enough statement, even playful. But for Christopher it cut like a knife. As did, "That's not a Jewish name!" And "How can you be Jewish if you're black?"

It's not remarkable that Christopher felt isolated from the Jewish community growing up the product of interracial intermarriage in the 1970s. What's remarkable is that the same scenario continues to play itself out in countless varieties today, 30 years later, despite an explosion in Jewish interfaith/intercultural marriages. The organized Jewish community on the whole—notwithstanding pockets of genuine inclusion—remains a fearful, closed, homogeneous group, with leaders considerably more conservative than their constituency who would rather oversee a decline in the number of Jews than take the bold step of "welcoming the stranger" in every Jewish family. Admitting the problem is the first step to recovery.

The next step is submitting to a higher power. But in this case it's not the obvious higher power. The power that will revive Jewish engagement in America is the inherent Jewish spark that still resides in unengaged Jews, intermarried families, and the children and grandchildren of intermarried Jews. Igniting that spark should be the primary goal of the Jewish community. We need to create many more doors back into Judaism, instead of obsessing over how to close the barn gate after most of the herd has already escaped. By the time I'd met Christopher, the Jewish community had been ignoring him for 20 years. Today, it's over 36 years. Yet Christopher's Jewish identity is still strong. He follows news about Israel intently, and still talks about the class we took together in college on the Arab-Israeli Conflict. If birthright Israel had been around back then, he might have gone. Congratulations, Jewish community, that's one way in. What else you got?

The Jewish community's standard answer is that we've got plenty for Christopher; he simply needs to walk through the doors of our institutions. Except that he's never going to. The Jewish community has repeatedly turned him off, whether through overt racism, inadvertent insensitivity, sermons against intermarriage (i.e., against his parents), or for all the reasons any other unaffiliated Jew is unaffiliated: boredom, lack of meaning, high costs, and an acute awareness of his inadequate Jewish education. We can no longer ask the unaffiliated to come to us. We as a Jewish community must go to them.

There are kernels of this idea taking hold, but not nearly in the scope needed. Chabad has been trying to meet unaffiliated Jews in public venues for years. Would they bother asking Christopher the obligatory opening line, "Are you Jewish?" Even if he did wrap tefillin inside their Mitzvah mobile, would they then be able to offer him a relevant next step? Or is his only choice to become a baal tshuvah? The other streams of Judaism are finally beginning to learn that programs held in secular venues—based around Jewish culture or holiday celebrations and open to all who would participate—removes barriers for unaffiliated and intermarried Jews.

Take for example Jewish film festivals. Twenty years ago there was only one, in San Francisco. Today it seems there's one in every town with more than three Jews. A recent study suggests that when Jewish films are screened in secular venues like multiplex theaters, rather than in JCC auditoriums or synagogue basements, the crowds in attendance are considerably less affiliated. But the question is, are there any trained Jewish communal professionals working the crowds at these events? Or are Jewish film festivals simply happy enough to fill the seats with warm fannies? We need to learn who these unaffiliated Jews are, find out what they might need from us, invite them to something else they'd find relevant, and then follow-up with them personally rather than dumping them on a mailing list or, worse, soliciting them for membership or donations. They need to get to know us, and we need the sensitivity not to inadvertently turn them away again.

Jewish programs are only as good as the Jewish professionals running them. To reach Jews like Christopher, we need the sort of trained army of outreach workers that Chabad has built, but have them offer countless additional paths into Jewish meaning. Christopher is the proud father of two beautiful preschool girls. His wife is not Jewish but like Christopher's father doesn't practice any other religion. The spark of Judaism is still alive inside that household. If only the community were to reach out to them, a whole generation could reclaim their Jewish heritage.

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'Who is a Jew' at the Maccabiah Games

By Charlotte Halle'

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/601631.html>

Had D.T. been born in Australia, he would not have been competing in the Maccabiah Games. But fortunately for this six-foot-seven basketball player, whose father is Jewish but whose mother is not, he was born in America, where the Maccabi organization's "Who is a Jew" policy is considerably less stringent than Down Under. While Maccabi Australia adheres to Jewish law when it comes to

Maccabiah eligibility - only athletes with a Jewish mother can compete - the Americans also accept athletes with a Jewish father.

"My father raised me as a Jew, I attended synagogue with him, and I regard myself as fully Jewish," D.T., a Division One college basketball player, says. "I don't think it's right that some of the delegations exclude someone because one of their parents has another religion. We're a shrinking people, and we should try to include as many people as possible." In the absence of an overarching policy—Maccabi World Union (MWU) allows each country to determine its own entry criteria—D.T.'s story highlights the wide disparity among the 55 delegations to the Jewish Olympics when it comes to determining who is eligible to compete.

The South Africans, along with the Australians, are among the strictest. "You have to have a Jewish mother in order to compete in the Maccabiah [for South Africa]," says Mervyn Tankelowitz, vice-chairman of Maccabi South Africa. "Halakhically [according to Jewish law], you're only considered Jewish if your mother is Jewish, and those are our rules." Australia also abides "very strictly" by that definition, says Phil Filler, president of Maccabi Australia, adding that sometimes rabbis are called upon to certify the Jewishness of competitors. "It can create difficulties and angst, and [turning people away] is not a very pleasant thing to have to do, but at the end of the day, constitutionally, we're only open to Jewish people." Filler adds that he does not consider those teams with more liberal acceptance criteria "to have an unfair advantage."

Both the Argentineans and the Dutch fall into the more-liberal category. The Argentinians have the most flexible entry criteria, also accepting non-Jews married to Jews and their children. The head of the Argentine delegation, Juan Balanofsky, said he does not inspect the religious background of each competitor. "We have 70,000 members at 47 Maccabi clubs across the country, and we think one of the best ways to keep young people and their families involved in the [Jewish] community and connected to Israel is through sports," he says.

"We are very open-minded in our organization. One family introduces another family, who introduces another, and we are growing. We are trying to build a strong community. We believe we are all Jews—whether we have the right papers or not—and we are very proud to have such a large delegation [of 302], and to be able to show solidarity with Israel at this time. If we placed restriction on top of restriction, we would have arrived here with a delegation of 10."

The Dutch, who have their largest-ever delegation, 140, at this year's games, do not allow non-Jewish partners of Jews to compete, but do accept anyone who has at least one Jewish grandmother. "We follow the rules of the Liberal movement in Holland [a progressive stream of Judaism]," says Frits Barend, head of the Dutch delegation. "If you have a Jewish grandmother, then you automatically have a Jewish mother or father, and that is enough for us. A Jewish grandfather is not. Sometimes, it is hard. We have had [male] Holocaust survivors who wanted their grandchildren to go to the Maccabiah, but we have had to turn them away. We have to draw the line somewhere."

America and Canada have adopted similar guidelines: competitors must have either a Jewish mother or a Jewish father, and must not practice another religion. Canadian delegation head Allen Gerskup says he is happy to bring athletes with little or no Jewish upbringing to the games, as long as they fit these criteria. "If we can bring someone to Israel and expose them to Judaism and Israel, I think we can make a real difference to their lives," he says.

Ron Carner, vice president of Maccabi USA, cites the example of swimmer Deborah Kory, whose first Jewish experience came at the 1993 Maccabiah. Kory, one of the stars of the games, stayed in Israel after the Maccabiah, became religious, and later worked for Maccabi USA. Unlike most of the other teams, the Americans also require that their support staff, like coaches and medics, adhere to their criteria.

"It's very easy if you have a Jewish population of six million," says Holland's Barend, whose delegation includes several non-Jewish coaches and medics. "It's not at all easy for us to find high-quality Jewish coaches who will take four weeks vacation - including preparations for the games - in a community of less than 40,000." While several of the delegation leaders said they had been pressured to include athletes whose Jewishness did not meet their criteria, none of those heading teams that adopt more liberal policies said they had faced criticism at home over their entry requirements.

Ricky Philip, the head of the 450-strong British delegation, which requires that athletes have one Jewish parent, says there has been "no controversy" over this policy, which runs counter to the more stringent approach adopted by most British Jewish institutions. "If an athlete has one Jewish parent and wants to be involved in Jewish sport, we're not going to deny them," he says.

When it comes to the Israeli delegation, Jewishness is not a criteria: one of the first medal winners at the 17th Maccabiah was Asala Shahada, a female Arab swimmer. As for teams from abroad, Maccabi World Union executive director Eyal Tiberger says his organization adopts a non-interventionist approach, preferring not to "check what type" of Jews are being admitted. "If you declare you are a Jew and the Maccabi organization within your community accepts this, then you can participate. We don't interfere with their regulations."

But Tiberger says that the Maccabiah does have acceptance rules. Anyone with one Jewish grandparent can compete, he says, reflecting the criteria enshrined in the Law of Return. "The main idea is to get as many people as possible active in our clubs. One of the strengths of our organization is that it reaches out to unaffiliated [Jews] - to those not active in youth movements and other Jewish organizations."

Representatives of the Orthodox establishment in Israel are not overly perturbed by the fact that most of the Maccabiah delegations do not adhere to Jewish law when it comes to selecting their teams. "Participating in the Maccabiah is not a certification of

Jewishness. It's a sports competition," says MK Avraham Ravitz, who belongs to the ultra-Orthodox United Torah Judaism party. "It doesn't matter to me if there are competitors whose mother and father aren't Jewish. But no one should mistake it for a stamp of Jewishness or a conversion process.">

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Debunking the Concept of 'Race'

Editorial
New York Times
July 30, 2005

Black Americans who explore their family histories typically hit a dead end in the early 19th century, when black Americans who were slaves were not listed in the census by name. Now some black Americans are trying to fill in the gap with genetic screening tests that purport to tell descendants exactly where in Africa their ancestors came from. But, like most people, those who think of themselves as African-American will need to search well beyond Africa to find all of their origins.

This point came through with resounding clarity recently at Pennsylvania State University, where about 90 students took complex genetic screening tests that compared their samples with those of four regional groups. Many of these students thought of themselves as "100 percent" white or black or something else, but only a tiny fraction of them, as it turned out, actually fell into that category. Most learned instead that they shared genetic markers with people of different skin colors.

Ostensibly "black" subjects, for example, found that as much as half of their genetic material came from Europe, with some coming from Asia as well. One "white" student learned that 14 percent of his DNA came from Africa - and 6 percent from East Asia. The student told *The Daily Collegian*, the student newspaper, earlier this year: "When I got my results I was like, there's no way they were mine. I thought it was just an example of what the test was supposed to look like. Then I was like, Oh my God, that's me."

Prof. Samuel Richards, who teaches a course in race and ethnic relations at Penn State, uses the test results to shake students out of rigid and received notions about the biological basis of identity. By showing students that they aren't what they think they are, he shows them that race and ethnicity are more fluid and complex than most of us think. The goal is to make students less prejudiced and more open to a deeper discussion of humanity. If the genetic testing fad pushes things in this direction, it will have served an important purpose in a world that too often thinks of racial labels as absolute - and the last word when it comes to human identity.

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