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## Be'chol Lashon (In Every Tongue)

**We are different cultures, languages and colors,  
yet we share Israel, Hebrew and Torah**

**A Program of the Institute for Jewish & Community [www.JewishResearch.org](http://www.JewishResearch.org)**

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### Be'chol Lashon Update 3/2/05

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#### **The Color Of Inclusion**

***West Coast conference brings together Jews of color from across the globe to celebrate diversity.***

**Debra Nussbaum Cohen**

**The Jewish week**

**February 25, 2005**

San Francisco — Before a packed house of some 400 people at the Fairmont Hotel here, 45 voices from Temple Beth El's choir soared in songs melding Hebrew lyrics with the passionate energy and rhythmic lilt of gospel music, all backed by a rocking band. It had almost everyone in the room — including the fervently Orthodox Yemenite Jews who had come in from Brooklyn — on their feet, waving their hands in the air and shouting out encouragement.

But don't call it Jewish gospel in front of chorus director Debra Bowen, who is known as ima, or mother, to her suburban Philadelphia congregation. "It's not gospel, which is Christian. It's soul-full," said Bowen, as she cooled down after her chorus' performance, still elegant in a sparkling silver-and-black dress and ornate black-and-white hat. And while the chorus' sound may have its roots in the black church, it is a genuinely Jewish form of praise worship for the members of Ima Bowen's congregation.

The Sunday night event — which included Ugandan Jewish songs by members of the

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Abuyadaya clan, and a rhythm-and-blues-influenced rendition of the traditional Jewish song Adon Olam by Rabbi Baruch Yehuda, leader of an Israelite temple in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn — was billed by its organizer as the first-ever performance of African and African-American Jewish music. Open to the public, the sold-out event was part of a conference called Be'chol Lashon, or “In Every Tongue.”

The Be'chol Lashon conference participants were a handpicked group of present and emerging leadership among Jews of color from all over the world. With about 100 people, it was the third and largest conference to date. The conference, which took place over three days from last Friday to Monday, was organized by the Institute for Jewish & Community Research, led by demographer Gary Tobin and his wife, Diane Tobin. Seven years ago, the couple adopted a newborn named Jonah. Not knowing any other non-white Jews, and wanting their new son not to feel isolated as an African-American Jew, they started reaching out to others, and Be'chol Lashon was born. In addition to its annual conference, the initiative runs Chanukah and Shavuot parties and other social and educational events.

“The Jewish people speak in many tongues and is more diverse than most Jews know, and certainly more than the rest of the world does,” said Gary Tobin during the conference. There are about 400,000 Jews of color in the United States, or about 7 percent of the total population of over 6 million, according to a study done by the Institute, whose findings are to be published next month in a book on ethnic and racial diversity in the Jewish community. That figure does not include people of Sephardic ancestry, who comprise another 8 percent of America’s Jews, the book says, as well as Mizrahi Jews from the Middle East, North Africa and Latin America.

“All together, we estimate that at least 20 percent of American Jewry is diverse, and an even higher proportion has a diverse background,” the book says. “The phenomena of interracial marriage, adoption, conversion and immigration are changing the demographic face of the American Jewish community.” The compelling question for the mainstream Jewish community today, Tobin said, is “How do we respond to those who look different? How do we, as a world people, move beyond our definitions of who’s in and who’s out?”

This year’s conference participants included 13 members of Brooklyn’s religiously stringently Yemenite Orthodox community. In the trope and cadence of their Shabbat prayers — which, they say, are the same as they were in First Temple times — listeners could almost hear the desert. Toward the conclusion, an African-American Israelite stepped in to lead the mourners’ Kaddish — with a different sound, although in the same Aramaic chanted by Jews everywhere. And, as in Jewish worship everywhere, the congregation responded. Conference participants also included a leader of India’s Jewish community, two Chinese Jews — one from China and the other American — a Mexican rabbi ordained by the Conservative movement, a modern Orthodox Latino rabbi from the Bronx, a fervently Orthodox rabbi from Portugal, along with Israelites and black Jews from Uganda, Ethiopia, Nigeria and South Africa, among other places.

Also involved were many American Jews of color — some born into Jewish families, others who have converted. Among them was Itiya Taylor, an African-American woman from a Baptist family who converted to Judaism under Conservative movement auspices. She has since become more observant and is now preparing for an Orthodox conversion. “It’s not new to me that there are African-American Jews, but it’s nice to see a lot of us under the same roof, said Taylor, who works in marketing and event planning in Los Angeles. “The work of the organization is amazing, even if I don’t always agree with some of what it does. It’s very

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inclusive for people who don't always have the opportunity to be heard," she added.

As a religious Jew, she takes issue with some of what she heard at the conference, in particular that many of those who call themselves black Israelites identify as Jewish, but have not converted, and with what she described as "proselytizing," the assertively pro-outreach stance advocating that people in Africa who may have Jewish roots be encouraged to discover them.

The African Jews present — from Uganda, Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Burundi and Ethiopia — decided to follow up on an idea floated at last year's gathering and create a Pan African Jewish Association with the goal of organizing and empowering Jewish leadership around the continent. As they discussed how to begin, it became clear that the challenges are complex.

Identifying publicly as Jewish remains politically sensitive and potentially dangerous for many Africans, some said, because in countries where Islam and Christianity dominate, they might be suspected of being Zionist spies. "In Africa, Jew is not a word to use easily," said Rabson Wuriga, who was raised in Zimbabwe and is now a post-doctoral fellow in philosophy at North-West University in South Africa. He is also a leader of the Lemba communities in both countries.

There is also the challenge of coordinating potential leaders from different cultures, and with different nationalities and expectations, from among a few Jews spread throughout the continent's 53 different countries.

While the Lemba in Southern Africa and the Abuyadaya of Uganda are organized as Jewish communities, "most of Africa is just waking up," said Jane Dele Osawe, a former Nigerian state legislator who currently lives in Chicago. Currently a senior executive at Chicago's Community Mental Health Council, she is a doctoral candidate in clinical psychology and attends the Beth Shalom B'nai Zaken Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation. According to Wuriga, in Africa "people know they are Jews but they must be educated and redirected" toward understanding what that means. As many of those from Africa did, Osawe had experiences growing up that led her to realize that her family was not the same as others.

A member of Nigeria's Ibo people, Osawe's family followed unusual practices: They carefully drained the blood of cows and chickens they slaughtered, which Christian neighbors called pagan, and circumcised their sons on the eighth day, among other things. But like most Africans, they were also publicly Christian. Christianity was the official religion of the African countries colonized by Western Europe. All schools, for instance, were Christian and required pupils to profess that faith. But as she grew up and read scripture, Osawe realized that Christian practices did not conform to what the Bible said was correct and to what her father did. But she didn't know that there was such a thing as a contemporary Jewish people, she said. It was only when she came to the United States to attend college that she realized how the pieces of her identity could all fit together.

"Ibos have always been called the Jews of Africa," she said. "I thought it was because we are traders, and business-oriented."

But now, she said, "there seems to be a reawakening. Synagogues are springing up," with 11 in Nigeria's eastern region alone. A congregation started in 2002 in Lagos now has 70 families as members, she said. While there are relatively few Nigerians presently connected to the Jewish people, she believes that there are, potentially, at least 20,000. A Pan-African Jewish Association will help bring them back to their original identity, she said. "If we have a focus, we can work as a team. If as Jews we come as one voice, it will strengthen us."

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The goal should not be emigration to Israel, as it has been for Ethiopia's Falash Mura, she said. Instead, they will be Jews in the land of their birth and visit Israel. Being at the conference was another awakening, she said. "I had never seen the prayers of people from different parts of the world. Hearing the Yemenites' prayers, and seeing Indians and Chinese who are Jews — that is really amazing. "It lifted my spirit to see that we are one people speaking in one tongue."

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## A Tribe of Many Colors

**S.F. conference brings together far-flung Jewish communities**

**By Dan Pine**

**The J Jewish Bulletin of Northern California**

<http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0->

[/module/displaystory/story\\_id/25074/format/html/displaystory.html](http://www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaystory/story_id/25074/format/html/displaystory.html)

In the lobby of San Francisco's opulent Fairmont Hotel, Ephraim Isaac wasn't hard to spot. He was the one wearing the white djellaba (robe), natalah (fringed scarf) and gobah (wedding cake-shaped head covering). He looked like a Yemeni prince. Isaac was there, along with Jews from Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America, to participate in the third annual Be'chol Lashon Think Tank, which gathers together representatives of the world's farthest-flung Jews. The S.F.-based Institute of Jewish and Community Research sponsored last weekend's event. Under the leadership of Gary Tobin, the institute launched Be'chol Lashon to help nurture Jewish communities of color in the United States and around the world. The annual conference provides opportunities for cultivating Jewish fellowship, most of it in a chorus of lilting accents.

Isaac was one of the key participants. He is a longtime Harvard professor, founder of that university's Department of Afro-American Studies, fluent in more than a dozen languages and a renowned scholar of Ethiopian and Yemeni Jewry. He's also fervently religious and a drum major for Jewish observance. "Judaism is not a race or ethnicity," he affirms. "It is a religion based on the revelation at Mount Sinai. The gates are open as long as you're willing to embrace it and practice it." Though born in Ethiopia to an impoverished family, Isaac was brought up in the Yemeni tradition of intense Jewish scholarship. He came to the United States in the 1950s and soon broadened his academic horizons, becoming the first Ethiopian to graduate from Harvard.

He has since been a strong advocate for black-Jewish relations and was an adviser to the Israeli government on its follow-up to Operation Exodus, during which thousands of Ethiopian Jews were resettled in Israel. Also attending the conference was Romiel Daniel, a Bombay-born Jew representing the small but ancient Jewish community of India. Though now a resident of New York (he serves as president and occasional cantor for the Rego Park Jewish Center in Queens), he maintains strong ties to the dispersed Indian Jewish community. "There are 300 Indian Jews in the United States," he says. "But there are 29 synagogues in Bombay," in a country with about 5,000 Jews.

Daniel is a lay expert on the history of Judaism in India. He describes three separate waves of immigration, most of it occurring centuries ago, as far back as the destruction of the First and Second Temples. Most Indian Jews were traders and merchants, and throughout their long history in the country they enjoyed tranquil relations with their Hindu neighbors. After the

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creation of the state of Israel, most Indian Jews made aliyah. Daniel and his family spread out, some moving to England, while he relocated to New York. Though trained as a chemist, he works in the garment industry today, but says Judaism is among the most important aspects of his life.

Coming to the San Francisco conference has been, as he says, “a tremendous learning experience for me. It gives me a much better perspective on how people look at their Judaism. [The Institute of Jewish and Community Research] gives guidance and support.” In full agreement is Orthodox Rabbi Rigoberto Emmanuel Viñas, a New York City-based Cuban American and spiritual leader of the Lincoln Park Jewish Center. He has devoted his career to bringing back into the Jewish fold untold numbers of Anusim, a Hebrew word meaning “forced out.” The term refers to New World Hispanics of Jewish origin forced to convert to Catholicism during the Inquisition.

“All over Latin America, there are millions of people who converted and then melded into the indigenous population,” notes Viñas, adding that many kept up Jewish traditions, even when they didn’t understand them. “My own great-grandmother lit candles on Friday nights and gave the children blessings. Around Easter she gave away all the bread and cookies.” Once Viñas tracks down Anusim, he coaxes them back to Judaism, a task he says is often easier than it might seem. Remembers Viñas: “One woman told me that with the mikvah, she was washing the water of the baptism off of her. We want to say to the Catholic Church, ‘You didn’t win.’”

He was especially pleased about the San Francisco gathering, which he saw as historic. “This is the first time since the 1650s,” he notes, “where a group of Sephardic rabbis met to discuss outreach to the Anusim.” Viñas is quick to note that the return/conversion ceremony he helped develop for these Jews is fully accepted by Orthodox Sephardic rabbis in Israel. As for Isaac, he applauds the efforts of Viñas and others he met at the Be’chol Lashon conference. Anything, he says to increase awareness of the countless millions of Jews from beyond the Pale. “Ethiopia is mentioned in the Bible 50 times,” he says. “I don’t think Poland is mentioned even once.”

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## **The Contra Costa International Jewish Film Festival**

**10th Anniversary**

**Sunday , March 5-11, 2005**

**Contra Costa JCC**

**510.839.2900 x256 or 925.938.7800**

**[www.jfed.org/jewishfilmfestival](http://www.jfed.org/jewishfilmfestival)**

In 2005, the film festival will be screening films from Argentina, Italy, Slovakia, Israel, England, Uganda, France and the United States. The cinematic line-up includes full-length feature films and documentaries to short films that cover topics as varied as the Abayudaya tribe in East Africa, the life of space shuttle astronaut Ilan Ramon and the resistance movement in Czechoslovakia during World War II.

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## The Face Of Jewish Uganda

**SHELLI LIEBMAN DORFMAN**

**Detroit Jewish News**

**Thursday, March 03**

**<http://detroit.jewish.com/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=1958>**

J .J. Keki looks very much like his Ugandan neighbors. He grows coffee, bananas and maize on his farm; travels on dirt roads by bicycle-taxi and pumps water from the ground several times a day to carry home to his family. But no matter what he is doing or where he goes J.J. always has a kippah on his head, eats only kosher foods and on Friday nights and Saturdays, he walks to synagogue for Shabbat. "That is because I am Jewish," J.J. explained. He and his daughter, Rachel Namudosi Keki, will be in Detroit on Friday through Sunday to share experiences of Jewish life in Uganda at three area synagogues and the Jewish Community Center in Oak Park.

The Kekis and other members of six eastern Ugandan villages are descendants of a group of Christians who left the church in 1919 and became Torah-observant Jews. Under the leadership of Semei Kakungulu, an elephant hunter, military leader and once-devout Christian from the Buganda region of Uganda, 3,000 Ugandans, including J.J.'s father and grandfather, began to observe Jewish dietary laws, hold Jewish religious services and perform Jewish circumcisions on their sons. Locals referred to them as Abayudaya, a Luganda (language) word meaning, "people of Judah" or "Jews." Kakungulu and the Abayudaya left their homes in Kampala and formed their own community in Mbale, where J.J.'s family still lives. There, Kakungulu began a sect called "the Community of Jews who trust in the Lord." He began construction of a synagogue that, upon his death, was overtaken by Christian missionaries. The group continued to be observant Jews but, because of limited methods of communication and travel, they remained out of touch with other Jewish communities. Only in the 1960s were they able to reach out to the outside world. "We even were visited by the first Israeli ambassador to Kenya, Arye Oded," J.J. said. "He wrote about us in Hebrew and in English." But soon after, in 1971, Idi Amin came to power and outlawed Judaism in Uganda and destroyed all the synagogues. "None of the children could go to school unless they were baptized as Christians," J.J. said. "So, many people allowed their children to be baptized so they were able to go school." Others went underground, remaining true to the Jewish tradition and educating their children themselves.

### Continuing On

In 1980, when Amin's dictatorship fell, religious freedom was restored in Uganda. The Abayudaya community that once included 2,500 members with seven synagogues was now a strong, but much smaller group of 500 — and they had no synagogue. During the next 12 years, the community was re-established under the leadership of three brothers: Joshua Jacob "J.J." Keki, Aaron Kintu Moses and Gershom Sizomu. (In Ugandan tradition, blood siblings did not share a common family name, although in more modern times, J.J.'s children have his name of Keki.) Calling themselves "the kibbutz movement," the Abayudaya lived in a kibbutz-like environment. They reclaimed the hill lost after Kakungulu's death and built the synagogue he began, calling it the Moses Synagogue. In 1992, Matthew Meyer, then a 21-year-old junior from Brown University studying in Kenya, introduced the world to the Abayudaya community. "I attended Yom Kippur services in Nairobi with Julia Chamovitz, a peer of mine from Pittsburgh on my study abroad program," said Meyer, a Bay City, Mich., native raised in Delaware. "I sat next to the one black African in the synagogue," Meyer said. "Julia — who was sitting in the

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women's section — encouraged me to talk to the guy, find out what was up. I did, and that set me off on a pretty amazing journey.” Matt had been watching Gershom following the prayers in Hebrew,” J.J. said of the chance meeting with his brother. “He asked him if he was Jewish and Gershom told him ‘yes’ and invited him to come to our village for Shabbat. When he left, he promised to tell everyone of the Jews of Uganda.”

### Telling America

Armed with photos and tapes of Abayudaya music, Meyer spent months trying to spur American interest in the community, even creating a Web site about them. “I spent many college nights writing letters about my Ugandan friends with little or no response,” Meyer said. “I sent out, over the course of a month, about 40 or 50 letters about the community, many including tapes of their music.” It was six months before someone contacted him. “My letter somehow landed on the desk of a rabbinic student researching dispersed Jewish communities,” he said. “A few months later, a rabbi called me because he had gotten his hands on the cassette and their music amazed him. “From those two contacts, next thing we knew, there were Shabbat visitors on Nabugoye Hill [where the Moses Synagogue is located] nearly every week and national news stories. A rabbi who visited expressed his disbelief at having spent a week in an African village with a community he said he often thought was ‘as Jewish as his own family.’” Finally, Americans were responding with visits and gifts, including a new Torah and money from the Brown University Hillel in Providence, R.I., to help build a synagogue. Others visited, coming to teach and donate resources and prayer books. Within a couple of years, Meyer went back to visit the Abayudaya villages. “I returned after college with a grant and, along with a Kenyan peer, started a small sandal-making cooperative that has done quite well at [Ecosandals.com](http://Ecosandals.com),” Meyer said. The project was created to provide work and income for impoverished residents of Korogocho in Kenya. The work earned Meyer the Samuel S. Beard Award for the Greatest Public Service by an Individual 35 Years or Under. He is the recipient of the American Institute for Public Service Jefferson Award for excellence in public service. Meyer's ties with the Abayudaya community remain strong. “In Nairobi, all East Africans have what they call a ‘ushago,’ a rural homestead where they go for holidays and when they get enough bus fare to go home,” he said. “For a year, I treated Mbale, Uganda, as my ushago. To some extent, I still do. On Nabugoye Hill, it is so green and scenic and peaceful. I once saw a rainbow in the sky there that was a complete ring.” Meyer, a graduate of the University of Michigan Law School in Ann Arbor, now lives and works as an attorney in New York.

### Visiting Groups

Soon after Meyer's trip to Uganda, a group of Conservative rabbis from Israel and the United States traveled to the Abayudaya villages to perform a mass conversion for the group who for so long had been living as Jews. J.J. attended the ceremony, but said, “I don't like to think of myself as a converted person. I was a Jew already. I was raised by Jewish parents, and I always lived a Jewish life.” In 1995, the Abayudaya community was visited by a delegation organized by Kulanu, a Baltimore-based organization involved in research, education and donations to those in developing, but unrecognized Jewish communities around the world. Jerry and Sharon Knoppow of West Bloomfield learned about the Abayudaya from Kulanu's Web site [www.kulanu.org](http://www.kulanu.org) and invited J.J. and Rachel to Detroit to speak about their community. “I learned about a world of non-mainstream Jews who just did not fit the Ashkenazi-Sephardi mold,” said Jerry Knoppow, who hopes to visit the Abayudaya in their villages. “We connected with them through Kulanu and the Institute for Jewish and Community Research (JCR) in San Francisco, which is sponsoring their trip.” The pair is in the United States to raise funds for their community, Knoppow said. “I personally hope our community learns that we are ‘One People’

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and that they support their causes.”

### What Would Help?

J.J., Rachel and Gershom are the only ones from the Abayudaya villages to travel to America to speak about their community. This month-long trip marks J.J.'s fourth time in the United States and Rachel's second, but neither has been to Detroit before. Each American visit has been sponsored by the JCR. “We need to come to America to tell people about our need for electricity and running water for our six villages and for our schools,” J.J. said. “Right now, only our major synagogue has electricity and every day, we wait in line to pump water from a bore hole in the ground to take back to our families. My wife, Miriam, and I have nine children and 15 adopted children. Rachel, who is 23, is the oldest.” The Abayudaya community has one high school, but it is too far from home for many potential students to attend. “We want to build a dormitory so more students can come from other villages,” J.J. said. “We have books that have come from donations and are in different synagogues, but we need a library, to sit and study.” On this trip, they have visited Washington, Baltimore, New York and Los Angeles, where members of a synagogue donated funds to help the Abayudaya high school build a science lab.

In Los Angeles, they also visited Gershom, the spiritual leader of the Abayudaya, who is a second-year student at the University of Judaism's Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles. “Gershom is the first person from our village to go to rabbinical school,” said J.J., whose other brother, Aaron Kintu Moses, is acting rabbi of the community and head of Hadassah Infant School, the Abayudaya elementary school. “He did not go to rabbinical school, but he is very educated,” said J.J., whose father and grandfather also were rabbis without formal rabbinic education. “After my ordination, I hope to serve my community and other emerging communities in Africa as a rabbi,” Sizomu said. “I hope to start a yeshivah in Uganda that will help prepare new African Jewish religious leaders to cater for the numerous congregations springing up on the continent.”

### Speaking And Singing

The Kekis came to America primarily to speak at the third annual Be'chol Lashon conference in San Francisco, an initiative of the JCR. “Be'chol Lashon [In Every Tongue] is devoted to racial and ethnic diversity of Jews throughout the world,” said Dr. Gary A. Tobin, president of the JCR, which serves as an international think tank providing policy research to the Jewish and general communities. “The conference brings together leaders from Jewish communities around the world,” he said. “Our goal is to work with the ancient and emerging Jewish communities, some of which have historic Jewish roots and some, like the Abayudaya, who are relatively new.” Be'chol Lashon is overseen by Diane Tobin, JCR associate director.

In San Francisco, J.J. and Rachel also performed African-Jewish music, as did Gershom and his wife, Tziporah, at a concert that celebrated Jewish diversity and honored Black History Month. Rabbi Baruch Yehuda, spiritual leader of an all-black synagogue in New York, also appeared. “We believe in embracing diversity and growth as a way of avoiding disappearance,” Dr. Tobin said. “What if Gershom and J.J.'s father and grandfather were told, ‘No, you can't be Jewish?’ “We are eager for North American Jews to understand emerging Jewish communities around the world, hidden or lost — and there are more. We have a responsibility to help those in Africa who want to return to their Jewish roots or to become part of the Jewish people.” To that end, the JCR has sponsored trips to the U.S. so J.J. and Rachel can make others aware of their lives and their needs. The JCR along with the University of Judaism also has provided a fellowship for Gershom to study and for his family to live in California for the five years of his



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schooling. “We know he will go back with a hope to open the first Pan-African yeshivah to train rabbis in Africa,” Dr. Tobin said. The JCR recently established a philanthropic fund that is administered by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee to fund-raise for a water and electricity project for the Abayudaya.

### Life Of The Abayudaya

After speaking in Detroit, the Kekis go home to Mbale. J.J. will return to his position as mayor of his village. A former chairman of the Abayudaya community, he is the first Jew to be elected to public office in Uganda. He and Rachel will return to a life where most of the community of 714 Abayudaya work as subsistence farmers. Without electricity, there is no refrigeration, so they will continue their chore of gathering fresh food daily. Like the Kekis, most of the Abayudaya keep kosher and each of the community’s five synagogues has someone trained to slaughter animals according to Jewish law. Shabbat is observed as it is in the United States. Most attend Shabbat services on both Friday evenings and Shabbat mornings, with many walking miles to avoid using transportation on Shabbat. Services may be held in Luganda alone or with Hebrew and English added. In one synagogue, services are solemn, with the congregation removing their shoes once inside. “They follow what the Torah said that Moses was commanded to take off his shoes at the burning bush,” J.J. said. “So they take off their shoes in any holy place.” Another is an Orthodox synagogue founded after an Orthodox American rabbi came to Uganda sharing the Orthodox observance of Judaism and bringing Orthodox prayer books. “But we don’t think of them as being separate,” J.J. said. “We are all Jewish together.”

The community has built an elementary school and a high school. “Our Jewish children are now allowed to go to community schools without being baptized, but only in our schools would they be able to have Hebrew and Judaic studies,” J.J. said. “We have 200 students in our elementary school and more than 300 in our high school, but all of them are not Jewish. We invite everyone.” Even in a remote area of the world, Ugandan Jews have been victims of anti-Semitism, with children sometimes teased and beaten by peers. “People who are not Jewish say we are ‘Jesus killers,’” J.J. said. “But they learn from us that that is not true. We teach them about Judaism.” Rachel will return home with him. She serves on the Abayudaya Jewish community’s executive council. But there is more in store for Rachel. “She is interested in studying at an American university,” Dr. Tobin said. “The Institute will help her with the application process.” And for Rachel there also is music.

### Sounds Of Music

A completely unexpected experience has come from Western involvement with the Abayudaya — an astonishing musical success. Two CDs of African melodies emerged from a village with only two old, worn and chipped guitars. Composed of both original lyrics and traditional Jewish liturgy in English, Hebrew and local languages including Luganda and Swahili, one of them was nominated for a 2005 American Grammy Award. The musical recordings began when the delegation from Kulanu visited in 1995. They were so impressed with the music that they returned and produced the CD, *Shalom Everybody Everywhere*. It features Gershom’s original music and the Abayudaya’s Kohavim Tikvah choir, which included J.J. and Rachel, a soloist, then only 9 years old. “Kulanu put us on the Internet and they are selling our CD [at its Web site] for a fund-raiser for the Abayudaya,” J.J. said.

It was the second CD, *Abayudaya: Music from Jewish People of Uganda* (Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, Washington D.C., available at [amazon.com](http://amazon.com)), that brought the Grammy nomination in the category of Best Traditional World Music Album — Vocal or Instrumental. “To

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make the CD, Rabbi Jeffrey Summit from Tufts University near Boston traveled to us with his recording machines and produced the CD," J.J. said. "We sang and he recorded." Rabbi Summit, executive director and CEO of the Tufts Hillel Foundation and Tufts' Jewish chaplain, is an ethnomusicologist who teaches in the school's Judaic studies program and department of music. Rabbi Summit has conducted research on music and liturgy of the Abayudaya. He also annotated a music CD that accompanies Abayudaya: The Jews of Uganda, whose text and photographs were created by Richard Sobol (Abbeville Press, N.Y.). Both have visited Mbale.

A third CD is in the works, this time with L.A.-based Gershon as the producer. "Something else we want to have in our villages is musical instruments," J.J. said. "Our young people love music. If they could learn to play instruments, they could have jobs as musicians."

### The Right Thing To Do?

While J.J. and his community are in awe of what has been accomplished by and for his people, Meyer sometimes second guesses his promise to tell the world about the Abayudaya. "I think, indirectly, what I did has led to some amazing and good things for the community in terms of substantively addressing their basic community needs," he said. "But I regularly wonder if it did not lead in some way to what may be their destruction." Meyer still returns to visit the Abayudaya every year or two, often for a Shabbat or Jewish holiday. "I consider myself extremely lucky simply to observe what I have observed, to serve witness to a community that has so blossomed and yet been so destroyed. I, myself, am never quite sure which." After their initial visit to Uganda, Meyer and his travel partner, Julia Chamovitz, who also has made return visits to the Abayudaya, discussed at length the decision of how much to share with the outside world about their discovery. "We spoke of everything, of how this community wanted us to do everything to help them: to promote awareness of their existence, to keep them safe, to help them build schools, to build a synagogue that was not built of mud and sticks," Meyer said. "They had never had a permanent-structure synagogue before. "And they wanted their children to be healthy. Disease was rampant. The AIDS scourge was just beginning to hit the community — which posed a particularly acute threat as the community had some success in practicing sexual exclusivity (only marrying within)." He thinks of new risks that came with the notoriety of news media publicity and the Grammy nod.

"The most incredible thing may be the amazement and interest with which American Jewish audiences find them," Meyer said. "Because that amazement and interest is not too dissimilar from how the Abayudaya view us. "The danger is that the community will disappear or assimilate to such a degree that they do not even exist anymore," Meyer said. "The community today is as divided as it has ever been. Kids are healthy. Everyone goes to school. But their services today much more closely resemble what you would find in a Southfield synagogue than what you would have found at Moses Synagogue 12 years ago. And I question whether that is a good thing."

The last time Meyer visited the synagogue was this past Yom Kippur, the same High Holiday that first brought him to the Abayudaya a dozen years before. "The banana porridge at sundown tasted quite sweet," he recalled. But he has seen J.J. and Rachel since that trip. Last Friday night, Feb. 25, Meyer had Shabbat dinner with them and a group of Americans, including their host Rabbi Darren Levine, who have all spent extended time living in the Abayudaya villages. "We are generally less interested in helping the community get religious materials and electricity and dig bore holes and are more interested simply in engaging the community as friends, in challenging them to serve each other better and just try to learn something from them," Meyer

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said. He will definitely return to the Abayudaya villages and visit the way he and his dinner companions always do. "Most who go visit the community stay in Mbale's finest hotel four miles from Nabugoye Hill," he said. "We stay in the village, often on the dirt and concrete floors of their homes. And we could not imagine doing it any other way."

### Where to Send Tax-Deductible Donations

Send a check to:

- 1) **Abayudaya Fund, Institute for Jewish and Community Research**, 3198 Fulton, San Francisco, CA 94118; or
- 2) **Abayudaya Jews of Uganda Philanthropic Fund, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC)**, 711 3rd Avenue, New York, NY 10017  
(Please write: "For Abayudaya Fund" on the check).

### Information About Booking Speaking Engagements

Please contact: **Institute for Jewish and Community Research**, 415.386.2604 or [info@JewishResearch.org](mailto:info@JewishResearch.org)

**Contact the Community:** P.O. Box 225, Mbale, Uganda

e-mail: [steno@swiftuganda.com](mailto:steno@swiftuganda.com) (with the words, "For the Abayudaya" in the subject line)

**More Information:** [www.kulanu.org/abayudaya](http://www.kulanu.org/abayudaya).

### Meet J.J. and Rachel

While in the Detroit area, J.J. and Rachel Keki will be at the following venues:

- 6 p.m. Friday, March 4, at Congregation Shaarey Zedek, West Bloomfield, B'nai Israel Center. J.J. and Rachel will teach niggunim (wordless melodies) during a musical service. A dinner following the service requires prepaid reservations. Cost: \$12 for adults; \$5 for children; no charge for children younger than age 3. For information, e-mail David Saperstein at: [DMS@maddinhauser.com](mailto:DMS@maddinhauser.com).

- 9 a.m. Saturday, March 5, SZ B'nai Israel Center. J.J. will speak at the service.

- 8 p.m. Saturday, March 5, at Congregation Shir Tikvah. A reception with J.J. and Rachel will include a slide show of their community photos and a musical performance. No charge. No reservations necessary.

- 10:30 a.m. Sunday, March 6, at Congregation Beth Shalom. J.J. and Rachel will speak and give a musical performance. No charge.

No reservations necessary. For more information, call Danny Kochavi at (248) 547.7970 or e-mail: [dkochavi@congbethshalom.org](mailto:dkochavi@congbethshalom.org).

- 1 p.m. Sunday, March 6, at the Jewish Community Center in Oak Park. The Kekis will make a presentation about their community and give a musical performance. No charge. No reservations needed.

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**Letter from India**

**By Sheldon Kirshner**

**The Canadian Jewish News**

**<http://www.cjnews.com/viewarticle.asp?id=5355>**

High up in Malabar Hill, one of Mumbai's most affluent residential neighbourhoods, an aphorism on a billboard attributed to that great Indian apostle of non-violence, Mahatma Gandhi, caught my eye: "You cannot be a true Hindu if you hate another religion." Slogans, as I have learned, should be taken with a grain of salt. But in India, the world's largest democracy and a living laboratory for ethnic and religious diversity, this slogan rings true.

Historically, India – a largely Hindu sub-continent whose land mass includes alpine peaks and steamy jungles – has genuinely welcomed foreigners. Bahais, Sufi Muslims, Zoroastrians and Jews have each found refuge here. And four religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism – have arisen in India. Islam was brought here in the 16th century by Mughal invaders, who left behind masterpieces of architecture, notably the sublime Taj Mahal in Agra and the majestic Humayun's Tomb in New Delhi. And Western colonial powers – from Portugal to Britain – introduced and disseminated Christianity to this nation of 1.1 billion, whose population is exceeded only by that of China.

India, having been an exemplary host to all these faiths, is rightly known for its "live-and-let-live" ethos. Yet India's record as a paragon of tolerance is hardly perfect. Since attaining independence in August 1947, less than a year before Israel's emergence as a sovereign state, India has been convulsed by several deadly episodes of ethnic violence. The last such outburst took place in the winter of 2002, when Muslims and Hindus massacred each other in Gujarat. Such incidents, in the main, have pitted Hindus against Muslims, who comprise about 12 per cent of India's overall population and who generally practise a moderate form of Islam that would be alien in, say, Saudi Arabia.

These occasional killing sprees, ignited by political disputes, have tarnished India's image. But in the congested, frenetic cities of India, from Calcutta to Chennai (formerly Madras), Hindus and Muslims seem to mix freely and easily. India's status as a melting pot of cultures and religions has been of immense benefit to Jews, whose uninterrupted presence here stretches back to antiquity, to King Solomon's time, but whose numbers have always been minuscule. In the modern era, India was home to never more than about 30,000 Jews, concentrated in Mumbai (Bombay), the commercial capital and the centre of the Bollywood film industry. With the advent of Jewish statehood in 1948, many Jews immigrated to Israel. Still others settled in Britain, Canada and Australia. As a result, there are only some 5,000 in India today, constituting 0.000455 per cent of its population, a drop in an ocean. That humble figure is dropping due to emigration, part of which flows toward Israel.

Despite its Lilliputian size, Indian Jewry is anything but monolithic. In fact, there are three primary Jewish groups in India. The Bene Israel, the majority of whom reside in and around Mumbai, are by far the biggest. Legend has it that their ancestors arrived prior to the destruction of the Second Temple. For centuries, they were isolated from mainstream Jewry, and some mingled with the locals. These contacts led to caste-like divisions between so-called "white" and "black" Bene Israel. The basic difference turned on skin colour. "Black" Jews were those whose

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forebears had intermarried. “White” Jews were supposedly “pure.”

During the 18th century, the Bene Israel came into contact with Cochin Jews, who brought them into mainstream Judaism. In the 19th century, the Bene Israel began moving to the cities. But to this day, some still live in villages fairly close to Mumbai. The first Cochin Jews are said to have settled in Kerala, in southern India, during the biblical period. In the aftermath of the Spanish Inquisition, they were joined by Jews from Spain, Germany and Holland.

They, too, formed sub-communities, consisting of Malabarim, Pardesim and Meshuharim. At first, they were concentrated in two centres: Kudungallur – or Cranganore – and Anjuvannam. But in the early 16th century, after being attacked by the Portuguese and the Moors, the Jews settled in Cochin, a small palm-fringed island in the Arabian Sea just off the mainland. The Baghdadi Jews, the last to arrive in India, initially appeared in the late 18th century, originating from the Middle East. The trickle turned into a stream with the arrival of David Sassoon, a wealthy merchant from Iraq, and his fellow Baghdadis in the first third of the 19th century. The Baghdadis tended to be staunchly pro-British and more socially insular than either the Bene Israel or the Cochin Jews.

In the eastern Indian states of Manipur and Mizoram, where many of the inhabitants are Christians, there are people of Chinese appearance who claim to be the descendants of one of the 10 lost tribes of Israel. Describing themselves as Jews, they say they were forced to adopt Christianity in the 19th century by European missionaries. Many rabbis do not recognize them as Jews, but according to recent DNA tests, they carry the same genes as Jews in Uzbekistan and India. In recent years, a handful have made aliyah after formally converting to Judaism. Whatever their origin, Jews in India have been treated with respect by post-independence governments and have never been subjected to state anti-Semitism. India, along with China and the United States, is thus one of the few major countries in history that have not subjected its Jewish citizens to official discrimination. And in this tolerant climate, Jews have been able to flourish in a variety of trades and professions. Nissim Ezekiel was a poet and literary critic. Abu Abraham was a newspaper cartoonist. Helen and David were stars of Hindi movies. Hannah Sen was president of All India Women’s Conference. Gen. Jack Jacob commanded Indian forces in the 1971 war against Pakistan.

These days, a large proportion of Jews are in the professions as doctors, lawyers and accountants, and in the booming computer sector as programmers, analysts and startup entrepreneurs. There are no fabulously wealthy Jewish business tycoons like the Tatas, Parsis ( Indian Zoroastrians) who are known as the Rockefellers of India. Like China, with which it fought a border war in 1962, India is an up-and-coming power. Early last month, when I was in India at the invitation of its tourism board, the current Indian prime minister and the architect of its seminal 1990s economic reforms, Manmohan Singh, declared, “The 21st century will be the century of Asia and without doubt the century of India.”

He may be right. India – a nuclear power that established formal diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992 – is expected to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council within the foreseeable future, and plans to launch an unmanned spaceship, Chandrayaan-1, on a moon mission in 2007 or 2008. So India, a land of sharp contrasts with a thriving middle class whose appetite for consumer goods seems boundless, is on something of a roll. Yet most Indians, particularly in remote rural areas far from the gloss and glitter of Mumbai or New Delhi, remain mired in a kind of appalling Dickensian poverty that visitors always find shocking and



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depressing. Perhaps India can ameliorate this endemic problem as it moves closer to modernizing and reinventing itself as one of the new “tigers” of Asia.

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## The Conversion's The Thing

**One-woman show explores Japanese-American actress' unlikely journey to Orthodox Judaism.**

**By Liel Leibovitz**

**The Jewish Week**

**January 7, 2005**

If you followed popular culture in the 1980s, Tina Horii's face is one you may recognize. She danced in music videos, accompanying such artists as Quincy Jones, Belinda Carlisle and Steve Winwood. She spent seven years on the chorus of a blockbuster Broadway play. Yet her new play, coming to New York this week, admits only women, because Horii is now Rachel Factor, an Orthodox Jew. The play, “J.A.P.,” is a one-woman exploration in song and dance of Factor's journey from her native Honolulu to Jerusalem, where she now lives with her husband and two infant sons. And an unlikely journey it was: Factor, 36, was born to Japanese-American parents, who were, by their own definition, non-practicing Protestants. She moved to Los Angeles when she was 18 to pursue a career as a dancer and an actress.

Luck smiled on her. “It was the rise of the Asian theater,” she said, referring to a brief wave in the mid-1990s in which Asian-themed productions were in vogue. Factor landed a role in one such production, a short-lived musical based on James Clavell's epic tale of ancient Japanese culture, “Shogun,” eventually working her way to the Broadway cast of Andrew Lloyd Weber's megahit, “Miss Saigon.” Still, Factor said, she felt as if something were missing. Anxious to connect with her heritage, she traveled to Japan several times and was disappointed, she said, to feel “nothing, no connection at all” to her ancestral homeland. Taking comfort in her burgeoning career, she continued to work, doing commercials and print ads and Off-Off Broadway productions of Shakespearean plays.

Then, in 2000, she met Todd Factor, a filmmaker and producer, and fell in love. The relationship quickly flourished, and soon she was presented with a decision: convert to Judaism, or part ways. Rachel Factor had no doubt as to what she should do; she must, she decided, break up with her boyfriend. A thoughtful woman, however, she decided that her reasons for breaking up must be well argued. And so, she decided to look into Judaism, a religion she thought would have nothing to offer her. “I looked into it with skepticism,” she said, “but then I found out, wow, this is pretty cool. Everything about it struck me not only as beautiful but enlightened, intelligent, both ancient and progressive at the same time.”

Conversion, then, was no longer out of the question, especially as her own mother seemed to support the move. “She said to me that Asians and Jews have a lot in common,” Factor recalled with an impish smile. “She said they both had good values, good education, and were good with money. It sounded all good to her.” Factor began taking classes at the Upper West Side synagogue B'nai Jeshurun, with the intention of undergoing a Conservative conversion. Todd, now her fiancé, attended with her, and together both grew closer to Judaism. “We took on observances and found that they benefited us,” said Factor. Although they did not yet keep Shabbat, they ate strictly kosher and tried to further explore the religion and its commandments. In 2000, the two were married, and in 2002, their first son, Ariel, was born.

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The boy's birth encouraged Todd and Rachel Factor to take an extra step. Searching for a mohel to perform the baby's brit, Factor said she wanted an Orthodox mohel to conduct the ceremony. "Somehow Orthodox sounded more real," she said. "You know what it's like, you go for the heaviest hitters you can find." Eventually, the couple found a mohel who came highly recommended, and asked him to perform the ceremony; although Rachel was not, according to Orthodox standards, a Jew, the man conceded, but not before telling Rachel that both she and her baby should consider undergoing an Orthodox conversion.

Trying to assert whether or not Orthodox Judaism had anything to offer them, the couple accepted an invitation for a Shabbat dinner from a neighboring Orthodox family. The experience, Rachel Factor said, left her overwhelmed. "I saw amazing hospitality," she said. "I saw people living people living out their ideals, living for their community." On an earthier plane, she had real gefilte fish for the first time, something she enjoyed tremendously. "The next weekend," she said, "we kept Shabbat. And we haven't stopped keeping it since."

That was Sukkot; by Passover, Rachel and her son underwent an Orthodox conversion. "Just before the conversion," Factor recalled, her eyes veiled by a thin film of sentimentality, "I had to go to all my agents and give up my former life. I realized that my career in the theater couldn't continue if I wanted to observe Shabbat and tzniut [modesty]. It so happened that all my agents were Jewish women, and they were all extremely supportive. I thought it would be a difficult day for me, a day of losing my identity, but instead I felt very liberated." Now an Orthodox family, the Factors continued to seek more Jewish education. Todd, for his part, found it in a Brooklyn yeshiva, whose rabbi instructed him to leave everything behind and go study in Jerusalem's famed Aish Ha Torah yeshiva, if only for a few months.

Excited by the change of atmosphere, the family landed in Jerusalem's Rehavia neighborhood, where their second son, Shalom, was born. Three months made way to six, and the family eventually fell in love with the city and decided to stay. All, it seemed, was perfect in Rachel Factor's life; all, save for one thing: she was an artist, and missed having a creative outlet. Being an Orthodox woman, however, she had little recourse but creating one herself: she revived a one-woman play that she wrote while still in the States, a play which she had to abort due to the Orthodox ban on men hearing a woman's voice. In Jerusalem, she performed the play in neighbors' living rooms, inviting only women to attend. And they did: Factor was forced to move to bigger and bigger homes, until she eventually rented out a local theater; 200 women packed the room, and Factor sold out show after show.

The demand, she said, made her realize that there was a real untapped desire for art and culture among Orthodox women. "The women who came to see my show were excited to have kosher entertainment," she said. "They were also inspired to see someone who chose their life." To pay her audience back, Factor embarked on an ambitious 60-date North American tour, which arrives to New York this week. All proceeds, she said, will go toward the establishment of a center in Jerusalem that will provide a creative outlet for Orthodox women to experience theatrical arts. Now, for the first time in her life, Rachel Factor feels complete. "The world today tells us that to be a vital woman you have to work," she said. "But I was looking for a place where it's OK to be with your children, a place that reinforces family first, and I found it." Rachel Factor performs "J.A.P" on Jan. 8 at Bnos Leah Prospect Park Yeshiva, 1604 Avenue R in Brooklyn; Jan. 9 at Yeshiva of Spring Valley, 230 Maple Ave.; and Jan. 10 at Young Israel of the Upper West Side, 210 W. 91st St. For times and ticket prices, call (888) 256-1764, or log onto

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[www.rachelfactor.com](http://www.rachelfactor.com). Only women will be admitted.

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## The Star Who Rose from the Mean Streets

Daily Mail

By Laura Benjamin and Clemmie Moodie

January 28, 2005

[http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/showbiz/oscars.html?in\\_article\\_id=335759&in\\_page\\_id=1855](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/showbiz/oscars.html?in_article_id=335759&in_page_id=1855)

Her name may not yet be familiar but she is being feted by Hollywood's movers and shakers as the next big thing. This week, after being nominated for an Oscar, it appears that there will be no stopping British actress Sophie Okonedo's rise to the top, And her achievements are even more remarkable considering her tough upbringing on a notorious housing estate. It has been no easy journey for the 36-year-old mother-of-one, who is nominated for Best Supporting Actress for her role in Hotel Rwanda in which she plays the wife of a hotel manager who hid 1,200 people during the genocide in Rwanda. She is facing competition from movie favourites Cate Blanchett and Natalie Portman for the Oscar. Such illustrious company and the lure of the Hollywood hills are far removed from Wembley's Chalkhill estate in North-West London where Miss Okonedo grew up. She is the daughter of a Nigerian father, Henry, and a Jewish mother, Joan.

### Muggers, vandals and drug addicts

Her father, a government worker, left the marital home to return to Nigeria when Sophie was five, leaving her mother - a retired Pilates teacher - to raise her on the estate famous for muggers, vandals and drug addicts. Former local MP Ken Livingstone, now Mayor of London, once said of it: "Nobody in their right mind wants to live there. It's a riot just waiting to explode." But even in these unpromising surroundings, her family encouraged her to be artistic. She remembers how a housing inspector was flummoxed by the family's large collection of books. "This man said to my mother, 'What do you do with all those books?' Because, of course, poor people don't read. My mother never forgot that."

Describing the estate itself, she said: "It was very rough. It wasn't very nice, that's why we left. But there were loads of mixed-race children there. When I moved out, I found it much harder." As a child, the young Miss Okonedo experienced racism in many different forms - and was the only black girl to attend a local Jewish youth group, Maccabi. "I came across as much racism in the Jewish community as I did outside the Jewish community," she says. "No more, no less."

### Racism

At one point she overheard parents of a friend say they would be moving to another area because of the number of black people moving in. As a teenager, she and her mother moved into a small flat about a fish and chip shop in nearby Kenton. "I used to be so ashamed that I lived there. My friends' parents were quite rich and I'd always get them to drop me down the road."

Throughout her schooldays at Preston Park in Wembley, Miss Okonedo remained close to her maternal grandparents, Max and Jean Allman. Her grandmother would regularly take her to services at the nearby Wembley Liberal Synagogue. "I feel proud to be Jewish, as proud as I feel to be black," the actress says. "Now I find the mixture extraordinary and I'm so happy to be both." Her grandparents' neighbour Esther Levy yesterday recalled: "I remember her as a young

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girl. She always loved drama and I had high hopes for her."

### High hopes

Miss Okonedo left school at 16 to work on a clothing stall at Portobello Market. Two years later she spotted a magazine advert for a workshop run by writer Hanif Kureishi at the Royal Court Young People's Theatre and immediately joined up. But she soon discovered that she was better at reading out the plays than writing them and applied for Britain's top theatre school, RADA. After completing her training she landed acclaimed roles with the Royal Shakespeare Company, The Young Vic and the National Theatre as well as in films including *This Year's Love* and *Dirty Pretty Things*.

Rada principal Nicholas Barter said: "I remember her very clearly - she was extremely talented and a somewhat unusual student. At the end of her time with us a number of agents came to watch her and she gave a fantastic performance of a monologue about a woman giving birth to an egg." Miss Okonedo, who appeared in the TV drama *Whose Baby?* last year, now lives in Muswell Hill, North London, with her partner Eion Martin and their seven-year-old daughter. She heard of her Oscar nomination while walking on Hampstead Heath with her mother and daughter on Tuesday.

The group's jubilation was so loud that a security guard at nearby Kenwood House had to ask them to quieten down. "I could hardly speak," she recalls. "I really didn't think there was any chance at all," she explained. Although she describes her relationship with her father as 'not close' she is in constant contact with her mother, who looks after her daughter while Miss Okonedo is abroad filming. This, she says, is the toughest part of her job. "With theatre I'm home every night before bedtime. It's tough when my child is in the middle of school - I hate pulling her out - but I also hate her not being with me. It's a working mother's typical dilemma." This story first appeared in the . For more great stories like this, buy the Daily Mail every day.

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## Taipei's Jewish Community Has Deep Roots

**Taiwan has had a small Jewish community since the 1950s. The nation's only  
rabbi tells of its history and touches on links to the Holocaust**

**By Cody Yiu**

**The Taipei Times**

**Monday, Feb 14, 2005**

As the world watched Holocaust survivors gathered at Auschwitz last month in memory of the 60th anniversary of its liberation, thousands of kilometers away in Taiwan, members of Taipei's small Jewish community still felt the sting of horror that has haunted their families for more than half a century. The existence of a Jewish community in Taiwan may be little known to locals. However, it has been here since the 1950s, when US troops were stationed in Taiwan.

The current community dates as far back as the mid-1970s, when foreign corporate executives began bringing their families with them to Taiwan while on international assignments. Dr Ephraim Einhorn, Taiwan's one and only rabbi, has dedicated himself to serving the Jewish community for decades. Even in Taiwan, it almost seems difficult to come across a Jewish person who cannot tell of a family tragedy that is linked to the Holocaust.

The massacre ended the lives of 6 million Jews, almost one-third of the Jewish population prior

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to World War II. The rabbi's granddaughter every year pays homage in Auschwitz to a great-grandparent -- Einhorn's mother -- that she never managed to meet in person. In addition to his mother, Einhorn's father was killed in Sachsenhausen, a concentration camp outside of Berlin. Einhorn condemned governments for turning their backs on desperate Jews. "The world stood by and did nothing. All countries, by and large, shut their doors, [while] people were desperate to get visas to go to other countries," Einhorn said in a low tone, a marked contrast to his normally cheerful demeanor. But the Austrian-born rabbi also tells the story of Dr Fengshan Ho (洪慎佩), a Taiwanese diplomat to Vienna and Germany between 1937 and 1938 who issued 1,200 visas to desperate Jews. Ho's unwavering sense of righteousness helped rescue thousands of Jews, many of who managed to flee to Shanghai.

### 'Chinese Schindler'

"Dr Ho was 'the Chinese Schindler.' He was honored by Israel's Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial with the title 'Righteous Among the Nations,'" Einhorn said. Another congregation member, Don Shapiro, who is editor in chief of *Topics*, a magazine published by the American Chamber of Commerce in Taipei, said members of his family who had survived the Holocaust usually kept mum about the pain and sorrow of their past. But as the number of living survivors able to recount the tragedy is decreasing as years go by, he said, passing on these memories in other ways is crucial.

"In another 10 years, maybe no one [will be] there to directly tell the stories. However, that incident is something that every generation should know," Shapiro said.

### Synagogue at the Ritz

When Einhorn started his work in Taipei it was at the US Military Chapel. Later, he moved to the President Hotel, which no longer exists. "And then they built the Landis. Some of the people who used to stay at the President started to move into the Ritz [Landis] Hotel," Einhorn said. So the rabbi made a proposal to the chairman of the Ritz Hotel Chain, asking if he could move the service over there. That was some 25 years ago. Every Friday and Saturday Einhorn performs Sabbath services at this one and only synagogue in Taiwan. The present-day synagogue, which is complete with a Torah and a Holy Ark, is located in a small room in the Ritz Landis Hotel on Minchuan East Road.

In addition, the rabbi also keeps a private library of Jewish works at the hotel, which he proudly claims is the largest in Asia.

The congregation is diverse. "The [Jewish] community consists of an unusual community. It consists of three groups: People who live here -- that includes people who have lived here for many years, and people who have lived here for a few years on assignments, [as well as] business people who come here regularly," Einhorn said.

Einhorn, who is in his 80s, is a man of many talents. In addition to his work as a rabbi, he has helped the Taiwanese government achieve ground-breaking work in seeking diplomatic relations with Eastern Europe. He also runs a successful trading company of his own, is an honorary member of the Rotary Club and is chairman of Republicans Abroad Taiwan for the US Republican Party. For the services, Jewish people from all over the world -- Americans, Canadians, English, Israeli, Brazilian, Costa Ricans, Panamanians, Puerto Ricans, Moroccans and Germans -- gather in one special room in the five-star hotel. The makeup of congregants has significantly shifted over the course of time. There were the American GIs, followed by long-term foreign businessmen in manufacturing industries such as textiles, shoes and toys. These



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businessmen have now been replaced by high-tech professionals.

Diplomatic representatives and expatriates working for multinational corporations may also be found in the congregation. In addition to Jewish people, Christians as well as Taiwanese who are interested in Israel or Judaism, also turn up at the synagogue. "It is a wonderful experience to see and hear a Jewish service or to hear someone talk about Judaism," Einhorn said. A Taiwanese who used to attend the services has since converted and joined Jewish faith, Einhorn said. Einhorn also told of a local Catholic priest who once brought together leaders of all faiths to sit in on a Jewish service at the hotel.

On High Holy Days, Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year) and Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement), a congregation numbering 60 to 100 may be counted on. The average weekly turnout is about eight to nine people. Shapiro notes: "It is quite a small room -- 10 [congregants] is our goal. Certain prayers are to take place if at least 10 people are present." Shapiro has been an active member of Taipei's Jewish community.

### Festivals

During the Jewish festivals, such as Hanukkah (Festival of Lights), Passover and Purim, the community comes together to have dinner, sing songs and do readings of the ancient tales, Shapiro said. Purim, mentioned in the biblical book of Esther, is the day where the Jewish celebrate their ancestors' survival against an attempt to wipe out all Jews in ancient Persia, by a villain called Haman. "On that day, we read the story of Esther in Hebrew. When the name of the villain is mentioned, we will yell out loud to drown out his name," Shapiro said.

### Some Difficulties

While the weekly services offer the Jewish community a place to come together, when it comes to daily living, there can be problems. Getting kosher food in Taiwan, for example, can get a bit tricky. "The Ritz prepares kosher food. Every Friday, they bake special bread to serve after service. And those [congregants] in particular can also have it sent to their rooms. Of course, they know how to prepare: no meat or shellfish," the rabbi explained. For meat to be classified as kosher, the animals must be slaughtered in a specific ritual fashion by trained specialists. "Not everyone keeps kosher," Shapiro said.

For those who do, pork and shellfish are especially off-limits; meat and dairy are to be set apart. According to Shapiro, a kosher meal is served on double tinfoil instead of on a plate, which may be contaminated by previously having pork served on it. The Bible designates some animals as unclean, including pigs, rabbits and horses. When receiving kosher inquiries from people who visit Taiwan, Shapiro sometimes recommends following a Buddhist vegetarian diet. Hsu Yang-ya (侯洋亚), the owner of the YY Steakhouse in Taichung, is one of the few chefs in Taiwan who knows how to prepare kosher food. The restaurant was very popular among the Jewish community in Taipei until it was relocated to Taichung four years ago. According to Hsu, his Jewish clientele has dwindled significantly over the years, as many foreign Jewish tradesmen have moved to China to seek business opportunities there.

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## Bnei Anousim to Pray with Portuguese Jews

**JTA email Edition**

**January 22, 2005**

<http://www.jta.org/brknews.asp?id=133692>

A Shabbat service run by descendants of Jews forcibly converted to Christianity will be held next week in Portugal's main shul. Organized by the Jerusalem-based Shavei Israel organization, the Kabbalat Shabbat service will gather descendants of the converted Jews, known as Bnei Anusim, and Portuguese Jews at the Lisbon Synagogue. According to Michael Freund, Shavei Israel's chairman, a seminar for Bnei Anusim is expected to be held next April in Oporto, Portugal's second largest city.

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## The Sundance Yid

**By Amy Klein, managing editor**

**Jewish Journal of Greater Los Angeles**

**February 1, 2005**

"When you're a falafel king/you're a falafel king all the way/ from your first alef-bet/ till your last dying day." O.K., maybe that's not exactly how the musical spoof *West Bank Story* begins, but the short film indeed opens with a cadre of snapping dancers taking on the guys on the other side of the tracks. Yet in this 22-minute film, instead of Maria and Tony, we have David and Fatima, and the war is not between the Jets and the Sharks, but between the Jewish Kosher King and the Palestinian Humus Hut next door. You can probably guess the rest, but hopefully, since the short was directed and co-written by Los Angeles native Ari Sendel, you'll get a chance to see it here in LA soon.

*West Bank Story* was one of a handful of Jewish-themed films screened at the Sundance Film Festival, which ended Sunday night in Park City, UT. With the deafening chatter around this small town about which studio picked up which film for how many millions of dollars, it's hard to walk sniffing out, not the hottest films, but the most Jewish of them. While hordes of ecstatically friendly movie-goers snaked around the corner hoping to get into a screening of *Hustle and Flow*, the feature about a pimp-cum-rap star from Memphis (Paramount paid \$9 million), I'm desperately trying to sell my extra ticket to a midnight showing of *Odessa Odessa* (I'd take \$5-10), a documentary that follows elderly Ukrainians in Odessa, Brighton Beach, and Ashdod. The 96-minute doc is preceded by a six-minute short from Israel, *Meet Michael Oppenheim*, which, through photographs and sweet narration, attempts to trace back filmmaker Roni Aboulafia's family history in Israel.

All roads seem to lead to Israel in the Jewish films at Sundance, even those not directly about the Holy Land. Take *Protocols of Zion*, documentarian Marc Levin's personal journey to uncover the resurgence of this anti-Semitic screed since 9/11. While it starts off at the site of the World Trade Center talking to people who blame the Jews for the tragedy, and then goes to Middle America and the home of the White Supremacists and other Holocaust deniers, he veers away from the Protocols to Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ*, and then to the streets of Patterson, New Jersey, to speak to the Palestinian street kids. He ends up, where else, at the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, finding the Protocols at the root of all these problems (not without the help the Simon Wiesenthal's Rabbi Abraham Cooper and the Anti-Defamation League's Abraham

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Foxman). *Protocols* was been picked up so far by HBO, with an air date as yet undetermined (they're hoping to sell it to the big screen first).

Perhaps it's a paranoia arising from *Protocols* that I begin to see Jews everywhere at Sundance (well, we are running all of Hollywood, aren't we? When Levin tries to get someone on the phone to discuss Jews in Hollywood, he gets passed around from Norman Lear to Larry David to Rob Reiner back to Norman Lear again).

When I randomly attend *Palermo Hollywood*, a feature from Argentina, I am surprised to discover that one of the main characters turns out to be Jewish (nicknamed by his friends "the Jew"), who is running away from his wealthy political family that maintains its standard of living despite the financial crisis.

But the most prominent Jewish film here at Sundance is *Wall*, a French/Israeli documentary about the security "fence" being built in Israel. "I was surprised to find that there are many Jews that are pro-peace in Israel," one foreign journalist told me when she exited the film. Indeed, director Simone Bitton presents a moderate look on both sides of the concrete and barbed wire structure, as she interviews "regular" Palestinians and Israelis, i.e. not the fanatics, the leaders and the spokespeople, but those who live adjacent to the \$1 billion project that is meant to bring security to Israel. Bitton is half-Arab and half-Jew, which is probably why--with her fluent Hebrew and Arabic--she is able to have frank conversations with both sides. The picture won a Special Jury Prize in the World Cinema Documentary category, so I'm sure it will be available for viewing soon.

In searching out films with a Jewish or Middle East subject matter, I came across *Planet of the Arabs*, a six-minute compilation of clips portraying the Arabs in American film and television. Dr. Emmett Brown: "Oh my God, they found me, I don't know how, but they found me. Run for it, Marty." Marty McFly: "Who?" Dr. Emmett Brown: "Who do you think, the Libyans." Filmmaker Jacquelline Salloum shows this clip from *Back to the Future* and more--from cartoons like *Lawrence of Arabia*, to *The Muppet Show*, to (Gov.) Arnold Schwarzenegger's *True Lies* to tell audiences to "turn off your televisions," to avoid these negative stereotypes.

Perhaps the fictional and real characters in the *Planet of the Arabs*, *The Wall* and *Protocols of Zion*, will one day be like Ahmed and Mahmoud, and Uri and Shlomo from *West Bank Story*, who, after their stores burn down, realize how much they have in common, and make falafel sandwiches together.

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## Youth Torn Between Two Worlds of Rap

Ha'aretz

Sunday, January 16, 2005

By Idit Avrahami and Omer Barak

Sent by: Michelle Stein-Evers Frankl

Hundreds of Ethiopians filled the Amphi Duhl auditorium in South Tel Aviv on Sunday night two weeks ago to watch artists from the community performing song and dance acts - all in Hebrew. Bnot Shva, a group of five young women from Lod, shyly take the stage dressed in white shirts. They wait for the crowd's cheers to subside and begin to rap: "Brothers, parents have to change / The reality here is different / We have to progress / Spending all day with friends in the streets

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/ Confused, frustrated / A difficult language, a different culture / No communication, no understanding."

The words, which express both distress and hope, are the product of an "educational rap" seminar the young women took with Jeremy Cool Habash, 25, a cultural hero among Ethiopian youth who defines himself as "the first Ethiopian rapper." The girls met with Habash on a weekly basis and wrote songs based on their feelings and problems. Daniel Ababa also uses songs to express his feelings. But it is difficult to find hope in the words he writes: "Working like everyone else / A check comes at the end of the month / No cash / The sons of bitches send me straight to the bank / From there, I am sent away with nothing / Hands in pockets / Face dejected / I feel like trampling on everyone in anger."

Where will the black music take the Ethiopian youth in the coming years, and where will they take it? On what kind of rap will they grow up, and with which texts will they identify - the educational music of Habash or the angry gangsta-style rap of Ababa?

The answer, as far as Habash is concerned, is clear. He says that when he started out, he was "a protest-song rapper," but this has changed now. He is putting his energy into activities for the Ethiopian youth and dreams of opening a record company of his own. "Today's youth are torn between two worlds," he says. "Most were born in Israel, but they don't feel Israeli. The Ethiopians now are like a ticking time-bomb; it can't be felt yet, but as the years go by, it becomes more and more difficult for us here. The children don't have anyone to take an example from today; there is no role model at home. The father works in a factory; the mother cleans staircases. Who is there to tell the child to do his homework? So he hangs around in the streets all day. The parents don't understand Hebrew; the children don't know Amharic. They can't speak to one another."

Over the past two years, Habash has been working with youth from Ashdod, Sderot, Rehovot, Ramle, Lod and Netanya, guiding them through seminars in "educational rap." A week before the show in Tel Aviv, the members of Bnot Shva met with Habash for a rehearsal in a bomb shelter in Lod. "You have a message to convey; you have to represent us with dignity," Habash says to them sternly. The song is played back over and over again on a small tapedeck, and the girls - Raheli Saime, Israela Bitau, Etti Grama, Etti Damka and Holgar Ananiya - sing into plastic cups that substitute for microphones and try to put together a simple dance routine. "The song talks about the lack of communication between children and parents, and about our desire to be liberated and enjoy life," explains Bitau.

"Many of the parents are primitive and don't allow their children out the house, so the children escape from them and don't tell them where they are going," adds Damka. "For years, I have been waiting for something to change in Israeli society, for it to learn to accept the Ethiopians," Habash says. "In history lessons, for example, they don't teach about all the Ethiopians who died during Operation Moses, or about the people who were killed in Sudan. We are ignored. Now, through the music, I am trying to build an identity for the children, to work with them on music and Ethiopian poetry, so that they can get to know their roots and culture. "The Ethiopians are constantly being told that they have to change, and in the end, they aren't accepted. I am trying to get them to believe in themselves and their identity," he says. Ababa hasn't undergone the process that Habash went through in recent years. Ababa remains a "non-educational rapper"; he is still angry.

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