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AFRICAN

JEWISH VOICES

**LEVERAGING
TECHNOLOGY**

Solar Powered-Communities.

Jewish Philanthropy.

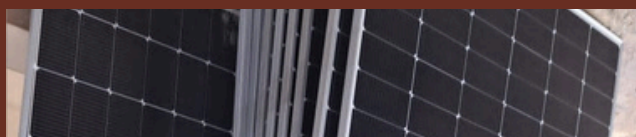
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Isn't it so surprising how one action or compounded array of events can alter everything? By everything, I mean the disruption of schedules, preplanned timelines, and expected outcomes—all of which abruptly shift into an unforeseen charted path. Two weeks ago, in a portion of Parshat Shelach, Hashem issued a decree following the Israelites' rejection of the promised land, prompted by the ten spies' negative report. This incident changed everything—a journey of 40 days evolved into 40 years. In the previous edition of the African Jewish Voices magazine, the article "Making History in Jewish Football" featured a story about the emergence of Maccabi FC Nigeria and their groundbreaking effort to compete in the Maccabiah. In the buildup to the prestigious Jewish Olympics, I can recall receiving an invitation letter recently on behalf of Maccabi South Africa to attend the games in Israel, as well as the Yakir Awards presentation scheduled on 14th July 2025, a special event in which Clifford Garrun, the chairman of the board of directors of Maccabi South Africa, will receive an award of excellence from the Maccabi World Union. However, hostilities between Israel and the Islamic Republic of Iran escalated into a war on June 13, 2025, after Israel launched surprise attacks on key military and nuclear facilities in Iran. Again, these actions changed everything—including the postponement of the Maccabiah that was a couple of days from getting started.

Nonetheless, just as the sojourn of our ancestors from the wilderness to the promised land still continued, although with the majority barred from getting to the finish line, the postponement of the Maccabi Games still gave room for the formation of MAC. The Maccabi African Confederation (MAC) is a historic alliance attempting to bring together athletes from different parts of the African continent—a

necessary move that would eventually provide an official pathway, which would see more countries making their debut in future editions of the Maccabiah going forward. Besides the Maccabi FC Nigeria, Uganda is also gearing up to organize and develop a professional Jewish youth football and volleyball team, as well as table and lawn tennis in Kenya, and track racers in Ethiopia, just to mention but a few. All these discoveries of talent are being made possible through the SAJA network, the Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance, a coalition of Jewish communities from more than 12 African countries.

Since its creation in 2022 at Abidjan, capital of Cote D'Ivoire, SAJA has been able to help position beneficiary communities to combat food security through agricultural grants. In this new edition of the AJV magazine, being its 3rd issue, we captured how Jewish communities are leveraging technology to foster growth and ensure sustainability. Observing the emergence of solar-powered communities in Sub-Saharan Africa, with solar capabilities for electrification of synagogues, guest houses, schools, and mikvehs; including domestic water and irrigation agriculture to combat drought and ensure year-round water availability for farmland, is fascinating. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that some indigenous organizations are joining their overseas-owned counterparts in actively defining the role of philanthropy in rebuilding Jewish communities. Despite the significant progress made thus far and the encouraging signs of progress, there is still more work to be done. Many communities remain unassisted, yet they continue to hold onto hope and patiently await a thorough transformation across the board that would benefit all.

Avraham Avraham

Opening Shot

Pictured here are the proud players of Maccabi FC Nigeria, an emerging football team of young African Jews with dreams of representing their country at future editions of the Maccabiah—the “Israeli Olympics.” Supported by the IPJD, alongside Kulanu and the A.B.A. Foundation, and spotlighted by the media effort of the African Jewish Voices, this team stands as a symbol of unity, resilience, and the growing presence of African Jewry in global Jewish life.





By Avraham Ben Avraham

ILLUMINATING AND EMPOWERING RURAL AFRICA.

How Innovation Africa is transforming Jewish and Non-Jewish Communities with Israeli Solar Technology.



A group photo taken with members of the Innovation Africa team at the entrance of their main office on 20/02/2025

Development, albeit much slower, is sweeping across the continent, but unfortunately, not at the same rate in the majority of the remote areas. Despite calls for modernity and improved living standards, rural areas are lagging behind on this journey. These locations, typical shadows of what they represent— hardship, isolation, and limited access to basic amenities— are found in almost many parts of Africa.

In many parts of rural Africa, the setting sun marks the end of productive endeavors: without electricity, darkness prevails in the evening, halting several essential services and activities, even religious practices as well. The lack of access to clean water, in addition, further compounds the daily challenges faced by millions.

Though the categories of rural locations differ in size and their degree of vulnerability. Yet, amidst this widespread darkness, a new light is rising— one powered not by chance, but by innovation and compassion. That light, a wave of change making a tremendous impact, is being brought by Innovation Africa, an Israeli non-governmental organization transforming underserved remote communities through solar energy and water access.

Innovation Africa's projects have benefited some African Jewish communities, many of which are located in remote and rural areas. The change is obvious judging from when we never thought of solar to now that we're witnessing solar-powered Jewish communities mostly in Uganda. From lighting synagogues and mikveot to powering irrigation and clean water systems, solar energy is reshaping what it means to thrive in Africa's countryside.

One of the greatest challenges faced in rural areas in Africa is widespread underdevelopment. It is estimated that over 600 million people live without reliable electricity on the continent. Similarly, in regions where Jewish communities live—such as Uganda's Eastern region—access to basic infrastructure like water and electricity is often, unfortunately unavailable. The outcome of this weak public system is far-reaching: some young people walk miles daily to fetch water, women give birth in darkness, and farms are plagued with irregular rainfall due to climate change.

For many Jewish families in these rural settings, the challenges extend to religious life. Observing Jewish rituals—like immersing in a mikveh, hosting evening prayers and Shabbat dinners, or studying Torah at night—becomes complicated without power or light. And in some cases, when the electricity is available, some synagogues are not always able to pay for the electricity bill to keep it lighted. No doubt, maintaining a vibrant Jewish identity should be encouraged and prioritized, especially if there is a reliable alternative system available to power these Jewish locations. This quiet revolution is the one brought by Innovation Africa's solar energy mission.

Founded in 2008 by Sivan Yaari, Innovation Africa was born from a simple yet powerful idea: use Israeli's proven technologies to bring solutions that would tackle one of Africa's basic development challenges. The organization provides alternative energy by installing solar-powered water pumping systems, solar electricity solutions, and drip irrigation technologies. All of their projects utilize a cutting-edge system that is managed through a digital monitoring platform accessible from anywhere in the world.

To date, Innovation Africa has implemented over 950 projects in 10 African countries, impacting over 5 million people in 1,300 villages. By leveraging the available rich African sunshine, the organization delivers clean water to isolated communities by

providing lighting and electricity to schools, synagogues, and medical centers. Under its water projects, Innovation Africa uses effective Israeli technology to provide water for both domestic and irrigation purposes. Their work is cost-effective, transparent, and community-centered. Each project begins with village consultations, engages local technicians, and includes long-term training and support.

On Wednesday, 20th of February, I made a brief visit to their office on Wanale Road in Mbale to meet the team behind their impressive performance in Uganda. Seated down in the main office room, I couldn't help but stare at the water project flowsheet showing visibly on a whiteboard, revealing decisions and steps in different but interconnected, complicated-looking procedures that successfully deliver water projects. It was truly an honor to speak with Alfred and Eric, two of their finest staff, who answered all my questions during our discussion.



African Jewish Voices Magazine, 2ND Edition

With smiles all over his face, Alfred stated that they have received tons of requests from villages and communities that need our solar-powered boreholes. He continued,

// Even though we can't help everyone at the same time, we prioritize how vulnerable the village in question is— its population and proximity to any existing water sources in the area." Then, in answering one of my questions, Eric spoke in confidence. "We don't just install boreholes; we train people on how to manage, repair, and troubleshoot the system. We only send a team to fix a major malfunction and get it running again. //

In Uganda, several Jewish communities— like Kwania, Namutumba, Nasenyi, Nangolo, and Putti— are entirely rural. Until recently, most of them relied on kerosene lamps, unclean water sources, and manual farming methods. Not only did the economic opportunities become limited due to lack of electricity, but also religious expression. But thanks to Innovation Africa, who have been changing the narratives. According to Alfred, the construction of a solar-powered synagogue in Putti was actually the first Jewish community to benefit from Innovation Africa projects in the country.

The Putti Jewish community, located in Eastern Uganda at the outskirts of Mbale, has long dreamt of a synagogue that reflects its spiritual aspirations. Its old synagogue, a small building that has kept the community going, still stands today as a tourist site. Their dream of getting a better synagogue became a reality when Innovation Africa began working in Uganda. The organization supported the construction and solar electrification of a new synagogue building, erected next to the old synagogue.



The solar-powered synagogue in the Putti Jewish community, built by Innovation Africa, standing beside the historic old shul.

With solar-capability, evening services now hold at the Synagogue, including Torah learning, and community events that were previously restricted once the evening darkness comes. Solar lighting has not only enhanced the religious atmosphere— it has strengthened Jewish identity and cohesion. Children can now take part in Hebrew lessons after sunset, and Shabbat gatherings are more joyful and meaningful.

In addition to the synagogue, mini-solar panels were also installed on the homes of some synagogue members who live far away in the sparsely populated Putti village. Recently, Innovation Africa completed the installation of a similar solar electrification system at the Kahal Kadosh Beth Shalom (KKBS) congregation in Nangolo, with funding from the Kirsh Foundation. In comparison to Putti, this 2023 project is a testament that Innovation Africa is true to its mission of providing solar for humanitarian courses.

But unlike Putti, it didn't construct a synagogue from scratch; it only powered up the newly built KKBS synagogue. Additionally, the village is currently getting a more potent and innovative public water system in an effort to reach more people in the surrounding area. The Nangolo village project utilizes solar energy to provide water for public use, which demonstrates how a single intervention can transform an entire community. During Purim of 2025, I was with the congregation in Nangolo headed by JJ Keki, which happened to be my second visit to the community. A walk through the little village will reveal the construction layout template of the water project.



The Kahal Kadosh Beth Shalom Synagogue in Nangolo, now illuminated by solar energy solutions provided by Innovation Africa.



A newly installed solar-powered public water tank in Nangolo, supporting community access to clean water.



One of several community taps fed by a network of underground water pipes.

By drilling into the ground and tapping from its rich aquifer, clean water is distributed through underground pipes across a section of the village near the synagogue. Prior to this, women and children would walk some kilometers daily to fetch water from open and contaminated water sources. But the feature of this village water scheme allows the water to be generated at the main site of the solar water generation and stored in overhead tanks, while villagers can access this water from different designated spots in Nangolo.

The construction involves the installation of a submersible solar pump with a 10-meter tower and an underground distribution channel that feeds many taps in the village. When this project gets completed, with a simple turn of a tap, families can access clean, reliable water—leading to better hygiene, lower the risk of disease, and provide people more time for school and work.

In Namutumba, the focus was on cultivating self-reliance through agriculture. Farming here, like in many other places, depends on seasonal rainfall, which is not enough,, and cases of prolonged droughts have left them vulnerable to food insecurity. It was on this backdrop that the "Namutumba Agriculture for Life" scheme was formed in 2017 after a famine period experienced in Uganda. This project, the brainchild of Israel Siriri, Ssekiddu Isaac, and Nehemiah Muguya, has over the years extended its activities from food crops to cash crops to ensure diversification and sustainability.



10-metre high solar-powered water tank in Namutumba, constructed to support irrigation agriculture.



One of 17 solar-fed taps delivering clean water for household use in Namutumba.

Nevertheless, with the recent intervention of Innovation Africa, agricultural operations have received a significant technological boost in the Namutumba Abayudaya community. With solar-driven pumps channeling water to farmland through drip irrigation, crop yields have increased. The community now grows maize, pineapple, cassava, banana, and chilis. The solar project by Innovation Africa does support agriculture and simultaneously provides water that is distributed to 17 taps in the area, sustaining about 3,000 people living in the village.

On February 27th, the Nasenyi Jewish community in Uganda inaugurated a new synagogue. If you have been to Kahal Kadosh She'erit Yisrael (KKSJ) before now, you can better understand what tremendous change it got, dismantling the old building and putting up a magnificent piece. Thanks to the significant support from SJUA (Sephardi Jews of Uganda Assistance) and a couple of other individuals solidly behind the Nasenyi community. It was a wonderful gathering on that day as visitors from across the globe stormed the venue to officially open up the new shul.

A few yards away from the solar-powered synagogue building, a farmland extends about 6 hectares for the community's food security efforts. Then about another one and a half kilometers away, there is a solar-lit mikveh built in 2023. Despite being small and remote, the Nasenyi community is deeply committed to Jewish practices. On this basis, Innovation Africa happily installed solar lighting in the mikveh, an essential ritual bath for family purity and conversion, enabling it to operate at night.

Generally, what sets Innovation Africa apart is its holistic, sustainable model. A transparent system equipped with remote monitoring, allowing managers to track energy usage, water flow, and maintenance in real time. One of their success secrets is maintaining a dedicated workforce made up of engineers, field officers, managers, and experts. They train technicians on the site to handle repairs, ensuring that the community maintains the systems instead of abandoning them. This empowerment model transforms beneficiaries into caretakers, thereby reducing dependency and fostering resilience.

Inspiring founder of Innovation Africa Sivan Yaari—who also doubles as CEO of the tech organization—expressed her enduring motivation and the mission ahead while recently commissioning a new solar-powered water tank in a Malawian village. Another project of a similar nature is currently underway in neighboring Zambia and is scheduled to launch later in August.

“We’re proud to bring the light of Israeli innovation to Jewish and non-Jewish communities alike—powering synagogues, mikvehs, farms, and futures. When the lights turn on or clean water flows, it’s not just technology—it’s dignity, opportunity, and hope.”



The mikveh at the KKSJ Synagogue, powered by solar energy

Moreover, the inclusion of Jewish and non-Jewish communities alike reinforces a shared humanity—proving that Israeli technology can serve as a bridge for cross-cultural cooperation and understanding. Looking ahead, the success stories of these solar-powered Ugandan Jewish communities point toward a compelling future. And as Innovation Africa expands its reach, more Jewish communities across Sub-Saharan Africa could gain access to electricity, clean water, and agricultural solutions.

In a world facing both climatic and economic crises, solar energy offers a path that is clean, renewable, and adaptable. To see African Jewish communities leveraging technology—which offers continuity—the ability to pass on the tradition, educate the next generation, and live Jewishly with pride. According to Jewish literature, Israel is referred to as the "light unto the nations." Through the work of Innovation Africa, this calling is being fulfilled in the most literal sense. Light is entering homes, synagogues, mikvehs, schools, and fields—nourishing both body and soul.

No doubt, this growing collaboration between Israeli innovation and African Jewish communities is more than a humanitarian effort. It is a profound statement that even the most remote and marginalized communities can be empowered, dignified, and included in the global Jewish narratives.



Technicians install additional solar panels on the rooftop of Beth Chessed Synagogue, boosting the overall efficiency of the solar power system.

SOLAR ELECTRIFICATION FOR HEBREW LEARNING & WORSHIP

A trip to Ardent Hebrew Academy in Eastern Nigeria



By Hadassah Azujioha

One of my most exciting experiences is traveling to Abia State to observe Sabbath and witness how solar electricity is powering a synagogue and Hebrew learning effort for children. A

week before Purim, I set out from my location in Ogwashi-Uku to visit Beth Chessed synagogue in Aba, the capital of the state, arriving there by 5:10 on Friday evening. I have been to the state a few times, but I have never been to this particular synagogue. However, I successfully navigated to the synagogue with the assistance of the provided instructions.

David, the chief chazan, welcomed me and took me to the visitors room, which was well prepared, arranged, and put together. With a sense of excitement and comfort, I inquired what time the erev Shabbat service commences, to which he responded that everything for Shabbat preparation is ready and prayers should begin a few minutes after the candle lighting. Indeed, everywhere around was immaculately clean and well-organized, ready to welcome Shabbat.

I wanted to see inside the synagogue since I was curious about it, and I was astonished to find the leader, who identified himself as Yahuderek, already inside. He had already dressed in a long robe for Shabbat and was meditating when I interrupted him with my presence. We greeted each other, and he extended his warmest welcome to me, stating that members of the Knesset would be arriving in a short while. The area was typically semi-urban, with some of their members living around the vicinity.

At the exact moment, some minutes before the time of Sabbath candle lighting, members gathered. The members sang various songs in both Hebrew and English to uplift their spirits as we prepared to welcome Shabbat. The congregation was full, with everyone, including the chazan, ready. As soon as the time arrived, one of the women lit the Sabbath candle and recited the blessing, receiving a melodic "amen" from the congregation. In a high-spirited mood, the Kabbalat Shabbat prayers echoed around the space as both congregations matched the energy of the leading chazan.

By the time we got to Aleinu, there seemed to be a complete blackout outside, but we had solar-powered bulbs lighting up the synagogue. Everyone's faces were bright, looking cheerful as we went straight to kiddush. The challah was fantastic, baked by Yehudit, the wife of the leader, whom I had prayed next to and was just beginning to learn more about and her amazing contributions to the community.

Just imagine how difficult it was when the synagogue had no solar light as an alternative, especially since public electricity in the area has been unreliable for several years. I was responding to a question David asked me at the end of Brikat Hamazon about how I felt about the evening prayers. In response, it was an energetic and brightly lit evening service, thanks to the solar bulbs' illumination. However, he informed me that the lights would go out by 10 PM, which caused the prayers to be conducted quickly and on time, followed by kiddush and the Shabbat meal; he mentioned that he would explain everything in detail after Shabbat.

Early in the morning, everyone woke up, freshened up, and got ready for Shabbat Shacharit, which began at 7. We prayed fervently until the Torah service, during which we read the parshat using a Khumash since there was no Sefer Torah. Then, the leader of the synagogue delivered a beautiful dvar Torah on the reading, concluding by encouraging everyone to uphold the words of the Torah as guidelines for living Jewishly, emphasizing that we should follow Judaism as a way of life rather than just a religion.

It was indeed another lively and vibrant Shabbat service for me, and there was something special about them in their deep connection with the Jewish tradition, spiritual consciousness, and vibrant young population. While the chazan led the prayers from a table at the left corner in front, the male congregation occupied the front row, with the women sitting at the rear, all facing the same direction. In the course of the prayers, a young boy recited some of the prayers seated next to the chazan, who I later found out was one of the students of the Hebrew class held in the community.



Pupils from Ardent Hebrew Academy gather for a group photo inside the synagogue — where Jewish learning flourishes, now supported by sustainable energy.

It is quite remarkable to observe the younger children's participation in the prayer service procedures, as it serves to enhance their learning and development. During kiddush, Yahuderek recited the blessings over wine and bread. A young boy was responsible for carrying the tray and coordinating the distribution of the bread divided into small portions. By the time we chorused Brikat hamazon together, the younger children were the loudest, with their young, sharp voices that made the grace after the meal melodically tense when they sang along to some of the lines.

Finally came the moment I was waiting for, to meet with some of the young students of the mini Hebrew class hosted in the synagogue. After everyone had their Shabbat meal, the students got ready for their Hebrew learning by positioning themselves at one end of the synagogue. When David came in, he started asking them questions one after the other. The students responded accurately and perfectly.

Following my introduction, I joined the class and felt honored to invite the students to read something in Ivrit of my choosing. I requested Kamsi, one of the male students, to recite Psalm 145 in Hebrew, and he did so flawlessly. It was inspiring to learn that their desire to travel to Israel as adults and be able to communicate with the people there is one of their main motivations to learn Hebrew. They seek to learn not only how to read but also how to speak. Another student, Chimuanya, a female, recited Psalm 136 in Hebrew with outstanding confidence. My enthusiasm was visible as I observed the students, prompting me to request that they recite more common sentences in Hebrew. They all made an effort before their teacher concluded the session. I urged them to keep practicing.

Ardent Hebrew Academy, as it is called, has been David Yahuderek's way of contributing to the development of Judaism, tracing back to 2019, about a year after his bar mitzvah. He was a student of Eben Cohen, who taught him how to read Hebrew. Cohen was teaching in the synagogue at that time. Throughout the years that followed, he has maintained the classes and has selflessly motivated younger teenagers to stay focused despite multiple challenges, the most significant of which is the lack of electricity.

When David was away at Abuja for a project, the public electricity system experienced a major setback due to vandalism. In addition to the absence of

their teacher, students struggled to learn without a textbook. To compound the electricity challenge that persisted for several months, the country was thrown into fuel scarcity, causing the price of petrol to skyrocket. In sheer determination, the synagogue management stepped up to keep powering the Hebrew class with a generator, which is usually more active at night since students have to rest after school hours and help their parents at home before going to the synagogue for classes.

While the electricity issue remained unresolved for nearly 3 years, continuing to run the class became unfeasible, bringing it to the brink of shutting down until Kulanu intervened. They analyzed the ongoing challenge of the Hebrew class and intervened by providing solar electricity for the synagogue to support the class. The solar unit consists of panels, batteries, and control units. In response to this gesture, the students, the imot, and the members of the synagogue express their gratitude and satisfaction for the new improvements and developments in the synagogue made possible by Kulanu's assistance. This development ultimately filled the gap in the community caused by a lack of public electricity for more than three years. For record-keeping purposes, the installation will be the first solar electrification project of its kind by Kulanu in the country aimed at supporting Hebrew learning.

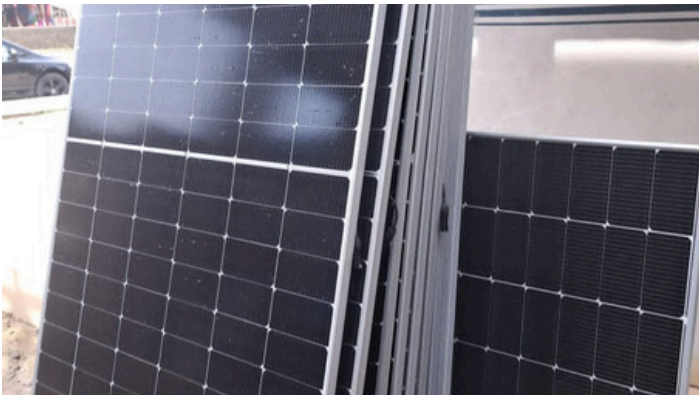


A Hebrew language class in session on a Sunday afternoon, reflecting the community's dedication to Jewish education in a solar-powered environment.

With the availability of solar-powered electric ceiling fans, stuffy conditions due to the zinc structure of the building have been improved, allowing members to have better comfort. In addition to providing a Wi-Fi connection, Kulanu also made a remarkable effort to ensure an adequate number of chairs, tables, books, and needed materials for students, as well as a standard whiteboard for teaching with a projector.

Everything was running smoothly, except for the solar panel, which shuts off at 10:00 pm. The solar system is turned off at night and powered on in the morning due to insufficient batteries, which made it difficult to power the borehole for water generation. The solar has eight panels and only two batteries, which was not enough to make it function at maximum efficiency.

In another development, the Ardent Hebrew Academy class has been receiving renewed support and encouragement, all thanks to Margie Billian from the United States, whom David met online. She not only provides food for the students to eat but also food for the synagogue to use for the Shabbat observance. The children have been immensely inspired to continue attending studies on a consistent basis as a result of her monthly contributions.



New solar panel units, donated through the generous support of Margie Billian, enable a full-scale energy upgrade for both study and lighting up the synagogue.

Alongside her support for meals and Hebrew education, Margie Billian also took action to tackle the recent challenges related to the solar system. As the solar system had become unreliable, especially at night, because of inadequate batteries and panels, she successfully secured the funds needed for an urgent upgrade. Barely a month after my visit to the community, the upgrade has now been completed thanks to the funding she provided, and the synagogue enjoys reliable solar power for both learning and worship.

Usually, a solar power system, even where there is abundant sunshine, generates electricity based on several key factors: the number and size of solar panels, the capacity of the batteries, and the total load it is expected to carry. When Kulanu first funded the first phase of installation in 2024, the project served as a pilot to test the system's viability for powering the synagogue and encouraging Hebrew learning. Now, with Margie's generous additional support, the solar system has been successfully upgraded to full capacity, capable of meeting the synagogue's daily and nighttime energy needs.

The initiative to leverage solar technology as an alternative has helped keep the community's efforts together. There's now more available time to study Hebrew in the evening. Two students, Kamsi and Ngozi, expressed their joy at the improvement in learning compared to the limited class sessions they previously used to have. Since the solar lighting upgrade, the increased availability of evening classes has significantly improved their learning pace and performance skills.

Kulanu's provision of solar electrification is more than just providing energy—it is a long-term investment in the future growth and the sustainability of Judaism. Reliable electricity provides opportunities for improved Jewish learning, worship, and community development, particularly in areas with limited electricity. This solar intervention serves as a model for other remote areas or locations facing similar electricity issues, offering a practical and sustainable solution for practicing Judaism fully, safely, and comfortably.



Batteries that store electrical energy generated by solar panels deployed on rooftops.



By Rishon Abraham

The Awakening of African Jewry and the Call for Giyur.

In recent years, there has been an awakening among people from diverse backgrounds, especially in Africa, who are rediscovering their Jewish roots. Numerous communities are, at long last, reconnecting with a long-lost heritage, thereby giving hope to the idea of "Kibbutz Galuyot" (Ingathering of the Exiles), as written in Devarim 30:3: *"Then Hashem, your G-d, will bring back your exiles, and He will have mercy upon you."*

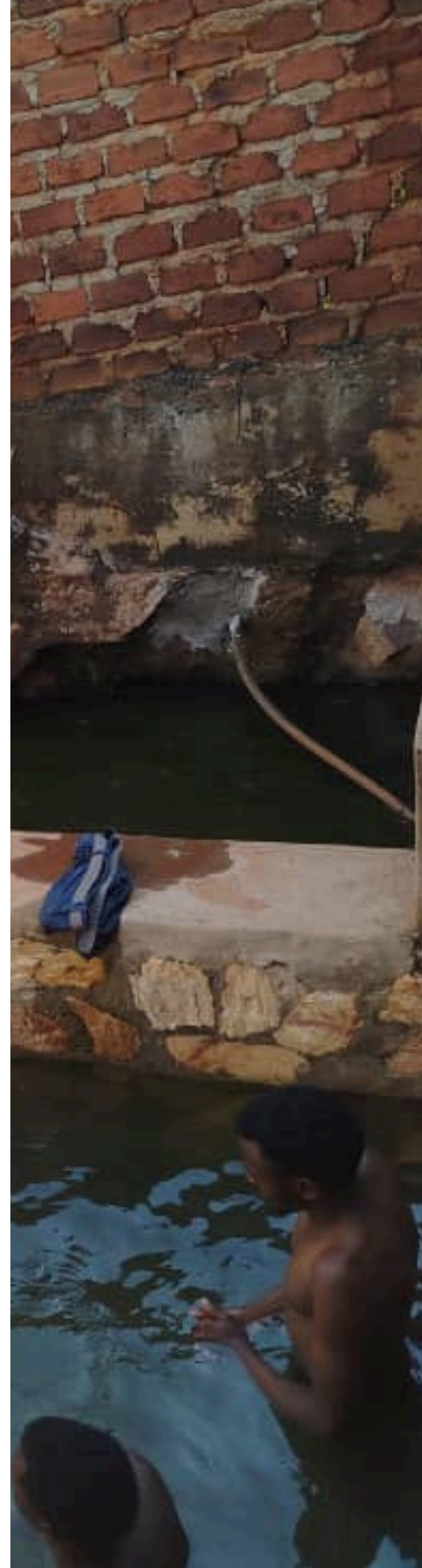
Rudy Rochman, an Israeli Jewish rights activist, made a logical statement in an interview with the a magazine during one of his trips to Africa. In my interactive conversation with a few non-African Jewish individuals I have met, never have I seen anyone reason in such a manner, putting themselves in a replacive position, as he spoke with considerable emotion and seriousness.

"When I first found out that there were Jews in Africa, I felt a sense of shock and responsibility to connect with them. I asked myself, what if they had come to Israel first while we were still suffering in the diaspora? Wouldn't we want them to come, help, and recognize us?"

Looking at the scripture, the return of the Jews of Africa, whether by bloodline or by spiritual calling, is more of a prophetic fulfillment of Yeshayahu 11:12: *"He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel. He will assemble the scattered people of Yehudah from the four quarters of the earth."*

The Concept of Baal Teshuvah and the African Jews

In Judaism, a returnee (Baal Teshuvah), like the African Jews, refers to a Jew who, after a period of non-observance or a less strict religious lifestyle,



Mikveh Immersion during a recent Jewish conversion ceremony in Uganda.

returns to a more observant and traditional practice of Judaism. This concept is what could be said of the African Jews (the lost tribes of Israel and the emerging communities), who are returning to G-d with a commitment to live according to Jewish principles. Yet, with this return comes a sacred responsibility—conversion to Judaism.

Conversion to Judaism (Giyur) is the process by which non-Jews adopt the Jewish religion and become members of the Jewish ethnoreligious community. For the African Jewry, who have embraced and followed the practice of Rabbinical Judaism for over decades, it is not easy to hear that they need to convert to their original ancestral religious path, but this is not personal. We can liken this circumstance to the same scenario that the entire Jewish nation underwent after leaving Egypt. Despite all the suffering and torment for being Jewish, the Israelites, upon reaching Mount Sinai, were told that they had to formally accept the Torah and convert to Judaism by immersing in a mikvah.

According to Rabbi Aron Moss, **"The Israelites could have had the same complaint: 'We have always been Jewish, we have suffered terribly for it, and now we are told to become Jewish?'"**

The Jews of old also had a time and moment to ponder and choose if they were ready for this formal recognition and commitment to Hashem for a lifetime. Therefore, today, the African Jewry, mostly the communities of Jews of color, should know that conversion is not a rejection of our past as a lost tribe of Israel but an embrace of the future—a formal acceptance of our destiny and identity as Jews.



Community members proudly display their certificates following a 2024 Jewish conversion in Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Rabbi Eliyahu Birnbaum, known as the Yehudi Olami (The Wandering Jew), once said in an interview, "It is clear that the only way they, as returning Jewish communities, can join the Jewish nation is through Giyur."

This statement reiterates the Psak made by Rav Chaim Kanievsky (the Chief Rabbinical Authority of the Charedi Community in Israel, 2016 [5776]), who stated "Giyur Lechumra" that the Igbo, an ethnic tribe in Nigeria claiming to be descendants of the Tribe of Gad, need to undergo a form of conversion to dispel any doubts. And without a doubt, this is a call to our African Jewish brothers and sisters to consider embracing conversion and to be eventually integrated into the mainstream Jewish community.

The Growing Number of Conversions in Africa:

Today, so far, the continent has witnessed pockets of conversions within the sub-Saharan states, which include the following:

- In 2017, there was an Orthodox conversion in Abidjan, the capital of Côte d'Ivoire in West Africa.

- Furthermore, we witnessed 2021 and 2024 Masorti conversions in Nigeria, which took place in Abuja and Rivers State, respectively.
- In that same 2024, a Giyur took place in Cameroon, at the capital in Yaounde.
- The Abayudaya in Uganda has had numerous Masorti and Orthodox conversions in the past in its various communities. And through their effort, they organized conversion for a Jewish community in Kenya. In Dec 2024, conversion also took place in Mbale, at the headquarters of Abayudaya.

The most recent event involved a second batch of Sephardi Orthodox conversions that took place in a Jewish community in Mukono, central Uganda, and was led by Rabbi Sjimon Den Hollander in February 2025. Although these conversions are a step toward African Jewish integration into mainstream Jewry, they fail to meet the demand for full-scale Jewish conversions needed across Africa, as many communities are yearning to be carried along.

The Challenges of Conversion for African Jews

The conversion process in Judaism poses challenges for Africans who have limited financial resources to pursue it. Most Jewish conversions require an officiating beit din, usually made up of 3 or more rabbis in most cases. The other option is for the individual involved to travel to South Africa, Europe, the United States, or Israel to join a Jewish community. Obviously, one or two individuals can arrange funding to move abroad for their conversion, but it is impossible for the entire Jewish community to travel overseas for this purpose.

Nonetheless, an increasing number of Jews who live in Africa are keen to witness a rise in conversions within their community. Many believe it is time for world Jewry to reflect on some of the limitations facing these communities. There have been requests and appeals for the relevant authorities to embrace and integrate the Jews of Africa into the

broader Jewish community by facilitating conversions for them.

Heaven forbid that I should clamor for a watering down of Judaism by quick and easy conversions, but my opinion is that the Jews of Africa, who have been practicing Rabbinical Judaism for a long time now, through the guidance of good-hearted rabbis, should be supported to bring conversions to their various communities. We should establish Jewish organizations specifically for the African giyur and encourage people to financially support them. Jewish schools should be built as alternatives to the missionary and secular schools around them. They should be helped to build mikveot so their women can fulfill their mitzvah of purity after nidah, and more of their youth should be encouraged to go to rabbinical schools to educate their communities.

The giyur of the African Jewry is a mitzvah that should not be delayed any longer, as stated in the Gemara (Yevamot 47b) about the convert: 'He is

circumcised immediately, as we do not delay (the performance) of a mitzvah." Yes, it is a mitzvah, and it is important.

Divine Call for Inclusion

This is a divine call, as stated in the Gemara, Pesachim 87B: *"And Rabbi Elazar said: The Holy One, Blessed is He, exiled Israel among the nations only so that the converts would join them, as it is stated, 'And I will sow her to Me in the land' (Hosea 2:25). Does a person sow a seed of grain for any reason other than to bring in several kor of grain during the harvest? So too, the exile is to enable converts from the nations to join the Jewish people."*

In our thirteenth blessing in the Amidah prayer, which we recite three times a day, we even remember the gayray tzedek (the righteous convert). Another aspect that shows how important converts are is the fact our sages chose the book of Ruth to be read to the congregation on Shavuot, which marks the giving of the Torah; meanwhile, Ruth was a convert.

It even gets fascinating when we read in the Hagadah that our fathers were idolaters and heathens, thereby reminding us that the African convert, even from an emerging community, also could become Jewish. All that the African Jewry needs is a chance to be carried along and to be recognized.

At this point, it is a proven fact that moving an entire community, such as one from West Africa, to join a community abroad to access a beit din is practically impossible. A realistic approach would involve communities having their own trained and ordained rabbi in the future, after they have rebuilt their communities to meet standard requirements and possess the necessary facilities. But before this future would be realized, more rabbis should be kind enough to make plans to come to interested communities, observe, teach, and convert them if they have met the necessary standard.

However, an African proverb says, "He who doesn't clean his mouth before breakfast always complains that the food is sour." This is advice to the majority of interested African Jewish congregations about the need to put their communities in the right order to meet Jewish standards and avoid complaints. It is a call to unite, build strong, joyful *kibbutzim*, and set a sustainable leadership structure that is void of *rancho*. They should be strict in their observance of *mitzvot* as much as they can and promote good *middot* to sustain the communities.

We should also understand that even as a convert, we are not inferior to Jews by birth. In reality, according to Ari HaKadosh in *Shaar HaGilgulim Hakdamot* א and א, "The convert was never really a goy but rather a *Nefesh HaGer* (a Jewish soul in a non-Jewish body)." The Talmud also refers to the convert as "a convert who comes to convert" rather than "a gentile who comes to convert," thereby supporting the idea of conversion even as a lost tribe of Israel or an emerging Jewish community.

Another point that is of utmost importance is the issue of divisions of sects. Should African Jews strictly divide themselves along the path of Orthodox, Conservative, or Reform sects? Should they give themselves brand names? I believe that African Jews should not feel compelled to adopt these labels if doing so would lead to rifts, segregation, or favoritism within their broader community. I've seen how strict many strive to be in observance, even among those who converted here in Nigeria, which is good for them. I believe the African Jewry can adopt the Reb's words, which say, "A Jew is a Jew." We must remember that there were never such divisions in the Torah until recently. The Jews of Africa should not allow conversion to disrupt their identity; they should not follow the path of divisions in extreme ways. Instead, the idea of *giyur* should strengthen our unity, even as we unite with mainstream Jewry.

On a final thought, what is the level of hope for the future of recognition and inclusiveness that we crave? The Israeli anthem "Hatikvah" conveys a promise through its lyrics, promising us, inclusive of African Jewry, that as long as the Jewish souls within us yearn toward Zion, our hope will not be lost.

The conversions in Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Uganda, Cameroon, and other countries provide strong evidence that African Jewish recognition through *Giyur* is potent. *Bezrat Hashem*, more conversions will be seen in Africa in the coming years, and some of these communities will eventually rebuild themselves, having their own indigenous ordained rabbis who will create their *Beit Din*, thereby fast-tracking the universal requirements of reconnecting to Judaism. *Shalom*.



The Role of Jewish Philanthropy in African Jewish Communities.



The Netsar Israel Lo Yishaker (NILI) Day Care Center in Cameroon, providing nurturing care and social inclusion for vulnerable children of all backgrounds.

As Judaism continues to spread in Africa recently, one thing that stands out and can never be overemphasized is the role played by philanthropy. Africa continues to face significant challenges with poverty, as a substantial number of Africans survive on less than 1 dollar per day. Additionally, many governments across the continent are not taking sufficient action to improve the living conditions of their citizens. Therefore, engaging in philanthropic endeavors has proven to be a crucial step in improving the lives of numerous Africans, including Jewish populations and their diverse communities.

With a lot being achieved in this regard and excellent outcomes as expected in many cases, many Jewish organizations continue embarking on philanthropic work. Around the African continent, many Israeli and American-based organizations are involved in work and philanthropy on one side in a form of cooperative responsibility. Now even among African Jews, some indigenous organizations are also getting involved as much as they can. From agricultural grants to educational empowerment and also in the area of power generation and health, these communities have received funding that has enabled them to have improved lives and has given them better Jewish experiences.



A large-scale fish pond project in Côte d'Ivoire — consisting of nine ponds — developed to boost local food production.

We have witnessed a new initiative focused on food security spreading throughout sub-Saharan Africa, as this issue has become an increasing concern. Among the numerous philanthropic initiatives significantly impacting Jewish communities across Africa, the Gelfand Agricultural Grant stands out. It is not merely about helping communities rediscover their purpose; these communities are shifting from being consumers to becoming producers, cultivating their crops and raising their animals. The organization is led by Mark Gelfand, a Jewish philanthropist, who is utilizing the Sub-Saharan Jewish Alliance (SAJA) to connect with Jewish communities, offering them grants to support agricultural initiatives aimed at ensuring food security for both the communities and the individual families within them.

As of now, the grant has enabled these communities to purchase, own, and operate farmlands that are currently contributing to their welfare. The grant required the communities to submit proposals that outline their plans for using the funds. Once approved, the communities are empowered to implement their projects according to plan, which range from sheep and goat rearing, as we have seen in Tanzania, to megafish ponds running in Cote d'Ivoire, poultry farming in Cameroon, and tomato farms in Uganda.

In under 30 months since SAJA's establishment, approximately 30 communities have received funding across more than 9 member countries. Most of the communities that received funding are sharing their success stories, challenges, and ongoing endeavors. In Nigeria, some communities that received the grant have acquired hectares of land because they previously lacked sufficient land for farming purposes.

The benefits of these initiatives are multifaceted, offering boundless opportunities and shared responsibilities. Communities are able to produce their own food, reducing reliance on external sources and increasing their productivity as well as communal value. These projects also promote a sense of community and cooperation, as members work together to implement and achieve their agricultural objectives.

In East Africa, these agricultural projects are already yielding results in self-sufficiency. Take Zimbabwe, for example; the Lemba community, who still maintain the tradition of slaughtering a ram for Pesach, was able to provide from their flocks. In fact, they sourced virtually all Seder items from their fields and pastures. According to Modreck Maeresera, this shift toward self-sufficiency is a powerful symbol of freedom from hunger and poverty that has bedeviled many Jewish communities for a long time, and one can say that the aim of the Gelfand Grant is being achieved.



Another SAJA initiated food security project (animal husbandry) in Tanzania funded by the Gelfand Foundation.

Agricultural projects are currently underway in approximately five Lemba Jewish communities and aim to address food insecurity. The results have been promising, as each community has achieved a major milestone in establishing and sustaining large farms that are producing abundantly. Alongside the

implementation of the solar-powered irrigation method due to the drought conditions in Zimbabwe, we have also seen a greenhouse farm project. For quite some years now, agricultural endeavors in Jewish communities have been thriving in crop production, poultry, and animal rearing.

Under the leadership of Modreck, the Harare Lemba Synagogue took a significant step forward by distributing potatoes to its member families. The move was a small but crucial step toward ensuring food availability in homes within the Jewish community. The addition of potatoes as a staple food will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the well-being and livelihoods of community members. As a visionary community leader, he has played a pivotal role in driving this initiative forward. His vision for a self-sufficient community is inspiring, and the successful harvest and distribution of potatoes are a testament to his leadership.

We are witnessing the unfolding of stories about how the Gelfand Grant is positively transforming conditions and assisting numerous African Jewish communities in charting their path. Communities that were previously confined by limitations and perceived impossibilities are now experiencing some improvement. It's the dawn of a new era from Tanzania to Zimbabwe and all the way across Cameroon up to the Ivory Coast, as hopes of a future of abundance look practically feasible. Based on all available evidence, facts, and projections from different ongoing projects, this grant is positioning communities to take up active responsibilities aimed at ensuring sustained food availability.

KULANU:

Shifting focus from food security, another organization that has made a significant impact on the lives of African Jews is Kulanu. As a non-profit, Kulanu has played a significant role in aiding Jewish communities in Sub-Saharan Africa. Even though it supports mini agricultural projects, it has, through various initiatives and collaborations, empowered communities in the area of education, technology, and religious observance. In addition to economic development, they have made

massive efforts to help communities sell their handmade crafts internationally and to provide numerous donations of Judaica to those in need.

Their organization has donated numerous siddurim to several synagogues, helping to strengthen religious observance and communal prayer. Understanding the value of digital inclusion, Kulanu has assisted various synagogues in connecting to the internet via Wi-Fi, therefore providing internet access for learning, communication, global engagements, and other uses. To facilitate virtual community gatherings, online Torah study, and simpler coordination among far-off Jewish communities, they have also sent phones and laptops. They have also funded traveling teachers visiting far-off locations to deliver Jewish learning, lead services, and offer mentoring—so bridging the distance separating remote communities from the larger Jewish community.



Pupils of Hadassah Nursery and Primary School in Mbale pose for a group photo on March 8, 2023 — a school supported through Jewish philanthropic efforts.

In the area of education, Kulanu contributed immensely in supporting Hadassah Primary School, a Jewish school in Uganda that is a visible example of interfaith harmony, bringing together students and teachers from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish backgrounds. The same thing is applicable to Semie Kakungulu High School in Nabugoye, Mbale. For women's and girls' empowerment, with Kulanu support, the Abayudaya Women's Association (AWA) has successfully distributed 90 goats to women in eight Abayudaya villages in Uganda, promoting economic sustainability and improving livelihoods. Another remarkable impact of Kulanu is their support for Namutumba for Girls (NfG), a social enterprise affiliated with Days for Girls. NfG's aim is to provide reusable sanitary pad kits, promote women's health, and empower girls through education.

For several years now, different communities in various parts of Africa and beyond have continued to receive cash donations to observe Jewish festivals. This gesture is coming at the right time, as complaints about hardship have been on the rise. From these donations, most times called festival grants, communities purchase their supplies to fulfill the halachic requirement of the hagim.



Volunteers baking matzah to serve 22 Jewish communities across Uganda, a project made possible through Kulanu's sponsorship.

In a recent event, it sponsored matzah baking for 22 Jewish communities in Uganda, a Pesach program aimed at empowering communities to celebrate the festival with self-sufficiency and dignity. The program includes initiatives such as matzah baking and the production of kosher wine for Passover, which provide essential items for the Seder and promote community empowerment. The availability of matzot and wine allowed beneficiaries to celebrate two nights of Seder, a possibility further enhanced by the cash support included in the package for each participating community.

Another important contributor to the well-being of African Jewish communities is SJUA (Sephardi Jews in Uganda Assistance), a philanthropic Jewish organization supporting the growth and identity of Uganda's Sephardi Jewish populations. Under the direction of a committed group of overseas volunteers from all around the globe, SJUA has assisted Jewish communities in both addressing broader needs and building and maintaining Jewish life. Their efforts cover access to healthcare, educational support, and creative agricultural projects enhancing daily living. SJUA also offers vital religious materials, such as siddurim, Judaica, and teacher support, therefore fostering a strong and long-lasting Jewish presence in Uganda.



The newly inaugurated KKSJ Synagogue in Nasenyi, Uganda, illuminated by a solar electrification project supported by Jewish donors.

In February, just a couple of months ago, KKSJ (Kahal Kadosh She'erit Yisrael), a key affiliated congregation of SJUA, inaugurated a magnificent new synagogue in Mbale. This vibrant Jewish community, located in Nasenyi Village, received the needed financial support to replace its former synagogue with a modern structure powered by solar electricity. Alongside

the mikveh built in 2023 by SJUA, the community was also granted 6 hectares of farmland designated for food crop production for communal use. Discussions are currently underway to initiate the construction of apartment units for members and guests to stay overnight, reflecting a true partnership and commitment to support.

Before I mention the last organization for this article, let me mention an individual, Margie Billian, a philanthropic Jewish woman from the United States who has been making a significant impact through her generous donations and dedicated support. One of her notable recent contributions includes sponsoring the upgrade of a solar energy system in Beit Chesed, Aba, Abia State, Nigeria. The existing solar energy system, which powered the Ardent Hebrew Academy—a Hebrew class for children—was previously inefficient during nighttime hours. Margie’s support enabled a much-needed upgrade, ensuring a stable and reliable source of light that now sustains evening learning and other essential activities. She also supported a solar project in a synagogue in northern Cameroon, helping to enhance community life and strengthen Jewish education in areas with limited access to electricity.



Margie Billian, whose ongoing support has helped sustained Hebrew learning, solar electrification, and empowerment.

In Ghana, Margie has also extended financial support for personal assistance, demonstrating her commitment to helping Jews in Africa. It is worth mentioning that she sends a monthly donation to support a feeding program for children attending the Hebrew learning class in eastern Nigeria. This initiative ensures that the children have access to nutritious food, enabling them to focus on their studies. Margie’s philanthropic efforts are driven by her desire to honor her late father, Dr. Sternly Klein. Her selfless acts demonstrate her dedication to supporting African Jewish communities, whether it’s an individual or a community. By donating a portion of her wages, Margie is making a tangible difference in the lives of many.



From left: Margie Billian, Roslyn Kline, and Dr. Stanley Klein.

Nili Daycare Center:

While we have highlighted many diasporan Jewish individuals and foundations working fervently to improve the lives of Jews in Africa, it is also important to mention a few African indigenous Jewish foundations that provide various life-changing opportunities. Nili Center, a daycare that provides care and social inclusion for vulnerable children from all backgrounds, operates in Cameroon. Nili stands for "Netsar Israël Lo Yishaker," which translates to "The God of Israel never lies."

Founded by Letemo Nkosgo Claudine, a young Jewish woman of Cameroonian origin, the Nili Daycare Center is an inspiring example of grassroots Jewish philanthropy in Africa. The center, a nongovernmental organization, was created to offer care, protection, and social inclusion for vulnerable children from diverse backgrounds. Since its launch just a few months ago, the center that began supporting around five children, offering them a safe space for learning, growth, and dignity, now has more children under its care. Claudine shared that the mission of Nili is simple but powerful: to ensure that no child is left behind, giving every child the opportunity to flourish regardless of their circumstances.



A solar-powered agricultural irrigation system installed in a drought-affected village in Zimbabwe, demonstrating the impact of sustainable Jewish philanthropy.

In conclusion, the significance of philanthropy within African Jewish communities is profound. From international organizations like Kulanu and SJUA to individual donors such as Margie Billian and indigenous efforts like the Nili Daycare Center, a web of compassion and commitment is being woven across the continent. These initiatives are reshaping Jewish life both spiritually and materially while also creating pathways of opportunity, identity, and hope. Through education, technology, religious support, and community development, philanthropy empowers African Jews to thrive and confidently define their role within the global Jewish narrative.

Passover in Pictures: Seder Moments from African Jewish Communities.

Celebrating Passover is certainly a joyous period for Jewish adherents across the globe. From Eretz Israel to Europe, and to Asia and Australia and across the Pacific into America, the marking of the season reminds everyone of our ancestors story of freedom while at the same time improving bonds across families and community members. The same pattern is seen on the African continent, as the Passover festival brings families and synagogue members together in a communal setting for the Seder nights and other public gatherings that occur within the remaining days of the eight-day festival.

In this picture story, we take you through four countries in sub-Saharan Africa, from west to east, to show you how five communities celebrated their Seder nights.



Tanzania

Located in the northern region of Tanzania, the Yemenite Jewish congregation celebrates Passover in their unique traditional way. According to the Yemenite Baladi tradition, the seder table, one table, symbolizes a whole seder plate. With members and families and invited guests seated around the table, the head of the seder sits on the far edge of the table, from where he conducts the seder service.

Akwa Ibom, Nigeria,

In southern Nigeria, the Beth Ha'arachman Jewish community also holds a typical communal Seder night. The synagogue building, with a capacity of 300, hosts the Seder nights with a unique setting of table arrangements. Each table contained all the symbolic food, with children, women, and the men positioned separately with copies of the Haggadah on every table. The leader of the Seder and a selected group of individuals, mostly the chazanim and the gabbai, sit at a separate table in front, from where the Seder service officiating happens.



Kasuku, Kenya.

At 8,000 feet above sea level in central Kenya, the congregation of Kehillat Yisrael Synagogue gathered in a compacted space to celebrate the Seder night. The community social hall was filled with warmth from a local fire stove burning charcoal, while everyone wore thick clothing to combat the chilling mountain cold. Everyone sits on their chairs around the perimeter, leaning against the wall, while a few people are closer to the central seder table arrangement, where the leader of the seder is positioned at the rear, flanked by the chazanim.



Yaoundé, Cameroon.

Yaounde, the capital of Cameroon in Central Africa, witnessed a combined Seder night celebration as the Beith Bnei Yeshurun hosted its members and visitors from other synagogues in the country. The seder was tense with excitement and merriment as everyone dressed beautifully to mark this year's Passover Seder. On the evening of the first Seder night, there was an entertaining display by the children as they played their part in the seder service program assigned to them.



Aba, Nigeria.

Beth Chessed, formally known as Har Shalom Synagogue in Aba (Eastern Nigeria), marked this year's Passover in a communal setting, as always. Members and their households gathered around one central seder table as they listened to the leader of the seder recount the story of the exodus, reading from the Haggadah. With a recent upgraded solar electrification, they were able to enjoy every moment of the ceremony, which lasted way beyond midnight in bright illumination.





By Israel Ben Abraham

IPJD PHILANTHROPIC GESTURE ACROSS JEWISH NIGERIA

The Initiative for Progressive Jewish Development (IPJD), as a philanthropic organization, has been making a profound impact through its endeavors, touching the lives of countless individuals and Jewish communities around Nigeria. With an unwavering commitment to creating positive change, IPJD's charitable initiatives have been a beacon of hope for Jews in need. Through its selfless efforts, it has shown a remarkable dedication to enhancing the Jewish experience for Nigerian Jews, and its philanthropic works stand as a testament to the power of compassion and kindness.

Led by passionate, jovial, and kind executive secretary and chairman, Engr. Yatov Ben Israel, the organization has over the years established itself as a leading force in philanthropy, leveraging its resources to drive meaningful change in Jewish communities across Nigeria. From supporting Jewish communities and organizations to individual and environmental conservation, IPJD's philanthropic initiatives have had a lasting impact on the lives of countless individuals and Jewish communities in Nigeria.

Established as a non-governmental organization by Professor Israel Abido, who additionally holds the position of spiritual leader at El Melek Synagogue in Warri, Delta State, Nigeria, this organization has played a pivotal role in advancing various initiatives focused on the promotion of Jewish heritage and community development in Nigeria. One of its most important contributions has been in the field of synagogue development, where it has been instrumental in constructing and refurbishing places of worship for Jewish communities. Recent contributions

include financial support for the completion of structural work and painting at Beth Harachaman Jewish Community (BHJC) in Uruan, Akwa Ibom State, along with funding for some construction work at the Jewish Central Synagogue, located in Uyo, Southern Nigeria. The organization provided financial support to Meir Elohim Synagogue in Port Harcourt in Rivers State to repair the damaged fence and complete the painting project for the synagogue.



***Yatov Ben Yisrael —
Chairperson for the IPJD***

Additionally, IPJD has offered substantial assistance for the development of a synagogue building at Tikvat Israel Community in Kubwa, Abuja. The organization's significant initiatives in synagogue development have created lively communities for worship and gathering while also contributing to the preservation of the rich cultural and historical heritage of Jewish communities in the country.

In a conversation with Yatov Ben Israel in his Abuja office, he shared insights about the establishment of the organization and the motivations that led him to pursue Jewish philanthropy.

"I will start by saying that my father, Prof. Israel Abido, was the founder of the Initiative for Progressive Judaism Development. He is the leader of El Melek Synagogue. I actually came on board at a point when I saw the sacrifices they are making to help develop Judaism. I told myself that the time has come for me to get involved. So that's how I began what you are witnessing today."

"As you know, everything has a beginning, and that is true for my involvement in philanthropic works in Judaism. As a young man, I discovered that Nigerian Jews lack a lot of support and are disadvantaged as a religious group. This can be attributed to the society we live in. So I made a vow to Hashem that if He blesses me financially, I will use the resources to develop Judaism in Nigeria."

"Upon my marriage, I made a commitment that should Hashem bless me, I will uphold and support Judaism. I am currently honoring my commitment to Hashem. For me, it's not about having an abundance; instead, it's about honoring my commitment with the adequate portion that Hashem has bestowed upon me."

Yatov also underlined that his philanthropic assistance is rooted in the Torah, which teaches that generosity yields more blessings.

"My passion for philanthropy is based on the Torah, which said that there is more benefit in Zadaka. And as a businessman, since the Temple is not standing now, I tithe myself and my business ten percent of our earnings and dedicate it to the works of Hashem. Directing money towards the advancement of Judaism—constructing and refurbishing synagogues along with several other humanitarian endeavors we are undertaking. So the Torah is my driving force in what we are doing with IPJD."

Beyond their historical significance, IPJD's synagogue development initiatives have also had a far-reaching impact on the spiritual and social lives of community members.

Synagogues serve as sacred spaces for worship, prayer, and spiritual growth while also providing a hub for community events, education, and social activities. Through the assistance of synagogue building and repair, the organization has cultivated a sense of community and belonging among people and families in Nigeria.

Furthermore, IPJD's philanthropic gestures have left an imprint that will inspire and uplift Jewish communities for generations to come. The organization remains dedicated to supporting and empowering communities across Nigeria, with a steadfast commitment to preserving Jewish heritage and fostering spiritual growth. In the past, IPJD has supported and sponsored Jewish weddings and donated numerous Jewish books to several synagogues.

Yatov emphasized that one of the next plans is to establish Jewish schools and construct new synagogues for various communities once funding is secured.

"We are currently engaged in the renovation, refurbishment, and enhancement of three synagogues in southern Nigeria to ensure they are suitable for the worship of Hashem. In the near future, contingent upon securing the necessary funding, we will initiate the construction of a new synagogue. Furthermore, our objective is to establish Jewish schools in Nigeria to provide Jewish children with a comprehensive Jewish education. Jewish children in Nigeria are currently enrolled in secular schools, where they are exposed to teachings that conflict with the Jewish lessons they typically receive on Shabbat."



BEFORE

Worshippers gathered for Mincha prayers at Central Synagogue in Uyo, one of southern Nigerian synagogues that received flooring support through IPJD funding.



An exterior view of the synagogue building currently under construction, supported by donations from the Initiative for Progressive Judaism Development (IPJD). The ongoing work includes raising the walls, installing doors and windows, adding a ceiling, and providing seating for the worship space.



ONGOING

Rishon Ben Abraham and Eliyahu Ben Avraham pictured inside the synagogue, where raised walls are being built to protect the interior from rain and weather— ensuring a safe, dry space for community gatherings and prayer.

Passover Matzot Across Nigeria:

In addition to contributing to synagogue building and renovation, another significant philanthropic effort by IPJD is the Passover Matzot Initiative, which involved the distribution of Passover wine and matzot to more than 30 synagogues in Nigeria.

Matzot, as a crucial component of the Passover Seder, represents the Israelites' swift exit from Egypt and is essential for the Passover celebration for every Jew. By providing matzot to those in need of it, IPJD has not only ensured that individuals and families can observe the feast according to halachic tradition but also is encouraging a bond of affection and kindness among Jews worldwide.



Community members in Abia State celebrating Pesach with matzah generously donated by the IPJD

Prior to the 2025 Passover, they initiated a noteworthy effort to infuse joy and celebration into Jewish communities in Nigeria. The organization, led by its executive secretary, Ben Israel, took on the responsibility of distributing Passover matzot to synagogue communities and individuals who require them, with the goal of enabling everyone to partake in the traditional Seder and celebrate the holiday with dignity and joy.

The Passover campaign reached an impressive 30 synagogues. Additionally, kosher wine was distributed to four synagogues in Abuja, which included Chabad Jewish Center Abuja, Tikvat Israel Synagogue, Gihon Hebrew Synagogue, and Hagadol International Synagogue.

In Abia State, Southeast Nigeria, Beth Chesed Synagogue and Ohr Torah Synagogue benefited. In Rivers State, Ark Of Hashem Synagogue, Yesharim Synagogue, Meir Elohim Synagogue, and Magen Abraham Synagogue received Passover matzah from the organization. In Delta State, El Melek Synagogue, Warri, and Voice of Israel Hebrew Congregation received matzot. In Lagos State, Nigeria, the beneficiaries include Beth Shalom Bnei Zakei Nigeria Hebrew Congregation, Kehilat Israel, Lagos, and Olam Israel Festac Lagos. In Anambra State, communities that benefited include Igbo Jewish Community Synagogue Ogidi, Torah Hakadosh Synagogue, Menehem Nuach Synagogue, Beth Shalom Synagogue, and Shema Yisrael Community, Uli. Synagogues in Ebonyi state that benefited include Be'zrat Hashem Kehilah and the Ohr Hakadosh Kehillah Synagogues, respectively. Finally, in Imo State, five synagogues benefited, which includes the Association of Jewish Faith, and others.

The organization also provided matzot to 20 individuals who might not have had the resources to acquire them for the Seder. This remarkable initiative showcases their dedication to assisting Jewish communities and individuals, no matter where they are or their financial circumstances. The Passover matzot initiative exemplifies the organization's continuous dedication to aiding Jewish communities and individuals. Through its diverse programs and initiatives, it diligently promotes Jewish heritage, offers essential services, and unites people during times of need.

When asked about his experience sharing the Passover matzot, Yatov response was quite emotional. In addition to pointing out how pleased everyone was when they got the matzot, he narrated a scenario suggesting that some Nigerian Jew seemed to lack gratitude.

"The sharing of the matzot was a feat for me personally and IPJD in general. When you see and hear people joyfully appreciate you for giving them something they originally would not be able to afford because of how high the price is, it inspires you to do more because certainly we weren't able to give to all the synagogues, making some feel left out and react. Nevertheless,

doing this made me feel fulfilled because I know I was fulfilling my vow to Hashem, which revolves around contributing to building Judaism in Nigeria."

Jewish Sports: Youth Development

In the area of sports development, IPJD is currently playing a pivotal role in seeing to the success of the first registered Jewish football club in Nigeria. Thanks to Yatov, also the executive director of the club side, who is playing an active role to ensure that the club develops into an internationally recognized professional football club participating in notable football tournaments across the world. The club, which is hoping to participate in future editions of the Maccabi Football competition, has received a lot of support from IPJD and other individuals and organizations such as Kulanu, a nonprofit based in New York, and the A.B.A. Foundation, an independent media company and Parnassah network.



Maccabi Football Club of Nigeria, proudly supported by the IPJD in partnership with Kulanu and the A.B.A. Foundation

The club, based in Abuja, aims to organize a training ground and a football camp to provide more training time for its players going forward. Maintaining a football team is not an inexpensive endeavor, given the cost-effectiveness of the various activities players engage in. From the funds made available to IPJD, the Maccabi FC Nigeria receives funding to carry on daily and all required activities.

Last year, IPJD sponsored the reverse Tashlich marine conservation exercise brought forward by the Repair the Sea Organization, which saw the involvement of many Jewish youths and volunteers, primarily players from Maccabi FC Nigeria, to remove plastic waste from Jabi Lake in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria. The Reverse Tashlich initiative, conceived by Rabbi Ed Rosenthal and run through Repair the Sea, Tikun HaYam, has celebrated its 7th anniversary. The project achieved remarkable success in Abuja, as participants dedicated themselves to collecting and removing plastic waste from the lake. This collaborative movement not only contributed to the restoration of the lake's ecosystem but also heightened awareness regarding the significance of safeguarding our water bodies. This event provided young Jews with a valuable opportunity to connect and collaborate as they contribute positively to society through activities focused on environmental preservation.

Jewish philanthropy sparks growing connections and collaboration with related international organizations in similar fields. The same can be said for IPJD as it seeks to expand its reach, firstly by partnering with organizations in different parts of sub-Saharan Africa that are rendering humanitarian services, beginning in Uganda. By joining forces with them on common ground, more can be done to make people feel much better through the little assistance that can be rendered. With a dedicated team committed to its responsibilities, the vision of significantly developing Judaism, both domestically and internationally, has transformed into a lasting mission pursued with resolve, enthusiasm, and a commitment to fortify Judaism.

In conclusion, IPJD appears to be on the right path, staying committed to its mission of constructing and refurbishing synagogues while also exploring other worthy avenues in Judaism. The latest actions demonstrate a deep dedication to community, faith, and sustainability through the provision of matzot and Shabbat meals, the intention to establish Jewish schools, and a focus on environmental preservation. These initiatives reflect the essence of Jewish philanthropy and values, fostering hope for a brighter future for all Jews and future generations.





By Avraham Ben Avraham

Celebrating Passover at 8,000 Feet in Kenya's Great Rift Valley.

Two mountain communities join the Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance in a historic celebration.

PESACH, annually observed as a festival of freedom, is a time that unifies Jews globally as they commemorate the departure from Egypt—a story of enslavement, pain, perseverance, and, at the end, redemption. For those who identify as Jewish, the observance of Pesach serves as a significant marker of Jewish identity around the world. This year, my personal journey in celebration of Pesach led me to unexpected heights—the highest peak I have reached, up on the chilly mountains of central Kenya.

My trip was part of a wider East African tour, following a vibrant matzah baking event in Uganda sponsored by Kulanu, which brought together 22 Jewish communities. At the end of the two days of non-stop matzah baking in Mokuno, I drew up an itinerary to cross from Uganda into Kenya using the Malaba border crossing. Originally setting out to visit the Jewish community in Kasuku, I stumbled upon another isolated congregation on one of the hills of Molo municipality during



A stunning aerial image showcasing the breathtaking terrain surrounding the Jewish community in Molo Municipality, within Kenya's Rift Valley.

during my journey back. Both communities are nestled amidst gentle, undulating hills of the Great Rift Valley passage.

Shortly before midday, I found myself across the border into Kenya—and the first part of my itinerary would be a taxi to Nakuru, the 4th biggest town with an urban population of 570,000, according to the 2019 Kenya Population Census. But before we got to this unique town, which has surprising Jewish parameters dating many years ago, our route took us through Eldoret, which I was told was the hometown of the current leader of the country. Eldoret, approximately 85 kilometers westward to the border, is a small and compact town with a buzzing lifestyle that developed during the colonial era, around the 1940s.

From Nakuru, my next destination was Ol Kalou, a place we arrived at after a considerable climb along an uphill path to reach the highlands.

Throughout the journey, prior to entering Nakuru County, the stunning beauty of East Africa's landscape unfolds before one's eyes. Uganda, known as the pearl of Africa, boasts a stunning array of topography, while Kenya offers its own captivating land features, showcasing the remarkable geography of the Rift Valley country. Crossing into Kenya from Uganda, I immediately noticed the shift from Uganda's bustling centers to Kenya's serene and expansive landscapes. The rolling hills, cool temperature, and breathtaking views created an unforgettable setting for my next Pesach experience.

After Ol Kalou, I proceeded to Kasuku, the location of Kehillat Yisrael Synagogue. The journey took approximately 50 minutes, but we experienced an additional one and a half hours of delay due to a road accident. Thankfully, the road accident did not claim any lives, Baruch Hashem. However, by the time I traced my way to the community, they were having kiddush and then a sumptuous Shabbat erev meal, which I joined. Having

previously researched them on the internet and even authored a spotlight article about the Kasuku Jewish community, it was a heartwarming experience to finally meet them. We sang Brikat Hamazon together before retiring to bed in the chilly mountain night.

Upon waking in the morning, I was greeted by a vivid understanding of the topography around me, having arrived the previous night under the cover of darkness. The synagogue, a modest square-shaped structure, is situated on the Gathudia side of Kasuku, perched on a hilly upland that offers a view of the Aberdare range of mountains stretching across the horizon before you. One of the characteristic features of the rift valley regions is lakes and green-grassed rolling valleys of different peak heights. At the foot of the 165 km long Aberdare mountain range, characterized by their diverse ecosystems, with several prominent peaks (such as Mount Satima and Mount Kinangop) and abundant wildlife, are the waters of Lake Olbolossat, clearly visible from the Synagogue, a distance of about 10 km.

At the end of the Shacharit service, we gathered again in the home of the leader of the community, Yosef Ben Avraham Njogu, a dedicated leader from the Kenyan Kikuyu tribe. The gathering includes women, younger girls, boys, youth, and elders of the community— all of whom appear cheerful as Pesach preparations are set to begin later in the evening, after Havdallah. Instructions were dished out by Yosef regarding how the men and women would split roles to save time, ensuring the Seder night begins as early as possible.

As night descended, the Kasuku community gathered for the first seder night— an evening filled with joy, songs, and stories of the exodus. Before now, we witnessed the spirit of unity and respect for authority, as the men and women jointly came together to prepare for the festival meals. Celebrating the Seder at an elevation of 8,000 feet above sea level added a unique experience to the event. Picture yourself on a chilly evening, enveloped by the vibrant energy of Jewish worshippers in a remote setting, with towering mountains and various peaks surrounding you.



Members of Kehillat Yisrael congregation gathered in Kasuku to observe the communal Passover seder.

First of all, the best spot to take shelter from the cold night was an enclosed compartment meant for the kitchen space, even though the social hall under construction behind the synagogue building offers more space. We then brought some local stoves into the rectangular-shaped room, burning charcoal to maintain the room's warmth. We sat together around an extended table laden with symbolic food, including maror (bitter herbs), charoset (sandwich), and, of course, the matzah, which they purchased through the synagogue in Nairobi, capital of Kenya. The community, in full attendance, paid attention as Moshe Ben Avraham, a hazan and one of the sons of the community leader, read the haggadah, the ancient text that tells the story of the Israelites' liberation from slavery and oppression in Egypt.

By the time we reached the part where we sang the traditional Dayenu—"It would have been enough"—I couldn't help but reflect on how much the community had achieved. Despite being in a remote part of the rift valley, they had developed their practice of Judaism as fast as they could, thanks to their faith and resilience. Their unity, which has grown over the years, was reflected on their faces as we recited "Next Year in Y'rushalahim" at the end of the Seder.



Women dressed warmly for the chilly seder night, celebrated at an altitude of 8,000 feet above sea level.

I spent the next four unforgettable days in Kasuku, using the first three days to interact and expand my connections and knowledge, followed by a final day trip for an adventure on Lake Olbolossat, where I explored one of Kenya's hidden natural treasures. In the company of Moshe and Samuel, members of the Kehillat Israel community, we set off for an afternoon adventure along the serene waters of the lake. The skies smiled at us with sunny weather and a blue heaven with white floating clouds, perfect for photography.

Lake Olbolosat, named after a Maasai tribe, extends around 42 kilometers and possesses a narrow width throughout its course. As the only natural lake in Kenya's central region around Nyahururu, its waters serve as an essential resource for local residents, providing water for agriculture, cattle, and daily activities. The lake is also home to an array of wildlife, which includes a giant population of hippos and over 300 species of birds.

The area was silent as we watched the lake from its green-grassed banks, where some sheep were grazing. After some hesitations on my side, we got in a little wooden boat, expertly paddled by its driver, and slid softly across the shallow waters. The view was wonderful: the far-off Aberdare mountains rising majestically into the cloudy heights. One could readily see a vibrant, dispersed settlement at the base of the mountain range. Every so often as we sailed, we would stop to search the reeds for the elusive hippos who live in this lake.

Although the hippos remained shy that afternoon, the boat ride was filled with laughter, storytelling, and an appreciation of the deep connection between the Jewish community of Kasuku and the natural environment that surrounds them. It dawned on me how their proximity to the natural world reflected the agricultural lifestyle of ancient Israel—a reminder that Jewish life, wherever it thrives, stays closely tied to the land and its blessings. To attract visitors to their community, Moshe said they are considering putting on their tourism cap to do things differently.



Avraham, Samuel, and Moshe enjoy a boat ride in the shallow waters of Lake Olbolossat.

"If we can organize an online platform where we can show people what they can do for fun if they come to Kasuku, then we can attract international visitors. And if they're Jewish, then we would be more than pleased to host them in our synagogue."

Of course, looking inward and presenting things differently in attractive ways can guarantee positive outcomes. Many travelers experience tremendous fulfillment when their trips are intertwined with adventures and tourism. There are multiple things to do in and around Lake Olbolosat, according to Moshe, that would give visitors worthwhile, unimaginable fun. But however, the need to prioritize some forms of marine conservation was brought forward, which considered the timely removal of plastic bottles around the vicinity of the lake. Nevertheless, due to the distance to the city center, if there is hope for industrial recycling, they would be required to gather it up in a collection spot before moving the collected waste plastics to recyclers. Then, as the sun dipped lower behind the hills, we returned to the community, refreshed by the experience, and for me—ready to continue my exit out of Kenya the following day.



Members of the congregation assembled at the residence of their community leader shortly before the Passover celebration.

Traveling in the capacity of the general secretary of SAJA, a pan-African Jewish alliance formed some two and a half years ago, I had some unresolved matters to address. In Abidjan, the capital of Côte d'Ivoire, we established the Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance, which initially consisted of 10 nations. Subsequent to its establishment, nations such as Zambia, Gabon, and Congo have formally joined the alliance, which aims to clearly unite and help in rebuilding Jewish communities across the continent. With the exception of Kenya, one of the Alliance's initial founding members, practically every member nation has benefited from the Gelfand Award for Food Security, which is one of SAJA's ongoing agricultural project grants.

The unfortunate situation stems from weak leadership in the country, which appears unwilling to engage a significant population of Black Kenyan Jews. The alliance's formation aimed to foster unity among various communities and facilitate borderless online communication throughout the continent. Therefore, meeting with over 50 members of the Kehillat Israel Synagogue, who have excellent potential for growth and expansion, provided an opportunity to formally educate them about the SAJ Alliance.



Sunday morning Shacharit prayers at Ol Kalou Synagogue following the first seder night.

At the end of the discussion, they enthusiastically embraced the alliance, securing their rightful position as Kenyan SAJA-affiliated communities. The organization's vision envisions a vibrant alliance that embraces its unique history and traditions while embracing a shared future of inclusivity, equality, and social progress. Everyone expressed hope as they became part of the Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance (SAJA) family. No doubt, with the guarantee of continued support, including grants for food security, Jewish education, and community development, their Kenyan voices will grow louder, stronger, and more radiant on the African Jewish stage.

Just like the community in Kasuku, the Elburgon Jews, a small town perched amid the rolling hills and forest of the rift valley in the Molo municipality, also took their spot on the SAJA membership. Eventually, they became the second Jewish community, deeply rooted in their mountainous environment, to join the expanding Pan-African Jewish alliance. Upon my arrival at their community, the Elburgon Jews greeted me with warmth, and we shared matzah along with a meal of potatoes and maize, complemented by freshly prepared boiled milk from their cows.

Before leaving the following day, the younger members took me on a hike up the highest peak surrounding their community. The climb was steep and invigorating, offering sweeping vistas of meandering green hills, fertile farms, and distant forested hills. Midway, we explored a hidden cave in the hillside— a place of wonder and history. The area surrounding the rift valley remains fertile, just as it was several decades ago when one of Rothschild's daughters farmed this land long before Kenya gained independence.



Members of the Elburgon Jewish community pictured in front of Njane dam downhill, where they plan to participate in the upcoming Reverse Tashlich global plastic cleanup exercise.

While in Elburgon, I learned so much about the nearby Nakuru, a historic town with some rich Jewish history. Although I didn't travel to Nakuru again for further exploration, I instead headed towards the border at Malaba, postponing that visit for another trip. Most importantly, I gathered stories that illuminated Kenya's Jewish past. Nakuru is home to the famous 1956 synagogue and a nearby Jewish cemetery, where European Jewish refugees—survivors of war and displacement—once found safety. These two important Jewish monuments are truly a reminder of the global journeys that have intertwined Jewish lives with African lands.

It is particularly noteworthy that Gustav Kramer, a German Jew who arrived as a refugee in 1938, rapidly ascended to prominence and was elected mayor of Nakuru in 1955, during which he laid the foundation stone for the Nakuru synagogue. In 1941, the congregation formed and held prayers in private homes before constructing a proper synagogue in 1956. But while all this has become history, the shadow of the once thriving Nakuru Jewish community still lives on after its synagogue building was sold and the proceeds handed to the Nairobi Synagogue.

Ultimately, after my enriching time in Kenya, I journey westward to Eldoret and towards the Malaba border crossing into Uganda. This Pesach journey revealed to me more than just breathtaking landscapes and inspiring communities. Passover in Kenya's highlands brought to mind that Judaism is alive in Africa — not only in numbers but in heart. From mountain peaks to valley lakes, from Shabbat candles and seders in Kasuku to isolated farmers in Elburgon, our people continue to sanctify time and pass the torch onward. The journey continues—upward, forward, and always toward freedom.

Historic First: Bedikat HaMayim Reaches the Mouth of the Nile.



By Netzach Ekwunife



In a groundbreaking initiative, Bedikat HaMayim, a pioneering project launched by the Repair the Sea organization (Tikkun HaYam), made its debut across the globe. This year will be the first time the organization attempts to conduct a second category of global marine cleanup exercise in the period leading up to Passover. Not surprisingly, as usual, the concept, an entirely new line of thought, invokes the Passover spirit, motivating the willingness to participate in environmental conservation activities.

Like the Reverse Tashlich, an annual cleanup initiative that has been ongoing for 7 years, Bedikat HaMayim arose as a public appeal for more involvement beyond the traditional one-time yearly event. The rising interest highlights a significant shift in the recognition of the need to address plastic pollution and waste within our natural ecosystems, which is expected to reach 12 billion tons by 2050. Plastic pollution is increasingly recognized as a major global issue, impacting the environment, human health, and the economy. Exposure to plastic has been associated with a range of health problems, such as cancer, reproductive issues, and respiratory diseases.

In the area of marine pollution, plastic ingestion harms aquatic organisms, with 600 species projected to be affected by 2050, including 90% of seabirds and 15% of marine species. Nonetheless, under the unwavering leadership of Tikun HaYam, a growing Jewish population has an interest in joining the mission. The reason is that these initiatives are deeply rooted in Jewish customs, inspiring groups and individuals alike to encourage recovering plastic waste, recycling, and ultimately creating a sense of obligation to protect our health and ecosystem.

When I was assigned to write about this, it was important to read up about the concept to understand what differentiates it from the Reverse Tashlich, which I took part in last year with a cleanup team at the Jabi Lake in the heart of Abuja. While the Reverse Tashlich is rooted in the idea of the Rosh Hashanah Tashlich rituals, the new concept is built around Passover with a focus on Miriam (the sister of Moshe Rabbeinu).

Chief among other things, the initiative reminds us about Miriam, who is most closely associated with water: she hid the baby Moshe in the river Nile, led the children of Israel in song after the crossing of the Red Sea, and had a drinking well in the desert that preserved the Israelites throughout their sojourn in the wilderness until her demise. Secondly, designating it as a pre-Passover cleanup is appropriately timed, as the Exodus season symbolizes the narrative of freedom and the favorable sea crossing.

Before the introduction of the Bedikat HaMayim, the parent organization, Repair the Sea, presented a new cup aimed at incorporating the concept of sustainability into the Passover Seder table. This unique cup, known as Miriam's Cup, honors her legacy, powers, and remarkable connections to water and is made from recycled plastic water bottles, connecting our Jewish tradition with a commitment to environmental responsibility. Miriam's Cup narrates a tale of renewal, resilience, and repair, transforming plastic pollution into something useful. Participating in the Bedikat HaMayim marine cleanup clearly demonstrates our commitment to giving back to the water that sustained our ancestors while also fostering sustainability and environmental responsibility.

With Miriam primarily in the center of the concept and the Red Sea and the Nile's relation to the African continent, it was historic and brilliant for the exercise to reach the mouth of the Nile, Africa's longest river, in its first edition. In the spirit of Bedikat HaMayim, Save the Nile Group, organized by Avraham Ben Avraham and supported by the Repair the Sea organization, executed an impressive cleanup effort on Lake Victoria, which is the largest tropical lake in the world. Their intention was rendered reciprocally as an obligation to save the River Nile, which has its source close to the Masese landing site on the shores of Lake Victoria in Jinja, central Uganda.



Various forms of plastic waste, in different stages of decay, lie scattered just inches from the shoreline on Kisima 1 Island in Lake Victoria.



A member of the Save the Nile Group surveys the extent of plastic pollution on Kisima 1 Island, Lake Victoria, on May 31, 2025 — just before Uganda's first-ever Bedikat HaMayim outing.

Before the cleanup exercise began, plans were made to map the areas around the lake that would be cleaned. The mouth of the Nile, which is commonly known as the source of the Nile, is closest to the popular Masese landing site. The area has a market, a jetty for boats ferrying people and supplies into several lake islands, and a recreational resort that attracts millions of visitors, mostly schoolchildren on field trips and excursions. In addition to the plastic pollution caused by activities in these areas, it is common to see plastics floating from the lake and settling on the shores at Masese. A trip to the closest island from the shore, the Kisima 1 island, revealed that an enormous amount of plastic has accumulated on the island. The same scenario is prevalent in all of the hundreds of inhabited lake islands. From these islands, indiscriminately littered plastics escape into the lake and freely drift in all directions.

Meanwhile, in the distant Akwa Ibom state of Nigeria, which is thousands of kilometers away from Jinja, members of the Beth Ha'arachman Jewish community participated in the cleanup effort. Led by their spiritual leader, Emmanuel Yerimiyahu, they turned out in numbers for the marine conservation exercise, a practice they have adopted as a religious communal activity in contribution to the fight against plastic pollution.

They again chose the Atlantic beachfront in Ibeno, southern Nigeria, for the cleanup. Several students from Brachot Yeshiva, a primary and secondary school under the synagogue management, also joined them. Members of the community that included men, women, and the youth, along with the students, eventually became the pioneering group in Nigeria to take part in the Passover cleanup after making their debut in the reverse-tashlich October 30th event. They had traveled a distance of approximately two hours to reach the beachfront, a popular destination for tourists seeking relaxation, only to subsequently litter the surrounding area with their waste.



Members of the Beth Ha'arachman Jewish Community engage in a plastic collection exercise at Ibeno Beach along Nigeria's Atlantic coastline on April 6, 2025.

The Akwa Ibom team, dressed in reflectors, moved around the beachfront, which has several shops and joints where customers sit to relax. Ahead of an expected busy day, the team arrived quite on time, moving through the environment and handpicking the plastics that littered different parts of the area. It took them over 2 hours to gather a heap of used plastic bottles, placing them next to some gathered tree parts that were washed up on the shoreline. Some shop owners praised their efforts and offered to help by inviting plastic scavengers to take the collected plastics to a nearby dump site, where trucks would haul them to city recyclers.



Students of Brachot Yeshiva Primary and Secondary School pose near heaps of collected plastic waste, alongside washed up plant debris, along the lakeshore.

In Nigeria and other locations, particularly in the United States, the global exercise took place along the shoreline. But the Ugandan team worked on the shore and in a lake island. Notwithstanding the heavy downpour that began early in the afternoon on 6th April, they refused to be deterred by the unfriendly weather, which would make the exercise somewhat risky. After the rains, it was refreshing to see the skies clear before the exercise.

The team consisted of people from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish backgrounds hailing from two Jewish congregations in Mukono, located approximately 85km from Jinja. This interfaith team, assembled in a brief period, focused on individuals who are motivated and have the essential marine skills required for the operation. Nevertheless, the group was truly a representation that the business of cleaning the lake should be a collective effort for everyone, involving those living close to the lakeside or living in any of the islands in the lake—even though ultimately it's a Jewish-led venture driving environmental change.

Members of the team were highly motivated as they set out to begin the cleaning process. They wore safety vests and boots and sailed with a sack each into the lake. The first destination was the Kisima One Island, a small fishing village at the edge of Lake Victoria with a population of about 3,500. They aimed to collect as many plastic bottles as possible, knowing they would have to fit them all in the engine-powered boat.

Plastic pollution has been on the rise, posing a significant threat to the lake's ecosystem and its aquatic life. With over 925 islands scattered across its surface, Lake Victoria, with about 7000 kilometers of perimeter, is shared by three countries: Uganda, Tanzania, and Kenya. In Uganda alone, Lake Victoria's 150 inhabited islands have an estimated 250,000 people, with Buvuma Island having a share of 89,890, according to the 2014 national population and housing census. Unfortunately, this population increase has led to the generation of plastic waste, resulting in millions of pieces of plastic being littered indiscriminately across the island district. In an interview with Avraham, who led the Save the Nile team, he gave a detailed analysis of the plastic pollution of the lake.



A section of the Save the Nile team spreads out across Kisima 1 Island, actively collecting discarded plastic bottles as part of their marine conservation efforts.

"One of the major sources of plastic pollution in the lake comes from its several lake islands with significant growing populations who unfortunately have turned the islands they live into their permanent garbage dump sites. When it rains, lots of these bottles get washed into the lake and eventually drift by wind and wave to different locations on the mainland shorelines, and some flow into the River Nile, which is specifically the main interest. To save the Nile, we have to repair the lake, starting right from these inhabited lake islands where tons of plastics can be intercepted, retrieved, and prevented from getting washed into the waters of the lake."

The Nile, one of the oldest rivers mentioned in the Torah, still offers several economic benefits to the continent. The Victoria-Nile, named after its emergence from Lake Victoria around Masese Landing in Jinja, powers a nearby hydro dam. The dam, which is operated by the Uganda Electricity Company, is a source of power generation for both domestic use and lots of which are exported across the border to Kenya.

Back at Kisima 1 Island, the 15-man team under the leadership of Avraham did a thorough cleaning job. In an operation that lasted about one hour, they filled up their sacks, loaded them up on the boat, and sailed away. Passing at close proximity to Kisima 2 and Samuka Island, they sailed for another 30 minutes to get to the mouth of the Nile, which is the exact boundary spot between the lake and the Nile River.



A team supervisor with Save the Nile diligently gathers plastic bottle along the edge of Lake Victoria.

Even though the "Save the Nile" initiative was born in this historic time, a foundation is being formed around it to go beyond Bedikat HaMayim. Marine conservation is a worthy course for Jews to embark on if a lot of impact can be made compared to a one-day annual global event. The lake and its numerous inhabited islands, despite being home to vibrant communities and vital ecosystems, no large-scale cleanup has ever been implemented in this region. As a result, millions of plastic items have accumulated along the shores and in the water, threatening marine life, public health, and the economic viability of tourism in badly affected parts of the lake islands. Therefore, a permanent plastic cleanup project is being considered, which would follow a suitable work template that guarantees profitability and can generate meaningful livelihoods for those involved.

That's why the "Save the Nile" group's proposed new mission makes sense. To save the Nile, their team's focus is to repair the lake by directly removing plastics from several lake islands, mainly the Buvama island, which alone is made up of 52 islands, and then the Kisima 1 and 2 islands and Samuka island that are close to the source of the Nile. The group is considering setting a realistic target of removing 5 million plastic bottles, provided they can develop actionable activities within a timeframe that sustains operational expenses, thereby transforming the initiative into a sustainable and innovative venture.

Organizers, participants, and supporters lauded the successful global launching of the Bedikat HaMaym exercise. Its historical reach to the mouth of the Nile also signals an important starting point in the new Jewish effort in the fight against plastic pollution in Uganda. When the Jinja cleanup crew returned, all the collected plastics were moved to a local dump site, where trucks would pick them up and take them to recycling factories in Jinja and Mukono.

Moving forward, it is paramount to build on the momentum generated and work toward contributing our efforts for a sustainable future. The outing, which served as a successful pilot test, demonstrated effective waste removal from the lake and aimed to recycle materials, thereby making trash find usefulness again. By combining community engagement, innovative thinking, and partnerships, we can protect these vital ecosystems for generations to come.



After filling their sacks with collected plastics, members of the cleanup team pose with their bag of trash before departing the island.

From Kisima 1 Island, the team sailed from Lake Victoria to the mouth of the Nile on this historic day, demonstrating the scope of the mission, which aims to save the Nile by focusing on the removal of plastics from the lake to prevent them from getting into the River Nile.





By Avraham Ben Avraham

Namanyonyi Replaces Its 23-Year-Old Synagogue.

Champions the Fight against Marine Plastics Pollution.



A photo of the former Namanyonyi synagogue building, captured on Sunday, March 5, 2023 — marking the end of an era after 23 years of service.

JEWISH COMMUNITIES in Uganda have existed for over a hundred years, marking a century in 2019, which was celebrated globally as a major anniversary. In Mbale, the Eastern region of the landlocked country—the cradle of Judaism—is evident in facts and historical monuments, which visually tell the story. A story of its founding fathers, led by a man of valor, strength, and authority wielding control over a large expanse of land on account of the British colonial masters. By the time he, Semei Kakungulu, converted to Judaism in 1919, lands were mapped out for synagogues and Jewish communities in several parts of Mbale (the town he founded), which included a central area in Namanyonyi village located between Nabugoye and Nangolo, all of which have synagogues until today.

A journey to Namanyonyi will take one through a prism of the long history of decades of Jewish practices. Today, supposedly the largest congregation of the Abayudaya, which refers to the Jewish community in Uganda and means the people of Judah, has just constructed a magnificent house of prayer. Situated right in the heart of the trading center, the new synagogue building rises prominently near the dusty road that descends toward the Namatala River in the valley below.

Thankfully, the former synagogue has served as a house of prayer for generations of individuals who have identified as Jews for two and a half decades. Although it was a relatively small structure, it united not only the residents of Namanyonyi but also others. How can I forget my first-ever Shabbat Shacharit in Uganda? It was a joint service attended by multiple congregations. Both Israeli and Ugandan flags hung from the ceiling before the entrance to the bimah area. The only distinction today is the presence of two Ugandan flags flanking an Israeli flag within the new structure.



Rivcah and her son join Pinchas and his wife, Athalia, for a photo in front of the historic synagogue building before its replacement.

However, it's fascinating to note that there was another synagogue before the 23-year building, but it was surrounded with so many controversies. During the early days of their Jewish life at the cascading hills of Mbale, where Judaism thrives, a



A festive Brit Milah ceremony held in Namanyonyi, drawing people from several synagogues across the country in a powerful show of unity.

synagogue was constructed in Namanyonyi in favor of worshipers who believe in facing the west while praying. The layout was in contrast to what the Moses Synagogue stood for, the oldest synagogue at that time on the hills of Nabugoye, which became the center of Jewish revival after the era Judaism was outlawed in Uganda by the Idi Amin administration. But unlike the Moses Synagogue that was later brought down to give way to a modern synagogue building, the older Namanyonyi Synagogue was destroyed to revert back to the idea that praying while facing the East is more ideal.

In March 2022, in an unexpected itinerary, I attended a combined Shacharit service at the old shul. The idea of strengthening the bonds between several communities is achieved through these special types of Shabbat gatherings hosted periodically by different host synagogues with folks in attendance from other Jewish communities around. At the high-spirited Shabbat at the Namanyonyi Synagogue, there were people from the neighboring Nabugoye and Nangolo communities in attendance. Currently, only a few individuals who have prayed in both synagogues can appreciate the contrast between the old and new structures at the Namanyonyi historical site.

But how were they able to achieve this feat in the shortest period of time? A community with little or no resources going from an old 100-capacity synagogue to a 500+-capacity modern masterpiece. In comparison to the old building that lacked adequate ventilation, which often put the children in a crying mood when its short aluminum roof was heated in the midday sun. The three doors at the western end of the old building have been replaced with three different entrances located on three sides of the new structure. The metallic entrances and the window protectors are made with a touch of Jewish artistry. Within the expansive interior, there are two distinct floor elevations, with the bimah positioned slightly higher than the surrounding areas. Two rooms lead into this space, while the ark is situated a short distance in front of the bimah.

A Call to Action:

Now, to answer the question above, we can trace this to their participation in an international marine conservation exercise back in 2023. We can describe this global event, known as reverse tashlich, as a necessary action at the intersection of science, nature, and religion. In addition to indiscriminate discharge of dirt into

our surrounding waters, Jews also put pressure on the waters while observing the Rosh Hashanah tashlich prayers. Therefore, to undo some of these acts against our water bodies, it only makes sense in equal measure to be dedicated to cleaning the waters around us periodically. This concept easily resonates with many, including community chairpersons like Moshe Sebagabo, who led his community to participate in the 2023 edition of the reverse tashlich, becoming the first Black African community to make its debut in the marine conservation movement to repair the sea.

"I was part of a WhatsApp group that includes a number of African Jews. One day, I received a WhatsApp message about the 6th annual reverse tashlich event. At first we didn't know much about it, and many were reluctant to participate. Knowing that the Namatala River is nearby and plagued by plastic pollution, I managed to pull a team together, and we removed many plastics flowing down the river."

It is widely known that if water bodies and humanity are to achieve some form of balancing, certain boundaries need to be maintained and not crossed. Apart from the fact that waste plastic blockage of water channels and drainage canals can cause flooding in the town, the plastics, which end up in the ocean with fishes, end up affecting the same humanity that failed to prevent the plastics from getting into the water in the first place.

According to Statista, a global data and business intelligence platform with an extensive collection of statistics, the world produces around 350 million tons of plastic waste each year. Then, as regards plastic in the ocean, between 1 and 2 million tons of plastic enter the oceans annually, which is equivalent to 8 million pieces of plastic pollution finding their way into our ocean daily. To comprehend the magnitude of these statistics, it is estimated that there are 51 trillion microplastics already in the ocean. After numerous oceanic chemical reactions, plastics degrade into minuscule, soft particles that some fish may ingest and cannot digest. Eventually, these fish end up as meals for men, who in turn consume them and face the likelihood of getting plastic poisoning.

One of the factors that fuels plastic pollution is its easy movement down the river, taking it on its path to the sea and oceans. Similarly, plastics flow from the upland areas of Mbale, including regions around Mount Elgon, down the valley and into the Namatala River, which is located less than 150 meters from the [Namanyonyi Synagogue](#). Being aware of the

phenomenon of seeing plastics floating along their backyards, especially during the rainy seasons, a team was mobilized for the exercise. Inspired by their alignment with the Reverse Tashlich global movement, the team went out together to clean up the riverbanks. The result of this collective work was massive and trendy, lauded by many as a significant first outing effort by an East African Jewish community.

The Turning Point:

In the aftermath of events, the community's sincere dream—which, at first glance, appears to be unattainable—came to pass. The friendships stemming from new partnerships and global teamwork laid the basis that triggered the financial support. While the discussion lasted, erecting a synagogue wasn't an automatic decision, as other worthwhile projects were brought to the table, which even included commercial solar water generation. At the end, the best decision was arrived at, a reflection of the resolve of a people seeking a rebuild of a standard community with a beautiful synagogue to pray in. During the construction of the new synagogue, services continued to take place in the old synagogue building.



Members of Namanyonyi synagogue take part in the 2023 Reverse Tashlich initiative, removing large amounts of plastic waste from the Namatala River.

"The only time that payers stopped in the synagogue was when it was time to construct the roof of the new building. The construction engineer advised that it was not safe to remain underneath a heavy roof while it was being constructed. So, we moved the Sefer Torah to one of our homes and prayed from there. A few weeks into the roofing project, we returned the ark and resumed our prayers in the newly constructed synagogue."

Athalia looked excited while she narrated the phases in the construction of the synagogue. Her husband, Pinchas, is one of the highly respected elders in the community, and she's also the sister of Gershom Sizomu, the chief rabbi of Uganda.

Nothing beats firsthand experience by going somewhere and immersing yourself in unison to grasp the same experience of the people—what they feel and how they feel about it. I recall driving past the synagogue while it was under construction exactly a year ago—and I was in the company of some visiting Jews from Canada, Janice and Liora.

We were in the company of Chaim Kihumbah, a documentarian and our tour guide, as we headed to the cave synagogue, a rocky, cave-like structure in the forest at Nangolo. The hideout is where the Abayudaya Jews prayed in private during Idi Amin's attempts to suppress Judaism in Uganda. However, we

only stopped inside the car to take a photograph before continuing on the bumpy ride to the cave; ever since then, I have continuously imagined what it will feel like to pray inside the new shul.

Praying in the new Shul:

As I was called up to say a few words in front of the congregation inside the new synagogue after shacharit, I was short of words, a moment I had waited for, perhaps with a sense of honor as the first Nigerian Jew to pray in the new building. I recounted my first trip to Uganda in February 2023. My first Shacharit Shabbat service was at Namanyoni. The Kiddush took place outside the small old synagogue, where everyone stood and listened to the melodic recitation of the blessing of wine and bread. Having prayed in the old synagogue and now in this new one, I can appreciate the difference, and the fact that this change occurred over a brief period of time truly demonstrates how magical a miracle can be.



The newly constructed synagogue in Namanyoni — a modern structure designed to accommodate over 500 worshippers.

However, a ceiling has not yet been installed to showcase the building's full architectural brilliance, despite its spaciousness, adequate ventilation, and high roof. Similarly, the beauty of the structure is not solely determined by the ceiling; a paved floor made of marble or colored materials is also essential to reflect the glory of a sanctuary for prayers. Again, security has to be paramountly considered, which means fixing the remaining protective glass cover for the north end side of the synagogue windows. In addition, a fence around the perimeter will provide better surveillance ability within and around the compound that houses the synagogue and the space around it. But peradventure I am asked, when is the likely official inauguration of the synagogue, with every party involved meeting and feasting together? My answer will be precise—when everything mentioned above is fully put in place, and then we see outdoor painting of the building completed. Nevertheless, of course, the same miracle that worked will still work its magic out!



A view of the interior of the new synagogue building in Namanyonyi, Mbale, Eastern Uganda.

"Imagine people in the village claiming that we have received magical wealth power from the river," Moshe said, causing all of us to laugh loudly. But yes, maybe they're correct—didn't we go to the river to perform reverse tashlich, Shmuel added. Didn't you see the video, Avraham? I was the one blowing the shofar inside the river while we picked out the plastics. I laughed and asked why he would bring a shofar to the river. But without hesitation he answered, "We were going to celebrate Rosh Hashanah at that period!"

It was a very heartfelt conversation with Moshe, the chairman of the synagogue, and with Shmuel, David, and Yosef on Sunday evening when I called again to conduct some interviews in the community. How incredible to see how the community is taking the responsibility of taking the fight against used plastic bottles to the village center and not just removing the plastics flowing down the river. They lamented the menace of people consciously neglecting the harmful effects of indiscriminate disposal and reasoned they needed to focus some more effort on trapping some of the plastics by preventing them from getting into the river flowing down the valley. One of the best strategies to achieve this is to station a plastic collection point at the trading center where the public can empty their waste for easy collection and scheduled proper disposal.

Championing the fight against plastic pollution:

But just how come there has been a sudden rise in interest in marine conservation among the Jewish people? Even beyond Uganda, the movement has spread to West Africa in Nigeria and Ghana in 2024, with many communities still looking forward to making their debut as soon as they can. All this drive and enthusiasm to take up the fight against plastics can all be connected to one thing—an initiative that intertwined the Jewish identity with marinity—it was simply an innovative approach as marine cleanup has been there all along—but used to be the business of those it would be until it's been branded as reverse tashlich. This aligns with the mission and vision of the organization, which is a global entity where science and spirituality intersect to form a Jewish perspective.

Repair the Sea, otherwise in Hebrew called Tikkun HaYam, is rooted in the foundation of marine conservation, created to raise awareness in the Jewish community about the eminent threats facing water bodies around us. Rabbi Ed Rosenthal, the founder, as an environmentalist, stressed the importance of Jews making marine protection a priority because when Jews get involved in an issue, substantial change takes place. Among the various cleanup projects under their brand, the reverse tashlich concept was particularly impactful because it resonated with many people. This innovative environmental Jewish ritual is a call to join the initiative that compels us to seek reverse tashlich and cleanse human sins in a collaborative environment cleanup. During Tashlich, we dirty surrounding

water bodies with our crumbs of bread, but in a reversal process we remove dirt from the waters. The acceptability of the concept doesn't just spice up one's environmental stewardship but takes us to the surroundings not in search of breads to remove but rather plastics that threaten humanity, making the reversal intentions effective.

However, another crucial issue, equally significant as plastic removal, is the methods of disposing of all collected plastics. Prior to removing plastic garbage from the environment, the methods and approaches for its disposal must be evaluated. Given the non-biodegradability of plastics, conservatives advocate for initiatives that promote environmentally sustainable methods of reusing trash.

Regardless of the level of engagement, even at least applying the most common procedures, those committed to this renewed fight against plastic pollution must quickly figure out what to do eventually with the collected plastics. While there are several possible directions, it's important to incorporate a viable approach to ensure the entire process remains economically sustainable. Obviously—in a way that turns the venture into either a product or service, driven by the demand from the local market and surrounding area being the ultimate consideration.





NUSACH FOR RETURNING JEWS



By Eben Cohen

NOTHING is more honorable than making a practical effort in an attempt to tackle a challenge that has lingered for quite some time with real hopes fading down on the horizon. Recognizing a problem is usually the first step. Another thing is knowing the possible solution to get out of the unfortunate situation. The third step involves taking bold actions to implement changes aimed at breaking these recurring patterns. If the situation is not resolved and control is not established while relying on external factors, the consequence may be enduring years of facing the challenges that many Jewish communities in the diaspora are experiencing.

It's the nature of Jews to always try to solve issues by coming up with options to test the waters. And when the outcome becomes a true answer, then success is achieved and the rest is history. Every time a solution to a problem is created, the universe around us advances. In simple terms, improving the world means eliminating challenges by offering practical solutions that can change the course in a positive direction. And in like manner, solving problems in African Jewish communities automatically eases the prevalent burden on the majority of these families of Returning Black Jews.

Returning to Mainstream Judaism— the Religion of Our Early Ancestors:

The destruction of the second temple—unlike the aftermath of destroying the first temple, which saw the mass movement of Jews into captivity in Babylon—sent thousands of people from different tribes of Israel into distant lands of Europe, Asia, and Africa. Rather than submit to Roman rule and forced religion, true Israelites chose the freedom of their religious belief and migrated to non-Roman territories on their path of escape. This has been the migratory pattern following the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70 in the Roman Empire. And from Europe, the migration to other lands that promised more degrees of religious freedom brought the early Jewish settlers into the Americas.

Similarly, there were a couple of migratory routes into tropical Africa, which saw some of the Hebrew Jews settling near the equator, on a vast region of land bordered by the big rivers and on the other side by the Atlantic coast of Western Africa. They became known today as the Igbo Jews of the old eastern region of Nigeria, mostly from the tribes of Gad and Ephraim. The present-day legendary “Ogbu-Gad” in Aguleri and the ancient kingdom of Arochukwu in Abia State are both tied to the direct descendants of Eri and Arodi, two sons of Gad. These sites have attracted Israeli tourists and American Jewish explorers recently.



However, the harsh reality of spending thousands of years in diaspora and being disconnected from the Holy Land led to a gradual loss of our Jewish identities over the subsequent generations. Yet, over a million Igbo people have been keeping the Shabbat and celebrating festivals across the country since the 1960s, although they mostly identify as Messianic Jews. However, interestingly, many are taking bold steps and returning to Rabbinic Judaism, which is the religion of ancient Israel. In the last two decades, thousands of people have continued to convert from the Messianic to the mostly Rabbinic Orthodox movement.

TorahWorld Outreach: Bridging the Gap Over the Years

One of the first bumps on the road for returning Jews is the need to familiarize oneself with the Hebrew characters and learn how to read and understand Hebrew, the original language of the Torah. Another fundamental aspect is enhancing the study of the Torah to understand the principal halakhic requirements for living as a Jew in the community. Therefore, there is a need for Torah teachers in the Jewish settlements who are responsible for interpreting the Torah to enhance broader understanding.

It is important to acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of TorahWorld Outreach over the past decade and its ongoing efforts. Founded in 2013 with a burning desire to teach Torah to congregations returning to Judaism across the federation, both in towns and cities, as well as in rural areas with Jewish presence. This non-profit outfit became one of the earliest traveling tutors, moving from one state to another teaching Torah, bringing up young cantors, and teaching several people how to read and pray in Ivrit.

A couple of congregations in Igbo land have been recently inaugurated through the effort of the TorahWorld Outreach as the congregants begin their full return to Rabbinic Judaism. Many students have continued to leverage the free TorahWorld Hebrew language learning classes available on WhatsApp and YouTube. Additionally, it is important to note that most of the Hebrew songs used across the country for several years are musical compositions by the management of TorahWorld Outreach.

Upcoming Project: The Siddur for Returning Jews

The Siddur Project for Returning Jews has been talked about for a couple of years, and many have welcomed the idea of locally published prayer siddurim as a worthwhile achievement for the indigenous Jewish community. A successful result will produce not just proudly African-made prayer siddurim but also offer affordability and availability options to thousands of Jews residing in the country and around. From my experience traveling to over 50 congregations across the country, I can say that only 1 or 2 persons out of every 10 have a prayer siddur.

There are several reasons for this poor trend, but as the case may be, there are two major facts that practically make the Siddur Project idea exceptionally unique:

1. The Siddur Project offers the best subsidized cover price in the local market.
2. Third party support for a mass Hebrew language reading campaign for many returning Jews.

1: The Problem—UNDERLYING CHALLENGES

Without having a prayer Siddur, it becomes a bit difficult bringing Judaism back to the home where you live. The option of using a mobile device is in no way comparable to the physical print, and then what happens on Shabbat when devices are mostly switched off? Yet, approximately only less than 15% own a siddur due to one of the following:

1. Prayer Siddurim not readily available locally for purchase
2. Imported siddurim are not affordable for thousands of worshippers.
3. A great number of returning Jews still cannot pray in Ivrit.
4. Countless cases of “lost in transit” and illegal tampering of shipped materials—and loss of the entire amount of money spent in most scenarios.

2: The Solution—PRACTICAL WAY OUT

Practically, there is a way out of every problem, which is the solution at the end. However, different problems require distinct approaches to address their underlying challenges.

The highlighted list below shows the corresponding solution to all the problems outlined in the preceding section, respectively:

1. Printing standard copyright-protected siddurim locally.
2. Save the cost of overseas shipping & clearing costs—hence making siddurim readily available and affordable as well.

3. The three-in-one book format is perfect for beginners in Hebrew.

4. Looking inward is exceptional. Operating within the neighborhood ensures that product delivery is secure, fast, and timely.

3: The product— MORE THAN JUST A VALUE.

According to one of its objectives, TorahWorld Outreach says that it is illuminating the world around it with the light of the Torah and good deeds. Clearly, one of these good deeds involves creating an indigenous siddur that offers an unbeatable unique value proposition, as outlined below:

- Affordability and Availability
- Excellent book format (3-in-one), suitable for beginners in Hebrew.

- Multi-color book option
- Complete prayer book for Shabbat, festivals, and weekdays
- 1,150 Pages
- Rabbinic Approval



Students of Gihon Eden Academy sit for their Hebrew examinations— a school nurtured and managed by devoted members of Gihon Hebrew Synagogue in Abuja, Nigeria.



Eben Cohen engages young learners in mastering the Hebrew alphabet— a grassroots Jewish education effort supported by Torah World Outreach.

Work-In-Progress & Other Important Updates

The project is expected to print at least 2,000 siddurim within five to ten years after launching its first edition. This milestone will improve the statistics of siddur ownership with affordability and availability as marketplace unfair advantages. And even for the number of newly returning Jews, the siddur will be a valuable tool in their possession, helping them chart their course through Rabbinic Judaism, the oldest religion in the world.

Unfortunately, though, the good news is taking a little longer to come out right now because the initiative needs some financial help in the form of support or contributions to get to the finish line. The management of TorahWorld Outreach was able to complete the whole write-up a few years ago, and preliminary editing is still going on as the team works hard to get this first locally made siddur on the market. However, before sending the work-in-progress to print, it must undergo additional professional editing.

Based on this, the “Siddur Project” for returning Jews will be seeking financial assistance through which individuals or groups can make donations towards the success of the project. The money raised during the funding campaign will be utilized to print the first 450 copies of the Siddur. So, we'll utilize the money we get from selling these first prints to produce the following 550 copies, which means we won't need to ask for more donations. Following this plan will keep the manufacturing cycle going because more people will benefit from having a standard prayer siddur.



That thousands of individuals don't have or own siddurim is a fact many people already know—two major reasons: affordability and availability. In the past, some donors (individuals and organizations outside the country) made it possible for a significant number of people to have their own prayer books today. However, the current cost of imported siddurim, which ranges from N65,000 to N80,000, is beyond the reach of thousands of our Jewish siblings. This is especially true at a time when many people are trying to survive recent economic setbacks caused by rising inflation. Nevertheless, the “Siddur Project” can act as a true buffer if the required funding goals are met and actions are taken towards full implementation of the intended purpose for the community at large.

SHAVUOT GREETINGS FROM THE HEART OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA.

Chag Shavuot Sameach! As Jews all over the world celebrate the giving of the Torah that took place on Mount Sinai and the season of harvest, I use this time to send out warm greetings and earnest prayers to all Jewish faithfuls both here and abroad. May the lessons of Torah inspire your every endeavor, and may the spirit of this sacred festival bring a renewed hope and harmony into your life. A life of peace, a life of goodness, a life of blessings, a life of good health, a life of wealth and honor, a life of love of Torah and fear of heaven, a life in which God answers our heartfelt requests for good, and may Hakadosh barukh Hu give us the strength, courage, and abilities to transform this world into a better place for all humanity.

*Best regards,
Shlomo Yaakov Coordinator, Gihon Eden
Academy, Gihon Hebrew Synagogue, Abuja.*

"Chag Shavuot Sameach from Elburgon! And as we commemorate the giving of the Torah on mount Sinai, we think about the important lessons in the Book of Ruth, which is about kindness, bravery, and Hashem's plan. Ruth, a good person who converted to Judaism, had no idea that she would be the great-grandmother of King David, who will be the father of the Mashiach. In reality, we may not entirely understand Hashem's plan, but we walk with faith, just like her. The path to conversion isn't always easy. Even when we are turned down or in doubt, it comforts us to know that Hashem keeps track of every good deed. No doubt, I strongly believe that all of our names, like Ruth's, are written in the heavenly scrolls with honor and love.

This Shavuot, may each of us feel the embrace of Torah, the hope of redemption, and the unity of Am Yisrael. From Elburgon to all corners of the Jewish world— may your Shavuot be meaningful, joyful, and filled with light!

*Moshe Avraham
Elburgon Jewish Community, Kenya.*

Today is the most joyous day of the year—Shavuot! —also known as the Feast of Weeks. The festival commemorates the giving of the 10 commandments to the Israelites on Mount Sinai, following their escape from slavery in Egypt. In the spirit of the season, I am delighted to reach out to Jews across the world. Blessed are we, for God gave us land to live on and fields to harvest. Let us celebrate the occasion of Shavuot by offering the fruits of our hard work to Him and thanking Him for His love and blessings.

On behalf of our community, we wish you a joyful Shavuot and hope that this special holiday season brings you abundant blessings. May you have a wonderful festive time as we commemorate this day wholeheartedly and enjoy it to the fullest. We wish you, your family, and Am Yisrael a very happy Feast of Shavuot.

*Chibuzor Nwede (Yahuderekh Nweden)Beit
Chessed, Nigeria.*

We celebrate Shavuot as Hashem instructed: for forty-nine days, we shall bring the omer offering, and on the fiftieth day, we will have a feast to Elohim that coincides with the giving and celebration of the Torah at Mount Sinai. In this special season, @YerubabelTV extends warmest wishes to the Jewish community in Nigeria, across Africa, and the world at large. May the spirit and wisdom of Torah, peace, and unity guide us all, inspiring us to uphold the values of justice, compassion, and kindness. Let us cherish the timeless wisdom of the Torah, which reminds us of our shared humanity and our collective responsibility to strive for a better world. May this feast of Shavuot bring us joy, peace, and every other good thing. May our communities be blessed with love, understanding, and harmony.

*Chag Sameach!
YERUBABEL TV*

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