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# AFRICAN

## JEWISH VOICES

THE FUTURE  
THROUGH  
EDUCATION



Maccabi African Confederation, MAC.

Hanukkah Across Africa.

Strengthening Jewish Education.

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# AFRICAN JEWISH VOICES

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# FROM THE EDITOR

It's another edition of the African Jewish Voices, and firstly, our team is truly grateful to Hashem for giving us the strength to continue our work. We are especially thankful for our expanding global readership, whose support has motivated us to maintain consistency since we began this journey two years ago.

Since the previous publication, a lot has been happening globally and around the Jewish world. The entire situation was extremely tense, leading to division and diverse opinions even among Jews as the conflict shifted from the war with Hamas to Iran; however, the latter conflict was short-lived, and the release of all remaining hostages held since October 7th, 2023, eventually ended the military actions in Gaza. As we maintain our prayers for enduring peace in the Middle East, it is disheartening that acts of revenge and retaliation against innocent Jewish individuals remain prevalent globally. Consequently, the battle against antisemitism must not be scaled down and should continue to be addressed openly. No one should be subjected to hatred due to their beliefs, regardless of the religion they follow.

In this 4th edition of the AJV Magazine, the theme beams light about the future through the path of education. It discusses how the various kinds of education, including academics, religious, rabbinic, financial, technological, and modern innovative knowledge, can be pursued and combined to help shape our collective future. While it's not enough for the African Jewish communities, most of which are currently struggling, to simply dream and hope to mirror the population and standards of their counterparts in the developed world, substantial effort must be made. The process begins with recognizing the current situation and then demonstrating a strong willingness to take action, as crossing the chasm requires a two-way approach: engaging the community as a whole and empowering smart individuals who can lead and possibly become the Moshe of their era. Therefore, it is important for leaders who have been called to serve to realize that uneasy is the head that wears the crown. Shunning individuality, unnecessary division, favoritism, personal interest, ethical shortcomings, and lapses in accountability should be in their best interest; otherwise, the community risks becoming a mere shadow of its true self.

Notable transformations seen in different parts in Africa can be attributed to international nonprofits, who have played a crucial role to rebuild Jewish communities. In the area of education, one organization that stands out is Kulanu. During my trips to remote areas of East Africa, I came across Jews who were only able to speak in native languages, because most of the public schools teach in those local languages. I have also met grown-up who continue to be grateful to Kulanu for having provided free education at the Hadassah primary school in Nabugoye, where they acquired English speaking skills. Also, they've supported schools in Nigeria, Cameroon, and Zimbabwe.

Similarly, applying improved technology in agriculture can boost food security. For beneficiaries who have received funding support but still struggle to make progress, the issue may stem from zero farming knowledge and resource mismanagement. A better approach should consider communities with a good track record. Above all, we cannot determine which sector is more important or should be prioritized; instead, we should focus on upgrading our knowledge, work as a team, and implementing strategies simultaneously, making sure that no area is overlooked.

# Opening shot

## SAJA AT THREE: CELEBRATING UNITY, VISION, AND PROGRESS.



The SAJA conference held in Abidjan three years ago stands as a landmark moment in the growing story of African Jewry. Leaders and representatives from across Sub-Saharan Africa came together in a powerful display of unity, shared purpose, and collective vision. The gathering affirmed a simple but profound truth: when African Jewish communities come together, their voices are stronger, clearer, and more impactful.

As SAJA celebrates its third anniversary, we honor the partnerships built, the voices amplified, and the shared vision that continues to shape the future of African Jewry.



# SHAPING THE FUTURE THROUGH THE POWER OF EDUCATION



BY AVRAHAM AVRAHAM

**E**ducation has transcended beyond the walls of the classroom. While its power as a transformative tool remains undiminished, its evolution has presented a dual reality: vast new opportunities alongside options of flexible directions. The essence of education has not changed, but its compounding effect—when applied across disciplines and contexts—has produced outcomes that are both remarkable and far-reaching. Today, being able to use available knowledge is not only a strategic move; it's a powerful way of applying multiple forms of understanding simultaneously to achieve timely and practical results.

True education embodies a vast range of knowledge, which is tailored to every facet of human endeavor. This knowledge—the very components of education—provides the essential framework for solving countless underlying societal issues. The essence of true education lies in cultivating the ability to identify a challenge, understand the required response, and implement solutions that transform chaos into purposeful, favorable patterns.

History consistently demonstrates that many of humanity's most pressing problems already have workable solutions. This reality makes it unnecessary to perpetually seek entirely new approaches or attempt to reinvent the wheel. As the saying goes, there is "nothing new under the sun." The smart way to go forward is to look at the success pathways of others, figure out what worked for them, and then carefully adapt and copy those techniques, which have been shown to make a real difference.

The journey to success, whether beginning from scratch or from a midway point, is invariably defined by time and deliberate action. Moving from one's present reality to a desired future requires an honest understanding of the current position at any given moment. A lot of the time, we are where we are now because of what we've done in the past, and the decisions we make now will affect what happens in the future.



African Jews aspiring to a future of enriched religious practice and meaningful involvement in the economic life of their countries.

This understanding is very important for African Jews, especially those who live in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is not enough to admire Jewish communities in other parts of the world or hope to mirror their achievements without doing the work first. There is still a big divide between African Jewish communities and those in more developed locations. This gap includes things like economic empowerment, organized community settlements, established synagogues, access to Jewish education, and representation in important aspects of the secular world. There is, undeniably, significant ground to cover.

Nevertheless, it is an optimistic and clear truth that these diaspora communities, which are currently doing well, were formerly weak and unstable. Through sheer determination, they organized, invoked deep reservoirs of knowledge—both sacred and secular—and ultimately steered their collective destiny forward. Their journey from being limited to having an impact is a strong example.

The strategic use of various forms of education for African Jewry must now be channeled into concrete, transformative pillars. This means focusing on certain areas where information is the main driver of long-term progress and self-determination. Let me take you through the following areas, which represent not mere aspirations, but actionable frameworks for building a resilient and prosperous future for many indigenous African Jewish populations.

Education is essential for the training and ordination of African rabbis who can serve, lead, and advocate for their communities. In Judaism, having a rabbi is required in every community, as their role as spiritual leader is a fundamental part. Unfortunately, most African Jewish communities rely on visiting rabbis or online external guidance, which, while helpful, cannot fully replace locally grounded face-to-face leadership and guidance. Through structured rabbinic education—combining Torah study, halachic training, pastoral care, and community administration—African Jews can raise rabbis who understand both Jewish law and the lived realities of their people. Education ensures that leadership is not only learned but also sustained from within.



A curated shelf of Judaica—texts that form the foundation of Jewish studies, learning, and tradition.

When African rabbis are educated and ordained, they become an important part of the community and its history. They ultimately fill in the gap of what has been an endless vacuum over a couple of decades. Just like other professions, trained rabbis are equipped to teach, resolve religious questions, guide youth, and engage government and international Jewish institutions with confidence. It's a position that requires maximum community service and the ability to help others. Additionally, these leaders command authority and safeguard authenticity by preserving traditions and adapting them responsibly to local and modern contexts. Education gives rabbis the tools they need to speak up for the needs of their communities, build collaborations, and inspire togetherness. The result is a strong foundation for spiritual growth and institutional stability in African Jewish communities. All of these are not rocket science, but a path many have followed and many are still following.

Understanding the importance of local rabbis should lead to increased efforts to identify ways to direct individuals toward this goal. Having an African-born and ordained rabbi is far more than having a religious functionary; he or she is not only a spiritual head but also a pivotal community architect and advocate. Another crucial point is the fact that such leaders can represent their communities with authority in global Jewish dialogues, make pleas to secure essential resources, and guide congregants with a resonant, authentic voice. By adapting the successful models of rabbinic training from the global diaspora to local realities, we ensure spiritual guidance is both deeply rooted and forward-looking. This helps us become less dependent on outside leaders and builds a strong, self-sufficient religious infrastructure that can support Jewish identity for generations to come.

In the field of agriculture, it is crucial to apply both ancient and modern wisdom. This is because food security has remained a critical concern for many African Jewish communities, especially those in rural settlements. Our agricultural heritage, embodied in laws like the sabbatical year (shmita) and historical farming practices, provides a timeless framework for sustainable land stewardship. Teaching our communities these ideas along with modern agro-science gives us a powerful set of tools.

Through learning modern farming techniques—such as crop rotation, soil improvement, irrigation systems, and climate-smart practices—communities can increase yields and reduce vulnerability to weather changes. Agricultural education transforms farming from a survival-based activity into a structured and productive system capable of feeding families and supporting economic independence.

Rice cultivation in the swamps of Nalubembe, Eastern Uganda, reflecting a Jewish community's commitment to food security and self-reliance.



Beyond the field, education unlocks access to technology and capital. Training community members to draft compelling grant proposals can secure funding. With proper training, communities can adopt technologies such as solar-powered irrigation and water management systems. When knowledge, technology, and planning are combined, food security becomes achievable, dignified, and scalable, ensuring long-term resilience for African Jewish households.

These results can be seen in the ongoing food security grants to members affiliated with the Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance, SAJA. This association, formed over three years ago, was established to unite African Jewry and assist in rebuilding their communities. In an unprecedented move, the organization has been able to secure agricultural grants for more than 31 communities across 10 countries. To get the grants, the communities had to join SAJA for free and write a proposal explaining what project they would do with the money, showing their plans and how they would manage the project until the harvest and its finances.

Economic development and participation in key sectors is a new mentality that needs to be grown with everything in our arsenals. All through history, Jewish communities across the world have used education to identify practical opportunities and went ahead to propose solution in adequate measures. By acquiring special knowledge in business, finance, and management, they positioned themselves in sectors that drive nationwide economic growth. Education enabled them to match community needs with market solutions, creating wealth not only for individuals but also for communal institutions such as schools, synagogues, tech companies, and welfare programs.

We must groom a generation that understands not only how to run a business but also how to identify and fill crucial gaps in the marketplace, transforming community needs into viable, scalable enterprises. Jewish communities in Africa can draw important lessons from the pages of history. While many communities remain in rural areas, education can prepare individuals to participate in urban economies and national markets. Learning entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and vocational skills creates pathways into commerce, manufacturing, and service industries. Strategic relocation or economic engagement in capital cities allows communities to generate sustainable income, reduce poverty, and fund long-term development initiatives.



A solar-powered water tank in  
Nangolo, Uganda.

It is undisputed that education facilitates a necessary shift from rural subsistence to urban economic participation. Through vocational training, financial education programs, and networking mentorship, community members can fulfill long dreams of relocating to capital cities and commercial hubs. Here, they can establish businesses, engage in larger-scale commerce, and integrate into the formal economy. Emulating the global Jewish model of creating mutual-aid loan funds (gemachim) and robust business networks can provide the essential seed capital and mentorship to launch more endeavors, creating a virtuous cycle of reinvestment and communal uplift.

Quality education must be inclusive, reaching men and women, children and adults alike. To make sure that both our boys and girls grow up to be knowledgeable Jews and exemplary citizens, we need to push for and build great Jewish day schools that offer a strong dual curriculum, with both secular academic excellence and deep religious study. These schools are the incubators for future professionals, thinkers, and community leaders.

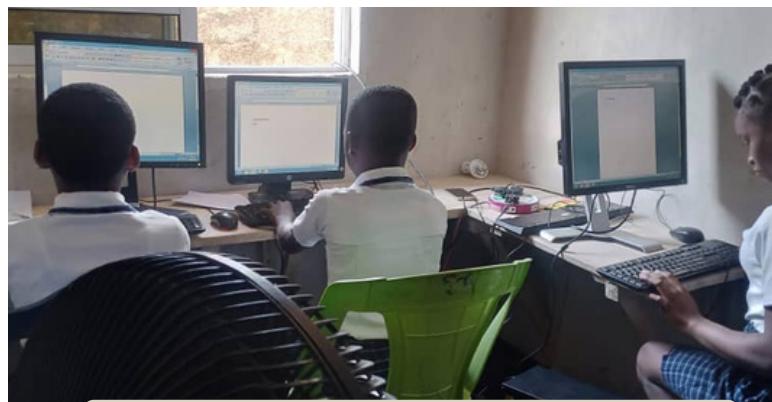
Adult education is just as important. Many community members were denied formal schooling due to historical and economic constraints. Literacy programs, vocational training, and continuing education help adults gain confidence and participate more fully in economic, religious, and civic life. When education lasts a lifetime, communities gain more leaders, have less dependence, and have a sense of progress that lifts up every generation.

This dual-focused educational investment is the engine for penetrating and influencing key societal sectors. A young lady who has a good background in law and is guided by her Jewish principles can do great work while working for her community from inside powerful organizations. Educated community members can also leverage international opportunities, studying and working abroad to acquire skills and resources that they can repatriate. The idea is to establish a virtuous cycle in which education leads to opportunity, which then leads to more investment in the community's intellectual and institutional capital.



Students: the foundation of tomorrow's future.

Technology runs the modern world, and education is the key to being able to take part in it in a meaningful way. Imagine young African Jewish children learning coding, digital design, or problem-solving skills and developing a mobile application valued at over five million dollars? Such achievements are already happening globally. Education makes it possible for people to be creative, converting their curiosity into solutions that have actual effects on the economy and society. The capital and expertise generated from such a venture could revolutionize community infrastructure, fund schools, rebuild the welfare system, and support several Jewish-owned startups.



Brachot Yeshiva Primary and Secondary School, Nigeria.

The possibilities go far beyond computer apps to include innovations in renewable energy, medical diagnostics, or fintech tailored primarily to the African continent. By leveraging online learning platforms, coding boot camps, and global tech networks, we can position our youth at the forefront of the digital economy. A single major success story might be a compelling example that motivates others and attracts funding support. Furthermore, technology education enables the global marketing of African Jewish creativity—whether through a world-best-selling digital novel, an online archive of unique traditions, a blockbuster documentary, or a consulting firm solving tech problems. These ventures share our voice with the world while creating sustainable revenue streams for communal rebuilding.

In conclusion, as has been emphasized throughout this article, almost nothing entirely new is being created on the surface of the earth today. Most new ideas, discoveries, and solutions that change the world don't come out of nowhere. Instead, they come from carefully putting together ideas that are already out there, knowledge that has been tested, and real-world experience.

This reality places a tremendous responsibility on those called to leadership. It should be known that transformation—whether social, economic, or spiritual—does not happen by chance. It is driven by informed decisions. Leaders who understand how to connect ideas, interpret knowledge, and apply learning strategically are far better positioned to guide their communities toward progress.

A leader who lacks the capacity to combine existing ideas, resources, and opportunities may unintentionally hinder the growth of their community. Leadership is not defined solely by expertise in one area or by maintaining what already exists. True leadership lies in vision—the ability to look inward, to assess available tools, and to coordinate people and knowledge toward practical solutions. When leaders recognize where educational resources exist, how knowledge can be accessed, and how ideas can be applied locally, they place the future firmly within their hands.

Ideally, shaping tomorrow is a conscious act. It is the result of deliberate choices made today—choices guided by learning, insight, and responsibility. Through education, communities gain not only skills but also agency. They gain the power to decide, to direct their development, and to shape a future that is sustainable, dignified, and firmly grounded in both heritage and possibility.



Members of the Jewish community in Molo, Kenya's Rift Valley, are already engaged in small-scale dairy farming and are confident in their ability to scale this experience into a larger venture if funded.



A re-emerged congregation in Douala (Cameroon) is motivated to regroup under a new strong leadership.



# Jewish Camping Efforts in Uganda: A New Chapter Begins.



BY REBECCA TENDO

Jewish camping, a gathering of the faithful, is a concept that has taken many shapes at points in time, historically, until it has evolved into what we know about it today. Retreating into a camp, a confined environment, away from the bustling and noisy world has served many purposes: group meditation, observing festivals fervently, study camps, or simply a protected space away from the public and prying eyes. Today, in its most familiar form, it has become a denominational backbone, shaping and strengthening the different sects of global Judaism.

The United States, with the highest number of Jewish adherents, hosts the highest number of modern campers. There are camps in some parts of Europe, in Israel, Australia, and South Africa. These camps, most of which own permanent locations, operate periodically, mostly during the summer holiday period. When active, camping activities last for two to three months and are coordinated by trained management teams consisting of counsellors and volunteers.

Depending on one's sect affiliation, individuals from different countries or regions can be admitted to attend camp and participate in the daily routines, which keeps the gathering vibrant and effective. Among these campers are the Abayudaya Jews from East Africa, who have attended summer camps in the United States for over a decade. The Abayudaya, which means "people of Judah" in the Luganda language, mostly inhabit the eastern parts of Uganda. Originating in Mbale, the cradle of Judaism in the country, they have spread out to both the north and central regions and further westward beyond Kampala, the capital of the country, fondly referred to as the pearl of Africa due to its magnificent and scenic topography, excellent weather, and natural lakes and mountains that boost its tourism potential.

During the government of Idi Amin, thousands of followers of the legendary Semei Kakungulu, who was the patriarch of Ugandan Judaism and who passed away in 1929, faced enormous threats for practicing their faith. This pressure intensified as relations between the State of Israel and the Ugandan government deteriorated. In July 1976, Israel mounted a daring rescue effort when an Air France

airliner with Israeli and Jewish passengers was hijacked and forced to land at Entebbe Airport. The military operation eventually freed the hostages in a dramatic overnight raid. It was led by Yonatan Netanyahu, the head of the elite Sayeret Matkal squad and the older brother of Israel's current prime minister. Furious with both the rescue and Israel's defiance, Idi Amin increased his hostility toward anyone perceived to be connected to Judaism or Israel, leaving the Abayudaya communities even more vulnerable.

When news broke out about the location of some citizens practicing the Israeli Judaism religion in some remote parts of Mbale, the tension was shifted to these rural-dwelling Jews. Without any chance to withstand the government's brutal force, the majority of them abandoned the religion; some fled, while the few who stayed back gathered and prayed in secret in a cave-like structure inside a forest in Nangolo. However, after the dictator was deposed and the situation calmed down, the first historic kibbutz camping was established, which became a rallying point that helped recall and reunite the Abayudaya, providing the necessary push for their re-emergence and survival.

From the kibbutz in Mbale to the summer camps in the United States, and now to a historic first modern type of camping in Busabala near Kampala—this is the story of the Jews in Uganda. Initially starting out in Mbale, there are now flourishing communities spread out, thanks to new waves of conversion, marriages, and new births, as well as the multiple sects existing in the country. But unlike most camps abroad, this inaugural camp was designed to unite Jewish children, youths, and adults from all sects, including Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform, under one roof for learning, fellowship, and spiritual growth.

The camp organizers at Busabala in Uganda embraced the idea of starting small and gradually expanding, echoing the well-known saying that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. There is no need to wait for the entire light to turn green; with willing individuals and a few dedicated volunteers, it requires a determined leader to take on the role of a pathfinder to reach the desired outcome. When the call was finally made, numerous individuals responded and signed up, turning the dream into a reality.

On December 13th, 2024, from different corners of the country, all roads led to Busabala, in the Wakiso district. Participants from Nabugoye and Nasenyi, both in Mbale, and from Mukono in the central region, as well as Kampala, made it to camp. The venue was at St. Peter's High School, with an excellent dormitory facility for campers and a secured and beautiful surrounding with trees adding to its beauty.

The camp lasted for the next 2 weeks, during which a total record number of 105 participants, including campers, facilitators, volunteers, and counselors, were present. The campers, made up of children, teenagers, and youths, ranged from the age of 5 to 28, inclusive of male and female. Being the first time, the stakes were high, with high expectations of achieving a fulfilling gathering while keeping the children engaged and motivated. For some of the officials, it was truly their first time volunteering, so it was an opportunity to learn on the job, especially after the brief training and orientation they had received before the camping commenced.

The days at Busabala were structured yet fluid, filled with a vibrant buzz of activity that blended learning with recreation and discipline with joy, from sunrise until well after the stars came out over Lake Victoria, which lies a few kilometres distant. Every morning, counselors reviewed the day's agenda, followed by spirited shacharit prayers with melodies mixing Hebrew with the local Luganda in a unique, uplifting harmony. Next is breakfast, before proceeding to the



Morning activities feature a variety of sporting events, including volleyball, basketball, track & field, and other team games for campers.

next round of the morning session. As the camp went on, both the participants and the facilitators got used to the rhythm, creating an atmosphere of excitement, adventure, and unity.

Jewish education formed the sacred core of each day. In small, age-appropriate groups, campers delved into Torah study, exploring stories and lessons to enrich their knowledge. Hebrew classes echoed in the classrooms, with children enthusiastically practicing the aleph-bet and common phrases, while teenagers worked on conversational skills. The highlight of the week for many was the challah-making workshop for the girls. Flour-dusted hands worked joyfully, braiding dough for Shabbat, the smell of baking bread filling the surroundings, signalling the coming of Shabbat. The younger girls were filled with extreme joy as they learned firsthand from the women who taught them how to bake bread, emphasizing its importance to Jewish womanhood.

The camp put a lot of focus on leadership and personal growth, in addition to spiritual growth. It organized leadership workshops that encouraged shy teenagers to speak up and work together by having them solve problems. Campers took part in small-group workshops where they did affirmations and spoke about things in groups to boost their self-esteem and confidence. Role-playing helped them figure out what they were good at, and group reflections made them want to create personal objectives. Many of them had never stood in front of their peers to express an idea or lead an activity before, and these experiences had a lasting effect on their confidence.

The Health and Wellness Workshops were just as important because they were meant to help young people deal with genuine problems. Qualified facilitators led practical discussions on HIV/AIDS awareness, cancer prevention, personal hygiene, and overall well-being. Campers learned how important it is to get regular checkups, keep things clean, and adopt healthy kosher eating habits. The sessions were interactive, with demonstrations, question-and-answer segments, and group activities that made the learning fun and memorable. Later, parents testified to the positive behavioural changes observed in their children after camp.

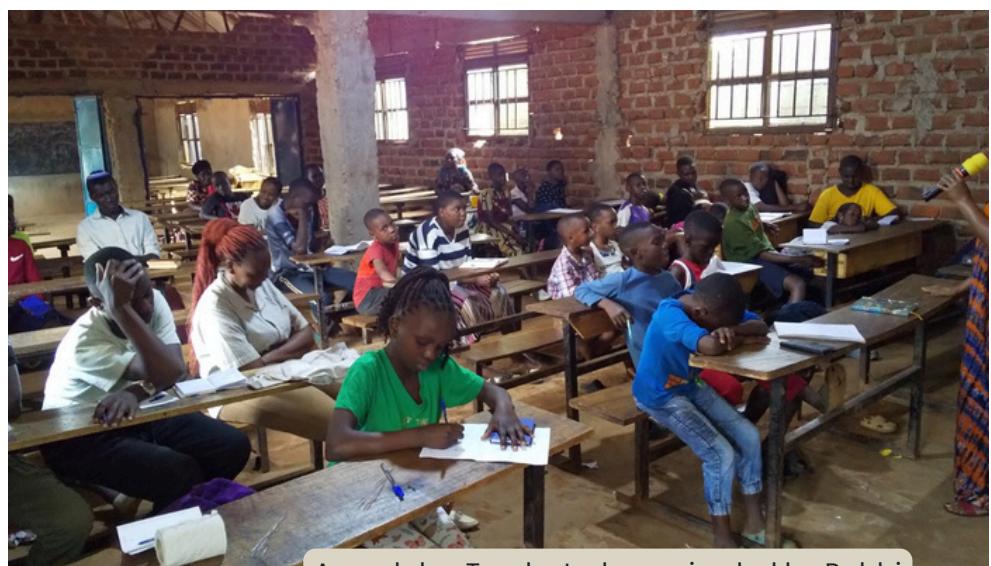
The mid-afternoons buzzed with interactive joy, especially the playing times that came after the learning sections. Friendly competition thrived through football matches and relay races, with the onlookers cheering their preferred teams from the stands. After this, collaborative cooking sessions, often supervised by the elderly women, taught both kitchen skills and the value of shared effort. These moments of pure fun and learning were not mere recreation; they were the glue that fused diverse individuals from different communities and sects into a single, supportive kehilla.

Evenings were dedicated to interactive activities—campfires, storytelling, games, and cooking sessions. These end-of-day activities aimed to ensure cemented friendships, create laughter-filled memories, and foster a sense of belonging among all participants. And as the flames of the campfire lit up the night sky, the voices of children and young adults singing Jewish melodies blended beautifully with the quiet rustle of trees surrounding the compound.

Similarly, creativity through art and craft was embraced in the camp, where campers learned to create decorative items using beads. These sessions did more than teach skills; they strengthened cultural pride and encouraged innovation. Many campers proudly carried home the items they crafted—necklaces, bracelets, purses, and small bags—as souvenirs of their time together. In addition, they also demonstrated how to make use reusable sanitary pads for girls.

By the end of the program, it was evident that this camp was more than just an event; it was a turning moment. One of the main goals was to train young leaders who would go back to their home synagogues equipped with new skills, confidence, and knowledge. Now that the seeds have been planted, the goal is for these campers to grow into responsible leaders who help their families, make their communities stronger, and help make Uganda's Jewish future bright.

Apart from South Africa, Uganda is not the only country that is hosting a Jewish camp, as Nigeria has one in its capital. "Camp Sarah" has continuously operated for three years since its founding in 2023, welcoming campers from all over the federation. Headed by Debbie Issar, Camp Sarah is an organization that aims to replicate the model of Jewish camps in the United States for Jewish communities in Nigeria, providing local camping opportunities since many individuals cannot participate in camps abroad. Inspired by the concept of teaching children playfully, after the camp Sarah 2025, being a third summer of Jewish learning and fun, sister camps have spread to other parts of Nigeria, such as Port Harcourt and Ebonyi State, indicating interest to follow suit.



A weekday Torah study session led by Rabbi Moshe Madai.

Just as Debbie serves as a pathfinder for Camp Sarah, Abigail Businge plays a similar role for the first Uganda camp, which is hosted by the Hatikvah Jewish Centre, an organization she founded. Together with her dedicated team, they envisioned a space where Jewish individuals, including orphans, marginalized youth, and less privileged community members, could come together to study Torah, celebrate Shabbat, and engage in interactive activities that build both character and community. At the core of its organizational objectives is empowering Jewish youth to thrive after school, building confidence, skills, and community through innovative programs, mentorship, and Jewish values.

When we asked Abigail how she managed to run the last camp, she was filled with excitement, recalling memories of the past. "My husband is passionate about charity and acts of supporting children and proved his generosity through his donation for this course. One of my brothers, with some other folks he brought, manned the security post throughout the duration. And the transportation of participants from Mukono was sponsored by members of the Tzion Beth Hamitzvot community."



Campers receive instructions for one of the many fun outdoor activities at camp.

The vision behind Uganda's first Jewish camp is aimed at empowering a generation and shaping its future through youth engagement and leadership training. In the actual sense, the rise of camping initiatives in Nigeria and Uganda is evidence of a continental awakening, an effort of resilience and revival, which deserves to be recognized. The result is a call for support to encourage broader and more consistent camping that positions youth for success through these gathering concepts, similar to those found in other parts of the world.



Young girls beam with excitement after receiving reusable sanitary pads donated by Sarah Nakintu.



Preparing for Shabbat: Young girls mix the dough for fresh challah.

# Hope, Unity, Global Embrace: How the CJC Visit Could Redefine Nigerian Judaism

## A 10-DAY JOURNEY THAT MAY CHANGE EVERYTHING



BY RISHON ABRAHAM

From November 24th to December 3rd, 2025, Jewish communities across Nigeria witnessed one of the most transformative moments in their modern Jewish history—the official ten-day working visit of Mr. Clive Lawton, CEO of the Commonwealth Jewish Council (CJC). For Nigerian Jews, long isolated at the edges of global Jewish consciousness, the visit was far more than a diplomatic tour; it represented long-sought recognition and affirmation of a people who have persevered in their religious identity against the odds.

The Commonwealth Jewish Council (CJC) has, since its inception, served as a unifying platform for Jewish communities across Commonwealth nations, encouraging cooperation, advocacy, and shared responsibility at a country-to-country level.



From left to right: Arthur, Clive, Agbai, Habakkuk, and Yerimyahu.

Its core objective focuses on protecting Jewish life and building bridges, as well as applying voices. Through leadership engagement, policy dialogue, and communal exchange, the CJC connects Jewish communities across continents, therefore making sure that even smaller or emerging communities are not excluded from global Jewish conversation.

Mr. Lawton's journey spanned six states and the Federal Capital Territory, reaching communities starting from Abuja, the nation's capital, to the heart of Igboland, then to the Southern Regions of Nigeria, and the bustling city of Lagos. Everywhere he went, he met communities who have preserved Judaism for generations—often without global support, mainstream acknowledgment, or institutional validation.

Working closely alongside the CJC during this historic visit was the Judaism Fellowship Initiative (JFI), a Nigerian-based nonprofit organization that is committed to uniting and strengthening Jewish life state by state within the country. While the CJC builds bridges between nations, the JFI focuses on internal cohesion—connecting Nigeria's geographically dispersed Jewish communities, facilitating unity and cooperation, Judaism development, and communal solidarity and welfare across state lines.

At the conclusion of the visit, reflections from both Mr. Lawton and JFI President Arthur Regis captured the significance of the moment. Standing alongside them was Yeremyahu Eyong, Vice President of JFI and one of the key organizers of the tour, whose tireless coordination ensured its success. Throughout the visit, the Nigerian government provided support, with state security services on standby to ensure the safety of all participants.

During one of the early public speaking events in Port Harcourt, the capital of Rivers State in the southern part of the country, Mr. Clive Lawton made a statement that would become one of the most defining moments of the visit. Reflecting on what he had witnessed so far across several Jewish communities he has covered in his itinerary; he spoke with conviction about the future of Nigerian Jewry on the global stage. "Next year, bezrat Hashem, I will be in Israel," he said, "and I will ask why they are not looking at the Nigerian Jewish communities—so that they can recognize them." His words struck a deep chord, sparking a renewed sense of hope and affirmation among those in attendance.

For many Nigerian Jews, the dream of global recognition will not be merely symbolic. It represents the big change that will make the needed difference, the end of decades of resilience in the face of marginalization, misunderstanding, and invisibility. Mr. Lawton's statement was received as a powerful signal that Nigerian Jewry, which is made up of both the Igbo and non-Igbo tribes, is no longer at the periphery of Jewish consciousness but steadily moving toward rightful inclusion within the broader Jewish world.



This photo, taken with the women's group, marks the conclusion of the visitation phase to Southern Nigeria. The gathering was hosted at the Jewish Central Synagogue in Uyo and included participatory members from various synagogues throughout Akwa Ibom State.

The significance of the visit was further echoed by Arthur Regis, the current president of the JFI, who described the moment as one of long-awaited validation. For generations, the Jews residing in Nigeria have preserved Jewish traditions, studied Torah, built synagogues, and raised families in faith—most times without institutional recognition and limited support from abroad. According to Arthur, Clive's visit affirmed the legitimacy of their identity and made clear that their voices and choice of lived Jewish practices matter. The visit was more than just a tour; it marked the acknowledgment of a narrative that had been longing for attention.

A defining strength of the visit was its inclusive character. The CEO's engagements extended beyond JFI-affiliated communities, reaching synagogues in Abuja and Ogidi that belong to other Jewish bodies, although they are former members, according to reports. Nonetheless, this broad outreach underscored a commitment to unity rather than organizational boundaries, reflecting the shared heritage and collective aspirations of Nigerian Jews across different regions and affiliations. While it is impossible for a single

journey to encompass every community across the federation, the visit stood as a meaningful gesture toward collective recognition, setting up a new frontier.

Taken together, these moments—advocacy for global acknowledgment, affirmation of identity, and an inclusive approach to community engagement—mark Mr. Lawton's visit as a pivotal chapter in the evolving narrative of Nigerian Jewry. It stands as a reminder that African Jewish voices are rising, being heard, and increasingly recognized as an integral part of the global Jewish story. His visit will not be the first time that he is involved in forging a path largely for Jews living on the African continent. Recently, his involvement in creating the Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance (SAJA) opened another chapter in the continent, enabling broader engagements and opportunities that were once hidden.



Clive Lawton in a gifted Isiagu (Igbo attire), Ogidi, Anambra State.



A visit to the Chabad House in Abuja.

### **A Day-by-Day Recap of a Historic Visit**

The historic visit officially began on Monday, 24th November, with Abuja playing host as the destination in the first stop. The opening moment took place at Tikvat Israel Synagogue, the venue of the just-concluded activities of Camp Sarah 2025, a third summer of Jewish learning and fun. At the synagogue in Kubwa, the community members gathered for Minchah. Men, women, and children filled the synagogue with anticipation, marking the beginning of a journey that most people felt had been long overdue. By simply praying together, a fact that carried deep meaning, they set a tone of spiritual kinship and mutual respect that would define the days ahead in the trip designed to cover four regions in the federation.

The following day, Tuesday, 25th November, focused on engagement and dialogue. Mr. Lawton met with Rabbi Israel Uzan of Chabad Abuja, where discussions centered on the realities, challenges, and aspirations of local Jews living in Nigeria. Later that evening, the delegation joined the Gihon Hebrew Congregation in Jikwoyi for Maariv. Known for its strong emphasis on Judaism observance and one of the oldest synagogues in the country, the community stood out as a testament to perseverance despite limited resources. The meeting in Gihon was electrifying with speeches from a few individuals. One of the most memorable events was the singing session, where the visitor had the opportunity to learn one of the congregation's Hebrew song melodies. This beautiful moment of learning and sharing was a display of the vibrancy of the indigenous Jewish people, signalling curiosity about how the others would be as the trip in the North winds down.

Wednesday, 26th November, brought the delegation to Ogidi in Anambra State, a central pillar of the Igbo Jewish identity movement. The visit to the Ogidi synagogue was among the most emotionally charged moments of the tour. Welcomed with warmth and cultural honor, Mr. Lawton participated in Ma'ariv and received traditional Igbo gifts, symbolizing mutual respect and shared heritage. The evening reached a profound peak when the community entrusted their Sefer Torah to him for use, as the synagogue in Port Harcourt that would host the only Shabbat in the trip lacks a Torah scroll.

On Thursday, 27th November, the journey continued through Awka and Aba. In Awka, Mr. Lawton was formally welcomed by JFI executives and introduced to members of the press, offering an opportunity for Nigerian Jewry to speak directly to broader audiences. Later, at the Beit Gadol HaKnesset in Aba, the commercial center of Abia State, the Jewish community's scale and vibrancy were evident. Worshippers overflowed the synagogue compound, reflecting both numerical strength and a deep hunger for connection and recognition. The atmosphere proved beyond doubt the reality that Nigerian Judaism is not marginal but alive and growing. It is also known that the state accounts for the second-largest Jewish population nationwide.

Friday, 28th November, began with Shacharit at Beit Chasaed Knesset in Umuejije in the outskirts of the city center. In attendance for the visit are some of the students of the Ardent Hebrew Academy, a mini-Hebrew class run in the synagogue. After the prayers and moment together, the next destination on the itinerary was one of the most consequential moments of the visit: an official engagement with the Governor of Abia State, Alex Otti. The delegation—comprising the CJC CEO alongside senior JFI leadership—presented key concerns relating to religious inclusion, civic participation, and tolerance. The governor's response marked a rare, hopeful, and significant moment of acknowledgment, signaling a new level of awareness and openness toward Jewish citizens within the state. For many, this engagement represented a turning point in the visibility of Nigerian Jewry within national discourse.

Shabbat, 29th November, was observed in Port Harcourt at Yesharim Synagogue, which also doubles as the host venue of Camp Sarah's sister camp. The prayers, melodies, and Torah reading created an atmosphere many described as unforgettable. During Kiddush, reflections on Jewish continuity—particularly the role of women in transmitting tradition—were deeply discussed with congregants. The moment served as a reminder that Judaism survives through observance of Jewish lifestyles, passed lovingly from one generation to the next.



With JFI leadership: Clive Lawton (center) with the President and Vice President.

On Sunday, 30th November, a National Jewish Interactive Forum brought together Jews from multiple states, including Edo, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Imo, and Abuja. This unprecedented gathering allowed diverse communities to meet, exchange experiences, and affirm their shared identity as one people. It was the first forum of its scale shaped under the influence of the Commonwealth Jewish Council, offering Mr. Lawton a panoramic view of the diversity, resilience, and unity within Nigerian Jewry.

Monday, 1st December, belonged to Uyo. Jewish communities across Akwa Ibom State gathered at the Jewish Central Synagogue to host the CJC delegation. Following a moving Sephardi-style Arvit, the introduction got underway, and then there were some moments of discussion that lasted well into the evening. The presentation of tefillin to the community became one of the most powerful moments of the day, as the new synagogue has no single tefillin in its collection. As members stepped forward to receive and honor the gift, emotions overflowed, capturing years of longing, prayer, and devotion finally met with affirmation.



Engaging with the community in an interactive session at Gihon Hebrew Synagogue, Abuja.

The final stop came on Tuesday, 2nd December, in Lagos at Kehillat Israel Synagogue in Bucknor. Speeches, embraces, and visible emotion filled the space as the visit ended. Without doubt, everyone was aware that a historic event had occurred, one that would be difficult to reverse. The following day, farewells were exchanged at Murtala Muhammed International Airport as Mr. Lawton made his way out of the country; his words made clear that this journey was not an endpoint but the beginning of an enduring relationship between Nigerian Jewry and the wider Jewish world.

In reflecting on the impact of the visit, JFI President Arthur Regis emphasized four lasting outcomes: Nigerian Judaism has entered global Jewish consciousness; Jewish communities across organizational lines experienced unprecedented unity; spiritual life was visibly renewed through Torah, prayer, and pride; and, for the first time, formal acknowledgment at the state level affirmed Jewish presence and belonging. Together, these outcomes mark the visit not only as historic but also as transformative.

### Clive Lawton's Final Message to Nigerian Jewry

***"As my visit draws to a close, the message I leave with Nigerian Jewry is unity. Having seen your depth of commitment, faith, and perseverance across communities separated by distance, it is clear that the most important step forward is collective purpose. Nigerian Jews must stand together and speak with one voice—because unity is the foundation upon which recognition, growth, and lasting impact are built."***



A gathering at Yesharim Synagogue, located in Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

In conclusion, many hold the opinion that a new chapter is beginning after the ten-day working visit of the CEO of the CJC, proving to be far more than a ceremonial tour. It became a catalyst on a three-dimensional front—spiritually, socially, and diplomatically. The journey, to an extent, strengthened the relations among Jewish communities, boosted a renewed sense of national unity, and elevated Nigerian Jewry's visibility within broader Jewish and civic spaces. Doors long closed began to open, and conversations once dwindled now gained some real traction.

Reflecting on the experience, Arthur Regis noted that the engagements throughout the visit affirmed something deeply significant: that Nigerian Jews are no longer invisible within their nation. For many, this recognition indicated a significant turning point—one that reinforced a sense of belonging, legitimacy, and hope for sustained cooperation in the future.

Sentiment has changed, as Nigerian Jews returned to their synagogues with renewed pride and a rekindled sense of purpose. Currently, the collective understanding that they had crossed a historic threshold is the most prevalent mindset. The message was clear and undeniable: the Jewish people of Nigeria are here—and the world has finally begun to listen.



# TIKKUN OLAM IN AFRICA: REVERSE TASHLICH REACHES CAMEROON AND KENYA



By Tendo Rebecca

Tikkun Olam, a powerful three-word phrase in English that translates to "repair the world," is one of the most common phrases among the Jews. Not only is it a fervent expression, but it is also sacred and an eternal call, which invokes a reminder of the duty of mankind to the surrounding environment. A responsibility: to repair, revive, restore, or protect the nature around us as much as we can, ensuring it doesn't continue to decay into deplorable conditions.

Unfortunately, water bodies, one of the four essential elements that sustain humanity and life in nearly every part of the globe, now experience unprecedented deterioration due to the actions of the very humans they support. Initially, as stated in Bereshit, water enveloped the entire earth until Hashem separated dry land from it and placed man upon it. Today, activities of human beings living on the land are the main source of pollution threatening our rivers, seas, and oceans, which constitute a total of 72% of the entire planet Earth.

Against this backdrop, a nonprofit organization in the United States initiated a renewed mission to repair our waters, Tikkun Hayam, approximately a decade ago, and it has since gained global traction. Repair the Sea is an organization that envisions a world in which the ocean is clean, aquatic life is abundant and safe, and the sanctity of water is appreciated and protected. Its vision and mission strategically blend science and spirituality with a Jewish perspective, which has immensely drawn tons of Jewish volunteers to this cause.

Among all its initiatives, the Reverse Tashlich, which recently debuted in West Africa, is the most engaging and has a global spread. The concept is rooted in the Jewish Rosh Hashanah tradition of casting crumbs of bread, symbolizing human sins, into a body of water, referred to as the tashlich rituals. Nonetheless, the opposite of this action entails removing sins in the form of human waste, such as used plastic bottles, nylon, and other garbage near the water, to prevent them from getting into the water.

This year's outing had a total of 320 teams, each consisting of 10 to 15 volunteers, participating from 31 countries in 6 continents. The global marine cleanup exercise, which took place simultaneously across the planet, happened on September 28th, barely three days before the fast of Yom Kippur. Teams were required to register online and maintain a web platform where they would update important cleanup details post-event. And according to information made available, a significant amount of plastic, measured in tons, was successfully collected across the board, preventing it from finding its way into surrounding waters.



In 2025, one of the newest teams in Africa came from Cameroon, Central Africa, while Kenya also made its debut in East Africa. Both countries joined the likes of Uganda, Ghana, and Nigeria, all of which have participated in the previous editions of the global marine conservation.



The Elburgon Jewish community, in Kenya, perched on a high mountainous location carried out the reverse tashlich in grand style, covering a lot of ground from the sloppy track of the crowded mountain settlement down the hill. The area, known as Sakaitim, has a population of about 3 thousand people whose daily use of plastics that are indiscriminately deposited finds its way down the hill, eventually ending up in the Njane dam. The settlement pattern on the slopes of the highlands causes rainwater to flow down, carrying away various materials, most of which end up in the dam.



With a team numbering more than the expected 15 men, members of the Jewish community, most of them dressed in reflectors and bearing collection bags, began the cleanup in the village area. They moved from house to house and from corner to corner and collected used plastic bottles from the surroundings. Onlookers cheered them and offered a helping hand, lauding their efforts. The group was led by Moshe Ben Abraham, the leader of the Jewish community and the chief government official for the area, which spans beyond Sakaitim and includes a total of about 22 villages. For the residents of Sakaitim, it was a worthy sight to behold their chief leading such a cleanup on a sunny Sunday afternoon with his team.

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The location is situated within the Rift Valley area in Kenya. Typical of these places, it is not only on elevated ground but also consists of many slopes, ridges, undulating hills, short valleys at different heights, and meandering rocky tracks. Although with near-freezing temperatures at some times of the year, the region has excellent soil fertility, which supports agriculture. Hence, most of the people are farmers and engage in farming all year round. Many also keep cattle for meat, donkeys as farm animals, and cows for dairy, all these animals thriving on the rich grass due to the area's high soil fertility.

Despite the area's excellent soil fertility, the hilly terrain causes rainwater and runoff from mountaintops to flow downwards, up to where it eventually settles into the lakes that are abundant in the rift valley area. This was a major concern to early settlers in part of this region, most of whom were Europeans, including the Jewish people who erected the historic Nakuru synagogue in 1956, a site less than an hour's drive from the Elburgon Jewish community. To make use of the area's rich soil, an innovative strategy was implemented to create dams in various locations that would trap large volumes of runoff water, thereby ensuring a readily available water supply for year-round agricultural activities.

The water held in the dam supports the soil around it and serves as a source of irrigation for many farmlands. These artificial dams, primarily constructed at the base of slopes and on flat valley surfaces to capture significant amounts of water, feature narrow exits at the opposite end to mitigate the risk of overflowing floods, which can happen occasionally, posing substantial harm to agricultural lands and risks to human safety. The dams are interconnected, with their outflows channelling into the next dam in the distance. In the Chandera jurisdiction, there are approximately nine dams, including the Gwatanero, Million, Ndega, Njane, and Nyeda dams.

The Njane dam, closest in proximity to the Elburgon Jewish community, has a picnic spot at a corner, which attracts people seeking leisure time, only to leave used plastic bottles at the banks that often end up in the waters of the dam. Members of the reverse tashlich team reached the dam as part of their cleanup site, where they rounded up the daily activities mapped out for the day. At the end of the task, which lasted more than three hours, the team headed back to the village after removing all the plastics that could have ended up in the dam.

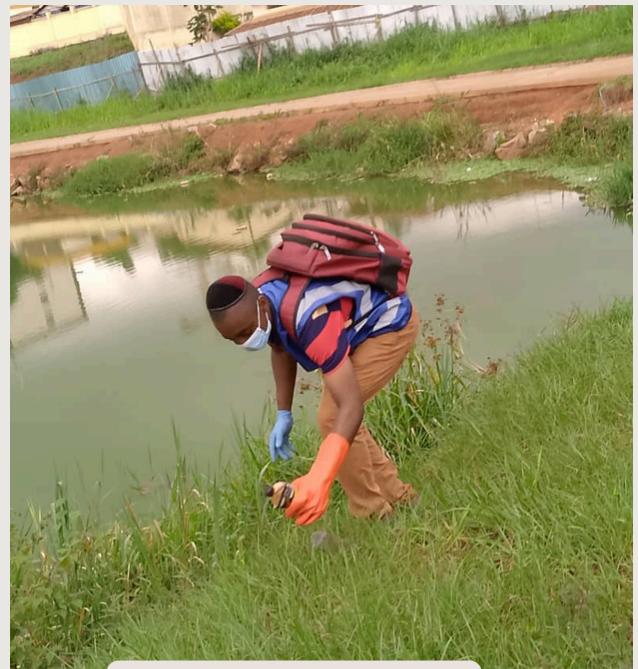
However, plastic bottles are already trapped inside the dam in an enormous quantity, and the ones still gathering at its banks are not the only threat faced by the dam. While it is feared that continuous accumulation of all sorts of plastics potentially can block the narrow exit channels, disrupting the controlled flow, and eventually leading to flash flooding, there is another more disturbing real threat –aquatic weeds. These weeds grow from the deep bottom of the dams and sprout in most places up to three meters.

With such sporadic growth, the aquatic weed competes for space inside the dam and is now a common menace in almost all the dams. If left unchecked, it not only blocks part of the channel of flow but can also displace a volume of water to flood the banks. Nonetheless, removal of aquatic weed wasn't part of the day's assignment, as the job requires a more experienced marine-savvy team and equipment. On a later date, led by the chazan, Michael Moshe, and a team that included some non-Jews, they conducted a pilot test to remove some of the aquatic weed along the shoreline; however, they did not venture deep due to the associated risks.

With a total number of collected plastics standing at around 9,674, the next step was a proper disposal as demanded by the principles of the reverse tashlich marine conservation exercise. The whole idea is to first remove the waste debris, preventing it from ending up in surrounding waters. Additionally, it is important to ensure that the disposal is carried out in a manner that prevents the collected waste from returning to the same environment. Alternatively, the end goal should be aimed at exploring viable recycling options as post-reverse tashlich measures with the intention of helping the plastics regain their usefulness again.

The participation of Cameroon in this 2025 reverse tashlich marked a meaningful moment for Jewish marine conservation engagement in Central Africa, with the Beth Goshen Jewish community in Yaoundé choosing the Yaoundé Municipal Lake as its cleanup site. This lake, which is in the Atemengue plateau valley in the heart of the Cameroonian capital, is not a random choice. The history of this place goes back to the 1950s, when a dam was built on the Mingoa River, eventually giving rise to a body of water that soon became a recreational and social landmark. The site attracted families, cultural activities, and even a nautical club that was founded in 1953. Later, the lake was also the site of fairs and public celebrations. It became a place of relaxation and shared identity for people in the city. However, its gradual decline was not only ecological but also cultural, calling for practical actions to restore both nature and public awareness.

The Yaoundé Municipal Lake, like many other lakes in cities in Africa, has been affected by population growth, bad garbage management, and insufficient environmental restrictions. Over time, plastic waste and wastewater discharges altered the ecological balance, destroying the site's beauty and cleanliness. The local government has tried to rehabilitate the Mingoa Valley in several phases, including cleaning up the water, treating it, building pedestrian walkways, and making it easier to get to. The first phase, which was finished in March 2024, has already changed some portions of the lake scenery, making it cleaner and easier for people to get to. But, with a second phase of the rehabilitation project currently suspended due to funding gaps, voluntary actions such as the reverse tashlich become an essential complement to the efforts of municipal authorities. The Beth Goshen team understood this need and acted appropriately. This situation demonstrates how national plans for environmental repair can incorporate Jewish environmental principles.



Picking up plastic waste at Yaoundé's Municipal Lake.

On the day of the cleanup, some members of the community, led by Rabbi Haim Mpodol, arrived in the afternoon equipped with collection bags and gloves, performing the symbolic action of "removing sins" not by casting them into the water, but by extracting them. They toiled on the shores of the lake, where plastic bottles and throwaway packs had built up over time. People who were passing by were curious about what they were doing because it was unusual to see a group of Jewish people actively cleaning the environment in a busy African capital. Volunteers discussed what the reverse tashlich means and how it combines a spiritual message with real-world environmental responsibility.



Volunteers from Beth Goshen collect plastic debris at Yaoundé Municipal Lake to protect this vital urban ecosystem.

The cleaning in Yaoundé, like its counterpart in Kenya, illustrated the global reverse Tashlich's adaptability. From the man-made dams and rural settlement of the Rift Valley to the rehabilitated urban lake in Central Africa, the ceremony connects Jewish communities worldwide through a shared lexicon of action. In Cameroon, the cleanup served as a powerful, visible statement: that repairing our waters is an important part of restoring our world, and that every community, regardless of where it is, has the potential and the duty to start that repair in its own backyard.



The Elburgon team in Kenya returns from cleaning the dam area.



At the planned central plastic dump site for future plastic collections.

For the Kenyan group, the collected waste marked the first batch of plastics to be stored at the Elburgon dump yard. Given the distance to the nearest recycling facility in the city, the team plans to continue removing plastics from their surroundings, securely stockpiling a substantial amount before transporting it to town for proper recycling. Looking ahead, full-scale removal of aquatic weeds is also being planned to repair and save the dams. The project will require strategic partnerships, an experienced team, and adequate funding. If this initiative is successful, it will not only keep farmlands, human settlements, and local fish populations safe from the dangers of flooding, but it will also ensure the long-term ecological health of the area's water resources.



# HANUKKAH: The Hidden Light That Illuminates the Soul and the World.



BY RABBI ISRAEL MPODOL

**H**anukkah is often considered the celebration of the Maccabees' victory over the Greeks and the miracle of the oil that burned eight days in the Temple. However, according to Rabbi Shimon bar Yo'hai, as recorded in the Zohar (II, 199a), this holiday carries a much more profound meaning: it reveals a hidden light of creation, called *Or HaGanuz*. This light was withdrawn from the world after Adam's sin and remains inaccessible to ordinary human activity. Hanukkah lets this light come down for a short time, healing spiritual wounds, lighting up the soul, and giving blessings to both the visible and invisible worlds. Thus, the miracle is not only material; it works in higher realms, reconnecting the divine dimension with the lower world.

The Ben Ish Hai (Rosh Chodesh, Year 2, Halakha 6) emphasizes that the light of Hanukkah primarily affects the eyes and the soul. The Greeks symbolized materiality and the seduction of the senses, attempting to divert Israel from spirituality. However, the beauty of the Hanukkah flame is its tendency to purify perception, restoring the ability to see holiness in the world and awakening consciousness to the Divine Presence. Each candle lit is not just a symbol; it is also a way to heal the soul and elevate the spirit.

The Ben Ish Hai says that this light gives off intellectual energy that can resolve spiritual problems and make the *Neshama* stronger, even if you don't consciously meditate.

The miracle of the oil is a good example of this hidden dimension. Pure oil, which stands for *Chokhmah*, or divine wisdom, spreads and burns in ways that are not normal. The Zohar (II, 200a) says that this oil is a symbol of how divine light travels through the *Sefirot*, from *Chessed* to *Malkhut*. The eighth flame stands for *Bina Ila'ah*, the hidden mother. Thus, the light of Hanukkah restores continuity between the divine and the world, allowing spiritual energy to flow and repair the rifts caused by materiality and injustice.

The Ben Ish Hai further explains that Hanukkah is a time for inner purification. The "Greeks" symbolize forces that obscure consciousness and distance the individual from their divine essence

The Maccabees stand for the struggle within, and each candle repels darkness, cleanses emotions, and brings peace back to the soul. The eight days of Hanukkah represent a spiritual journey: each new candle changes a part of the soul, from Gevurah's harshness to openness toward the higher light.

The Zohar says that the light of Hanukkah is not meant to be used for anything but to light up the world. It should be shown to the public so that people can see how holy it is. During Hanukkah, "the heavenly hosts change their song" (Zohar II, 199b), because a new light descends into the higher worlds, softening judgments and opening several channels of blessing for homes that light with joy and sincere intention.

In addition, Hanukkah anticipates the Geulah (Redemption). Rabbi Shimon bar Yo'hai explains that the light descending during Hanukkah is the first flame of the future world, the light that will shine at the coming of the Messiah. The Ben Ish Hai adds that every household that lights the candles and every soul that contemplates the flame participates in cosmic repair. The miracle is not only historical: it is universal and eternal, connecting the heroic past of the Maccabees to the spiritual mission of the soul and the ultimate light that will illuminate all creation.



Avraham and Joram light the hanukkiah on the 7th night in Kwania, northern Uganda.

In conclusion, according to Rabbi Shimon bar Yo'hai and the Ben Ish Hai, Hanukkah is not merely a festival but a cosmic moment of repair. The candles lit each night are doors opening toward divine wisdom, protection, and the revelation of the ultimate light. They purify the eyes, strengthen the soul, and prepare the way for the Messiah, making Hanukkah a holiday that is historical, spiritual, and mystical all at once.

# HANUKKAH PICTURE STORY Across Africa.



This photo story captures the warmth, devotion, and unity of families and communities as they celebrate the Festival of Lights, showing that the spirit of Hanukkah shines brightly, no matter where you are in Africa.

DEC  
2025



Arusha, Tanzania.



Douala, Cameroon

1st/2nd Night



Arusha, Tanzania.



Yaoundé, Cameroon

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia



Mukono, Uganda



Mukono, Uganda

At Home, Addis Ababa,  
Ethiopia



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

3rd/ 4th Night



Elburgon, Kenya



Kwania Jewish Community,  
Uganda.



Shabbat Shalom.  
Kwania, Uganda.



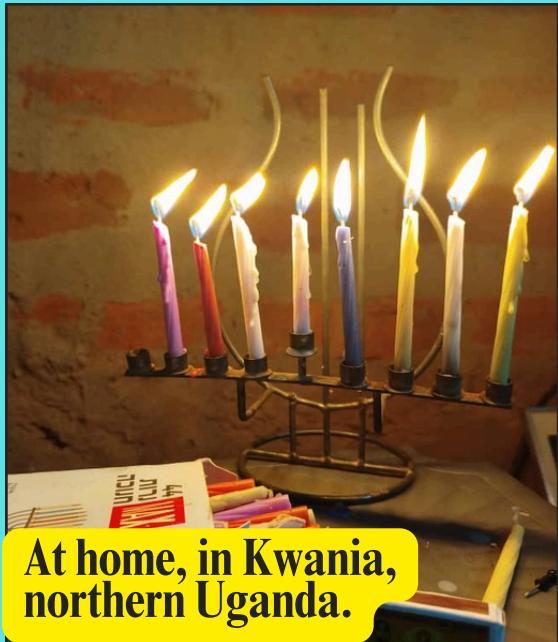
Elburgon, Kenya

## 5th/6th Night

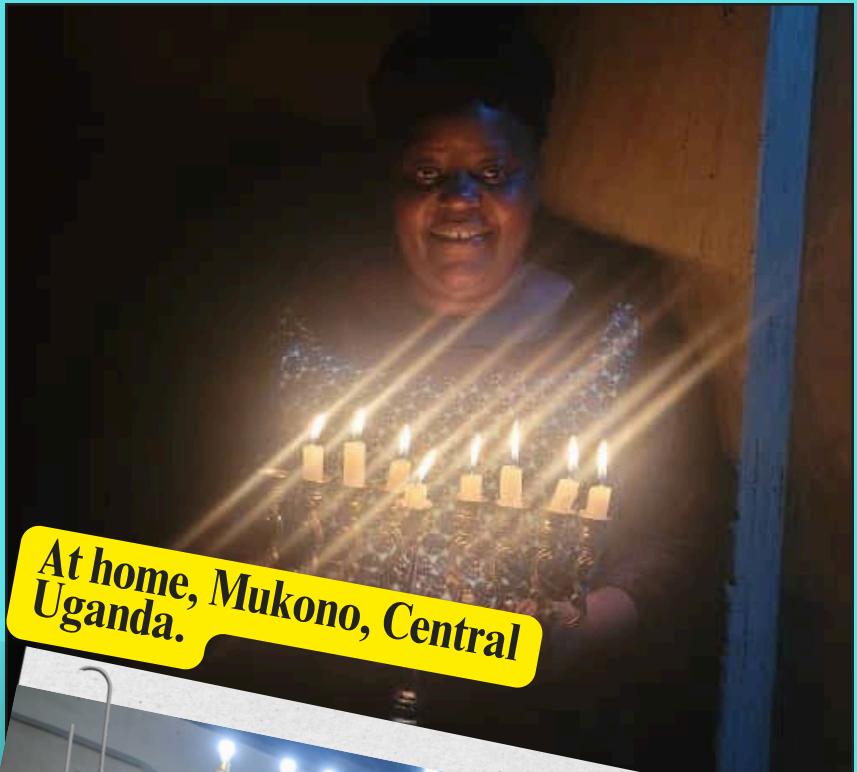
Shabbat Shalom.  
Mukono, Uganda



12/19/2021



At home, in Kwania,  
northern Uganda.



At home, Mukono, Central  
Uganda.



Kehillat Yisreal  
Synagogue, Lagos,  
Nigeria.



Gihon Hebrew  
Synagogue, Abuja.



Sharei Synagogue, Kwania,  
Uganda.



Beth Ha'arachman,  
Nigeria.



Beth Chasead,  
Aba, Nigeria.

7th/8th Night



By Avraham Avraham

# Aliyah in the Digital Age: The Gihon Hebrew Synagogue Model

**On October 27th, it was a quiet Monday evening in the WhatsApp group of Gihon Hebrew Synagogue. A post notification popped up, with the new week's parashah appearing on the top of the screen: Parashah Lech Lecha (Genesis 12:1-17:27). Haftara (Isaiah 40:27-41:16)**

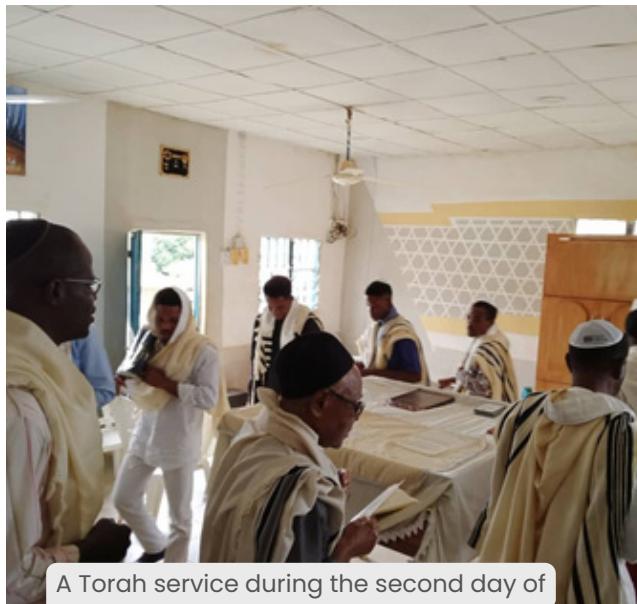
Beneath it, a list of aliyot unfolds—rishon, sheni, shilishi, revi'i, chamishi: some of the lines bearing a phone number, a name, a contributed amount, and a small green checkmark, showing payment received. Within minutes, the chat lights up as the synagogue members, in response to the call to indicate interest for any of the aliyot, begin to bid and claim their Torah honors for the coming Shabbat. Already, one Yosef had chosen petach, while the Hagbaáh spot was claimed by Tehilah bat Yoshiyah. Another woman bids for Gelilit, indicating a male who had volunteered to stand in for her.

From my base in faraway East Africa, I bid interest for the 4th aliya (revi'i) and confirmed it by sending a screenshot of payment successfully made. By Friday morning, every slot has been taken and recorded. What once required in-person coordination at the synagogue now happens seamlessly through mobile messages. A sacred practice of selecting who will ascend to the Torah has now been upgraded into the language of modern connectivity in this digital age, allowing members to participate in the Torah service irrespective of their present location.



A glimpse inside Gihon Hebrew Synagogue—one of the oldest orthodox shuls in Nigeria.

From its earliest days, Gihon has called itself a synagogue of the people. Founded in the 1990s, it is one of the oldest mainstream Jewish congregations in the country. In contrast to numerous Nigerian synagogues that are established and headed by an individual or groups, Gihon has flourished thanks to the consistent generosity of those who pray within its walls.



A Torah service during the second day of Rosh Hashanah, observed in September 2022.



Women of Gihon Hebrew Synagogue, whose commitment, vibrancy, and diligence have earned them recognition as one of the leading women's congregations in the country.

Basically, the offerings realized by being called to the Torah—and the tzadaka, as well as other charity contributions—have long sustained the community. These contributions power the synagogue's daily life: keeping the lights on, maintaining the sanctuary, and supporting Shabbat and festival observances such as meals, challah, religious materials, and symbolic food. Members are aware that each contribution, however small, helps sustain the house of prayer they call home.

For several years, Gihon's stability and reputation have drawn wider recognition. And due to its long-standing presence in Nigeria's capital, it has not only been visited by many foreigners but also attracted support from Jewish and Israeli organizations in the country. Through this network of goodwill, the synagogue has been able to undertake major community projects—including its kiddush hall, guest room, and kitchen space. Its perimeter fencing and water borehole were also built through donations from a well-wisher through the Chabad centre in Abuja and community support.

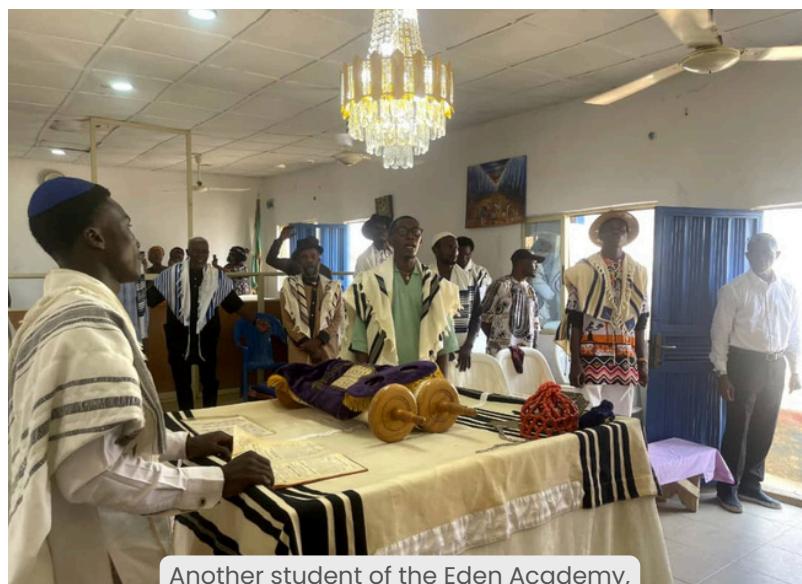
Furthermore, it's notable that inclusivity has always defined the community. Women, too, have long participated in the aliyah allotment. Under Orthodox custom, a male congregant ascends the bimah on their behalf, yet the woman's Hebrew name is pronounced during the blessing, ensuring her spiritual presence is honored. Hence, clearly, the WhatsApp aliyah system that Gihon now employs simply continues this tradition of openness and shared responsibility—preserving the synagogue's communal spirit while it gracefully transitioned into the digital age.

Prior to leveraging the WhatsApp mobile application to transform the ritual, aliyot bidding at Gihon was scheduled for moments before the Torah service. As the scroll rested on the bimah, congregants would raise pledges aloud in a lively, if sometimes hurried, exchange. Others, knowing they might be absent, reach out to the gabbai a day or two earlier to reserve a slot.

It was an authentic, spirited procedure, but also a bit messy, especially when some members were absent or showed up late to the synagogue. The system favored those physically present, left little room for certainty in filling up the list of aliyot on time, and created occasional overlap in pledges. The record-keeping was manual, sometimes plagued by unforeseeable delays in fulfilling payment, and for members abroad, impossible.

However, the limitations of an on-site system became clear as Gihon's network of friends and families expanded across the country and as the recent astronomical rise in inflation due to the removal of subsidies in petroleum caused transportation expenses to the shul to soar beyond the reach of a few. The desire to preserve transparency, ensure order and flexibility, enable instant payment to secure aliyot slots, and promote inclusion gave rise to an idea that would transform not just logistics but the very meaning of connection.

The WhatsApp Model, a repetitive weekly protocol, usually resets after each Shabbat. Once the candles have been extinguished and the community rested, the gabbai, beginning on Tuesday morning, posts a message announcing the week's parashah. The message lists the Torah portion, the haftarah, and all aliyah categories, including other synagogue honors such as petach, hagba'ah, gelilat, and tzdaka



Another student of the Eden Academy, Peniel Baruch Ben Imanuel, celebrated his Bar Mitzvah on 6 November 2025.



Kavod Ben Yaakov, a student of the Gihon Eden Academy, is called to the Torah for the first time during his Bar Mitzvah on 21 December 2025.

Members reply directly in the group chat or message the coordinator privately to claim their aliyah. Payments are made through bank transfer to the synagogue bank account indicated, and receipts are shared as screenshots. The post is then updated with verification marks indicating confirmed pledges

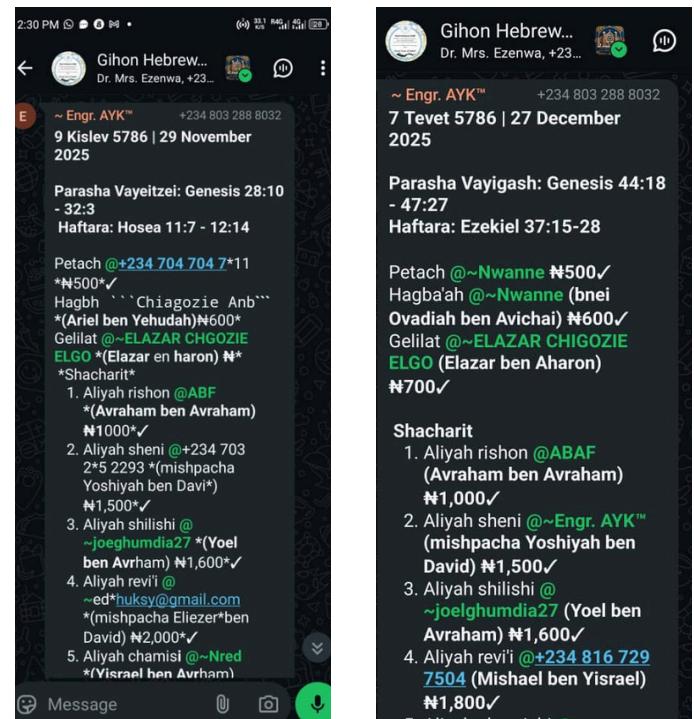
**A simple reminder reads: "It's important to note that aliyot isn't given on pledge but payment; payment confers the allotment."**

Without doubt, the process is fully transparent: everyone can see which aliya has been taken, by whom, and at what bidding entry level. Now, just imagine how a few minutes of online interaction replace the once-hectic and mostly uncertain allotment moments that occurred before Torah reading. More importantly, the new system opens the doors of the bimah to members far beyond Abuja.

**"Even though I have recently relocated to Port Harcourt (Southern Nigeria, about 690 km from Abuja), I am still a member of Gihon in my innermost heart, as always. I will continue to support the running of the synagogue, which has been important to me. It has helped shape my spiritual life, serving as both a place of worship and a centre for learning. I understand that this is one of the ways I can contribute to getting things up and running; I will continue to participate in bidding for aliyot from a distance and sending in my payment and donations."**

Just like ima Keleyah in Port Harcourt, I too, for the first time, participated from a distance outside Nigeria. I was in Uganda. That week, I saw the message for Parashat Lech Lecha, sent in the Gihon WhatsApp group. Without hesitation, I placed my bid for an aliyah, made the payment through mobile transfer, and sent my receipt. When Shabbat arrived, a brother in the congregation ascended the bimah in my stead. The reader called my Hebrew name in the blessing, and the congregation responded, "Amen."

Though I was thousands of miles away, I felt the warmth of belonging. The words of Torah read in Abuja reached me across borders; my small contribution kept the synagogue alive while keeping my spirit anchored.



The aliyah allotment system in action: a screenshot from the Gihon WhatsApp group showing synagogue members claiming aliyot honors.

Since then, I have also joined from Kenya, getting the Aliya Rishon spot for the week of Parashat Vayeitzei. Each time, the experience reaffirms that distance cannot diminish devotion. This digital bridge allows me to stay connected to the vibrant Gihon community as a friend and well-wisher, actively participating in its ongoing activities back home.

In the WhatsApp bidding system, everyone has a share. Both men and women participate, families make joint pledges, and younger members, accustomed to digital interaction, have taken on a new level of engagement. Every contribution made, however small, supports the synagogue's daily needs, which comprise fuel for the generator, electricity bills, support for festival meals, as well as bread and wine for kiddush. That shared understanding keeps the flame of collective responsibility burning. The digital chat has effectively become a new courtyard for the synagogue, serving as a typical virtual space where generosity and faith meet, with certainty also guaranteed.

From a broader perspective, this is a way of opening the door to a global opportunity. Through this digital system, anyone in the world can now willingly contribute to sustaining the spiritual growth of Gihon Hebrew Synagogue in the capital of Africa's most populous nation. Whether one lives in South Africa, New York, or Tel Aviv, it takes only a few taps to bid for an aliyah, send the offering, and have one's name blessed from Gihon's bimah.

The spiritual connection is real: the Torah blessing spoken in Abuja mentions the name, and the congregation answers "Amen," linking the giver's intent with the community's response. In many large synagogues abroad, obtaining an aliyah can be difficult because of the sheer number of congregants competing for limited honors. At Gihon, the model of this digital procedure guarantees access and a level playing ground, ensuring room for participation to share in the blessing.

For those seeking both a spiritual merit and a tangible way to strengthen African Judaism, this initiative offers a unique path. It doesn't just democratize a sacred ritual but also decentralizes it and turns it into a channel of global participation.

The transition from 'brick and mortar' to an online platform has demonstrated the effectiveness of the WhatsApp model in addressing some of the issues presented by the previous approach. Management can draw inspiration from this, then iterate and expand beyond WhatsApp, perhaps utilizing their synagogue website or a dedicated app that would automate parts of the process. A secured payment gateway with multiple options is paramount, as well as real-time updates or even an AI assistant that can send simple, heartfelt thank-you notes automatically.

Beyond aliyah allotment, the Gihon WhatsApp community has become a digital hub for African Torah life, connecting different WhatsApp groups and creating a network of shared learning and support. The same system that now manages aliyot can also integrate the Gihon Eden Academy (a mini-Hebrew class) and even drive cross-community communication, allowing Jews nationwide and beyond to be part of the system.

Standing now for over 30 years, Gihon has continued to hold the status of being a community-owned house of prayer. Its openness and freedom of expression among members have helped it grow into one of the largest congregations in town. Its devotion is fervent, and even without a physical rabbi in their midst, the love and practice of Judaism are things many have admired and can attest to.

The community is guided by a group of elders and its founding fathers, who recognize the innovative mindset that their youthful generation brings to the table, striving to identify better ways to grow together in strength and purpose. Gihon's experiment is part of a larger wave reshaping Jewish life on the continent as we see communities turning to digital tools for education, communication, and worship.

Technology, once viewed by some as a threat to tradition, has become its ally. How fascinating to see Gihon stand at the forefront of this digital revolution. Its aliyah system proves that innovation need not dilute faith; it can deepen it, preserving the Jewish heritage while mastering modernity.



# WHO IS A RABBI?



By Eben Cohen

This question resonates on a profound level, recalling two poignant incidents that underscore a broader, more urgent narrative about identity, aspiration, and the state of Jewish education in Africa, particularly Nigeria.

The first incident took place during a visit by Rabbi Howard Gorin and Jeff Leiberman to Port Harcourt, Rivers State. Gorin is known as one of the first American rabbis to travel deep into Jewish communities, including those in Uganda and Nigeria, while Leiberman is a documentarian. As they engaged with the vibrant Meir Elohim Community, an individual with a zeal but limited knowledge of Judaism introduced himself with a title that carries centuries of reverence: "Rabbi." It was obvious that there is a lot of difference in opinion. However, it became clear during their interaction that this title had been adopted without grasping its weight, its history, or the depth of commitment it signifies. Leiberman later shared a photograph on Facebook that captured the poignancy of the moment: "Nigeria Rabbi on a bike." While this story is tinged with humor, this snapshot reveals a startling sobering truth: how the absence of structured Jewish education leaves space for misconceptions, even exploitation, of sacred titles right here in Nigeria!

The second incident speaks of aspiration amid adversity. My mentor, Akeidah Fulcher Eze, took deliberate steps to pave a path for Prince Israel and me in a certain rabbinical institution. We were tasked with articulating, in writing, why we desired to become rabbis. I, as usual, poured my thoughts into that essay, crafting a piece that earned Fulcher's admiration, even though the application ultimately did not come to fruition. Although this story contrasts sharply with the first, it is proof of the hunger for authentic engagement, a fervent pursuit of spiritual growth, and the painful barriers that exist for African Jews seeking formal rabbinical training.

These narratives shed light on a critical reality: a majority of global Jewish institutions have largely overlooked African Jewish communities. Clearly, the lack of accessible, quality Jewish education has led to a troubling dynamic where the title "Rabbi" risks being diluted while simultaneously

extinguishing the dreams of those who genuinely wish to pass through the corridor of rabbinic service. Therefore, this is a call to action—a reminder that a rabbi is not merely a title one assumes but a scholar, a teacher, and a shepherd of their community, dedicated to the service of God and humanity.

In the broader Jewish tradition, a rabbi embodies rigorous study, leadership with morals, and is dedicated to *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). There is little doubt that partnerships that put education, mentorship, and resources first are important for this goal to come true in Africa. We need institutions willing to see the potential in every seeker, to nurture vocations, and to ensure the title "Rabbi" is honored as a symbol of profound responsibility, not a label taken lightly.

The stories of aspiration and misunderstanding compel us to bridge this gap, to invest in a future where African Jews can pursue their calling with dignity, knowledge, and the full support of the global Jewish family. It's worrying how Jewish education and resources are in Africa, especially in Nigeria.

The widening gap in Jewish engagement in Africa is undeniably troubling to the extent that many Jewish communities, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, apart from the Republic of South Africa, feel overlooked by foreign Jewish institutions. The lack of proper education and facilities not only hampers the growth of Judaism on the continent but also fuels misconceptions about the faith's values. The notion that a rabbi's title is "a mere title" any person can accord himself reflects a deeper issue of misunderstanding and disconnection, likely exacerbated by limited access to authentic teachings and standard facilities required to train up people to become rabbis.



Rabbi Sjimon Den Hollander leads the prayer service during the inauguration of Kahal Kadosh She'erit Yisrael Synagogue in Nasenyi, Uganda, on 27 February 2025.

Yet beyond the internal challenges of education and mentorship lies an equally formidable barrier: access. For many Africans aspiring to rabbinical training, the pathway is narrowed by complex *giyur* (conversion) standards, lineage considerations, and institutional criteria that—while rooted in the preservation of Jewish law and continuity—can feel exclusionary when applied without contextual sensitivity. These frameworks, though essential to safeguarding tradition, often operate without sufficient mechanisms for outreach or accommodation, reinforcing a perception of Judaism as inaccessible to sincere seekers. The result is a quiet loss: gifted minds and devoted hearts are turned away from yeshivot, depriving the global Jewish community of voices shaped by resilience, diversity, and lived faith.

Compounding this challenge is the often-overlooked role of visa bureaucracy. Recently, a couple of Nigerian Jews who were accepted into yeshivot in Israel—schools that saw their potential as future rabbis and were ready to help them study—had their journeys stopped not because they weren't qualified, but because of decisions made by the embassy and strict immigration rules. These administrative barriers have quietly extinguished opportunities for future rabbis in a country that has sustained mainstream Jewish practice for over three decades without a single resident rabbi. Such moments expose a painful paradox: communities are encouraged to preserve Judaism, yet pathways to leadership formation remain obstructed. Until we address these systemic barriers with intention and compassion, the dream of nurturing homegrown African rabbis will remain vulnerable, teetering between aspiration and denial.

For over a decade and a half, two individuals from Nigeria's Igbo Jewish communities have resided in Israel, and they are known to have been ordained as rabbis. Yet beyond their names, there is little information about their formal rabbinic status, congregations, ordination, or institutional affiliations. This prolonged lack of clarity has left a vacuum within Nigerian Jewish life. In response, many communities now turn to rabbis found on the internet for learning and spiritual consultation, while others look inward, conferring the title "rabbi" upon local Torah teachers who provide instructions,

motivation, and communal leadership. In the eyes of many congregants, the functional roles appear indistinguishable: teaching Torah, guiding prayer, and offering moral direction. Thus, in the absence of an ordained rabbi, doing what seems necessary becomes normalized. Over time, the title is accepted by the individual, embraced by the community, and gradually sustained—until any capable Torah teacher may be addressed as "rabbi," and the cycle continues.

A more troubling development has emerged alongside this trend: the reinterpretation of rabbinic authority through the lens of traditional Igbo social structures. In Igbo culture, elders called the Nze or Ndi Nze are highly respected. These titled men are custodians of moral order, interpreters of the laws of the land, and key figures in communal governance, often serving as a check on the authority of the Eze (king). The Nze, viewed as upright and spiritually elevated, have historically played a stabilizing role in Igbo civilization. Drawing from this parallel, some have begun advancing the concept of an "Nze-Rabbi"—a fusion of traditional Igbo leadership and Jewish religious authority.

Under this emerging narrative, an Nze-Rabbi is defined loosely as an elderly man, a synagogue leader, or a Torah teacher with a measure of knowledge and respect within the community. There is no need for yeshiva training or formal ordination; all that is needed is acceptance of the title by most people in the community.

While this definition may appear pragmatic on the surface, it represents a fundamental misunderstanding of Judaism's standards and procedures. In effect, the title of rabbi becomes a cultural adaptation rather than a religious qualification, detached from the rigorous scholarly process that defines rabbinic authority worldwide.

This approach is deeply flawed. It reflects not malice, but ignorance of how Judaism has historically preserved structure, continuity, and accountability. More concerning are the implications. If this logic were extended beyond Igbo communities, other ethnic groups in Nigeria could introduce parallel constructs—Obong-Rabbi, Emir-Rabbi, or similar titles—each shaped by local tradition rather than Jewish law. What begins as an attempt to solve the absence of rabbis would ultimately introduce greater confusion, inconsistency, and fragmentation. It is a classic case of placing a round peg in a square hole—addressing a real problem with a solution that creates even deeper structural challenges.

To really understand who a rabbi is, you have to look at history. The fact remains that the word "rabbi" doesn't appear in the Tanach (Hebrew Bible). It came about later, during the post-Temple period, when Jewish life changed from sacrificial worship to study, law, and community leadership.

At first, "rabbi" was an honorific title given to learned teachers who showed exceptional mastery of the Torah and moral leadership. As Jewish communities grew and spread out, the need for standardization became increasingly evident. Formal institutions of learning were created, ordination processes were set up, and rabbinic authority became linked to rigorous study, mentorship, and communal accountability. This framework, while evolving, remains the basis of rabbinic legitimacy in the modern Jewish world.

### A Glimpse of Hope from Uganda

While a standardized rabbinic path based on rigorous education and ordination has been accepted by most of the Jewish world for a long time, Uganda offers a compelling example of how this model can be successfully adapted to local realities. Today, Uganda is home to a growing number of indigenous rabbis, many of whom have studied in yeshivot in the United States and Israel and gone on to receive formal ordination. Their travels indicate that a single, traditional campus-based structure doesn't have to limit dedication to rabbinic training.

In practice, several alternatives, yet credible, pathways have emerged. Rabin Rivbin Asiimwe, currently a rabbinic Abayudaya student, combines structured online learning with periodic travel to Israel for in-person classes and mentorship. In the same way, a rabbinic student, Orah Avraham, in Mukono, central Uganda, is also enrolled in a U.S.-based yeshiva that offers a two-year online curriculum with homework, quizzes, and presentations. After this part is done, students go abroad to finish the rest of their course. These hybrid models maintain academic rigor while accommodating geographic and logistical constraints faced by African Jewish communities.

Uganda has a flourishing rabbinical council composed of ordained rabbis, yeshiva graduates, and rabbinic students, with representation across different regions of the country. This structure has a promising formation of a strong and credible beit din, capable of overseeing conversions and other communal religious responsibilities within recognized Jewish frameworks. With an increasing number of individuals committed to this path, Uganda is steadily building a sustainable future in which ordained and well-trained rabbis are consistently available to serve their communities.



Shoshana Nambi's rabbinic ordination celebrated in Mbale, Eastern Uganda, a defining moment in African Jewish history.

The impact of this ecosystem extends beyond the present generation. The visibility of multiple rabbis—trained not only in Jewish law but also in leadership, pastoral care, and human relations—naturally inspires younger members of the community. Often, rabbinic families nurture future rabbis, creating continuity and depth within Ugandan Jewish life. Notably, Uganda now has rabbis trained through Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform yeshivot, reflecting a broad and inclusive engagement with global Jewish institutions.

Rabbi Shoshana Nambi of Mbale in Eastern Uganda is perhaps the best example of how well this teaching paradigm works. She went to Hebrew Union College (United States) and recently became the first black woman rabbi in Sub-Saharan Africa. Now she is an assistant rabbi at Congregation Beth Am in Los Angeles. The Union for Reform Judaism ordained her, and her journey is a major success that shows what can happen when African Jewish communities have access to mainstream educational paths. Uganda's experience is, above all, a narrative of shaping the future through education, discipline, and adherence to globally recognized rabbinic standards.

### A Vision for the future.

In Uganda, as in Nigeria, it is still common for Torah-learned individuals to be affectionately addressed as "rabbi." This practice is not unique to both countries alone and can be found in Jewish communities elsewhere. However, it is important to recognise the true significance of a Rabbi (רָבִי), which in Hebrew means "my teacher." Within Jewish tradition, this title carries profound

weight. It represents not merely academic accomplishment, but a lifelong responsibility to teach, guide, adjudicate, and uplift others in accordance with Torah values.

The scarcity of formal Jewish educational institutions and rabbinic training resources in Nigeria—and across much of Africa—has inadvertently contributed to misunderstandings about the role and responsibilities of a rabbi. Yet this reality should never serve as justification for lowering established standards. Instead, anyone who aspires to be called a rabbi should be encouraged and supported to pursue recognized and appropriate pathways of study and ordination.

To make such an outcome possible, well-wishers and stakeholders must invest intentionally in yeshivot, structured rabbinical training programs, and sustainable community learning centers. In this regard, working with Jewish schools and organizations abroad can be very helpful in making curricula, mentorship, and accreditation stronger.

Meeting these educational and spiritual needs sends a strong message: Judaism is a living, dynamic faith that values all communities, regardless of where they are. For Nigerian Jews in particular, this vision promises the emergence of a new generation of knowledgeable and passionate leaders—men and women who understand the rabbinic path as a sacred calling to serve others and embody the values of Torah in ways that resonate both locally and globally.

Ultimately, when Jewish education flourishes in Africa, the title “Rabbi” will naturally be revered as a symbol of deep commitment and integrity. In doing so, misconceptions will fade, and a renewed wave of devoted servants of Hashem and humanity will rise—rooted in learning, guided by tradition, and inspired by a shared future.



Rabbinic students engaged in rigorous Talmud study at a Yeshiva, exemplifying their dedication to Jewish scholarship.

## Previous Editions of AJV Magazines





With gratitude to Caroline Rozentvaig, these book donations—delivered by Yatov Israel following his return from Johannesburg—form part of the first batch supporting Hebrew education for children at Gihon Hebrew Synagogue.



By **Netzach Ekwunife**

The absence of a standard Jewish school, which would facilitate a comprehensive education rooted in Jewish values, has been felt for decades by the Nigerian Jewish communities. Many Jewish children attend secular schools where they face assimilation, segregation, and other challenges arising from their beliefs. As Judaism continues to thrive in Nigeria, with estimates of practicing Jews ranging between 6,000 and 10,000 and over 100 synagogues across 10 states and four regions, the need for children to attain standard Jewish education has only intensified.

# Where Young Jew Grow: Inside Nigeria's Flourishing Torah Academy.

**Building strong Jewish  
foundations through  
dedicated learning, tradition,  
and community.**



Students of the Eden Academy participate in a spirited Torah quiz competition during the Simchat Torah 5786 Camp Sarah event held at Gihon Hebrew Synagogue.



Inside the social hall at Gihon Hebrew Synagogue, serving as the venue for the Academy's in-person classes and engagements.



Young students pose with their instructor, who has played a key role in advancing their Hebrew and Torah education.

Gihon Eden Academy, founded by Shlomo Yaakov, came just in time to bridge the gap and ensure access to Jewish education in Nigeria. The Eden Academy, currently in its pilot phase, is on track to be one of the first Jewish schools in the country, built upon years of Torah teaching. It is projected that by 2035, it will have grown into an accredited educational institution serving both primary and secondary school children.

According to its roadmap, the school will provide comprehensive Jewish education with a curriculum that combines secular subjects like math, science, history, and literature and covers all the basic education requirements. Compared to other existing Jewish-owned schools, this one focuses on teaching Jewish studies, such as the Torah, Talmud, and Hebrew language, aiming to provide students with a strong foundation in Jewish heritage, traditions, and values, while also preparing them for academic success and personal growth.

Gihon Eden Academy, co-tutored by Immanuel Ben Immanuel and Fidelia Agoha, began as a Hebrew class aimed at children and new members of the Gihon Hebrew Synagogue in Abuja, particularly those transitioning back to Judaism from Christianity. People warmly welcomed the classes as a laudable initiative that promoted effortless Hebrew language learning. It has since transformed from merely a Hebrew class, as the curriculum has broadened to encompass additional Jewish studies. The academy offers a beginner's syllabus aimed at familiarizing students with the fundamental beliefs, practices, and traditions of the Jewish faith. Assisting students in cultivating a deeper understanding and respect for the Jewish community

The syllabus covers a range of topics, which includes an introduction to Judaism, comprising topics like what is Judaism, its core beliefs, and its historical context. Another topic in the curriculum is the study of Jewish Scriptures like the Torah, Tanakh, and Rabbinic literature. The curriculum then discusses the study of key Jewish holidays, such as the High Holidays, Shabbat, Pesach, and other major and minor festivals.

Going deeper, the curriculum covers Jewish practices like prayer, Jewish halachot, and life cycle events. It also has Jewish Life and Identity, which includes culture, tradition, and values. The curriculum also expanded to include the Holocaust, helping children understand the history and significance of the Holocaust, which is one of the most significant events in the history of Jews.

Just as it is widely accepted that life comprises both old and new, the academy's curriculum includes a course on the study of modern Judaism. In this course, students learn about the various movements within Judaism, its diverse expressions, and the different sects making up global Judaism's composition. In addition, the course outline has lessons on the Jewish calendar, conversion, and the State of Israel. Generally, the syllabus is designed to inspire and educate both beginners and practicing Jews looking to deepen their knowledge in their practice of Judaism.

Before Gihon Eden Academy came into existence, learning the Hebrew language as well as other Jewish studies used to be very challenging due to limited guidance and availability of organized resources that would enhance and facilitate a seamless Jewish learning experience. Jewish learning was only attainable through individual effort. In fact, only the majority of people who were called up to pray, known as chazans, led the prayers and mastered how to read Ivrit. Many others who did not have siddurim found it difficult to keep up with the pace of the learning or continued practice to become perfect.



Peniel is presented with a branded gift during the Repair the World program, held on the final day of Hanukkah in Abuja.

Shlomo Yaakov, who was born into Judaism, experienced firsthand the early struggles and complexities of practicing Judaism in a country where Judaism is not recognized; he struggled to obtain Jewish education as a child. However, sometime around 2015, he had the opportunity to study under Rabbi Gershom Sizomu, the Chief Rabbi of the Abayudaya community in Uganda. This experience of learning directly under a rabbi for the first time was significant, especially since there was no rabbi in his home country of Nigeria. No doubt, the experience was a turning point for him, and therefore the Gihon Academy was founded to change the narrative and make Jewish learning accessible to his community and others.

The model of the academy operates as both a physical and online class, making it possible for interested students from anywhere in Nigeria to obtain quality Jewish education. The online classes are usually accessible via WhatsApp and scheduled Zoom meetings with recorded classes that are available upon request. Its WhatsApp community is made up of different WhatsApp lecture groups tailored to the needs of students at all levels. Students who enrolled in the online classes are provided with mentorship programs, including counselling and seminars that are designed to ensure that students understand what they are taught and learn to apply it in their daily lives.

The offline and online models provide children with the opportunity to learn both at the synagogue and from their homes or while on the go. At the initial stage, the Gihon Hebrew Synagogue usually hosts these classes every Sunday morning after Shacharit prayers. Some of the students, including mothers who reside far away, would sleep over in the synagogue guest room to attend morning classes before returning home to their families. Additionally, classes are held on one day during the week; however, due to the recent increase in transportation expenses following the government's removal of petroleum subsidies, online technology has to be leveraged.



*Kavod and Rachel, students of the Eden Hebrew Academy, pictured on their Bar and Bat Mitzvah day, December 21, 2025—a joyful milestone in their Jewish journey.*

Peniel Immanuel is one of the most recent; he celebrated his bar mitzvah on November the 6th in the synagogue. He also emerged as the overall top winner during a quiz competition. A public event held during Simchat Torah turned into a competitive three-way race at the final rounds, ultimately earning him a school-term scholarship from several sponsors. One would often wonder the reason the students of the Gihon Eden Academy perform exceptionally well in Jewish educational competitions and quizzes in the country. The answer lies in their strong foundation in Jewish education and the incorporation of entertaining methods into the learning process.

Today, students who are members of the WhatsApp community have the opportunity to interact with their teachers through voice chat and text. This setup offers flexibility, helping them to ask questions on issues ranging from lectures to real-life experiences. It also helps them get answers to their questions in real time, giving other students the ability to contribute to questions asked and learn from others' experiences. At the conclusion of each week of online lessons, students meet in the synagogue on Shabbat during the break period to engage in one-on-one discussions with their teachers, enhancing both their online and in-person learning experiences.

Currently, there are 60 students enrolled in the Gihon Eden Academy. The synagogue's physical classes have 40 students, while 20 from other parts of Abuja are in the virtual program. Since its inception, about six sets of students have successfully graduated, and most of them celebrated their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs as students.

As far back as 2019, during the inaugural National Jewish Youth seminar, held in the eastern part of the country, the Gihon children in attendance wowed the gathering with their group performance. And in a recent outing, during the 2025 Camp Sarah program held in Abuja, Nigeria, the young stars took center stage again. Participants during a quiz competition included children from the host synagogue at Tikvat Synagogue and children from synagogues across the country in attendance. Once again, the children from Gihon Eden Academy excelled due to their deep understanding of Jewish education and readiness, which they attribute to their unique curriculum and class-learning style.

To support the academy's internet connectivity, it received a donation of an MTN 4G router for internet connectivity from the Avraham Ben Avraham Foundation (ABA). The internet helps to get the synagogue WIFI-connected, making it possible for members with a smartphone to connect to the internet. It has also helped to power laptops that tutors use to teach students during live sessions in weekday classes. The ABA Foundation recently replaced a smaller and worn-out whiteboard in the shul that had been in use for over a decade. It has been a very useful addition for both the synagogue and for teaching and learning purposes. Instructors can write short lectures or a Torah quiz on the board before Shabbat, and students will learn or discuss it during Shabbat classes since writing on Shabbat is not allowed.

In addition, the ABAF provides data bundles periodically to support Zoom learning in the academy. However, apart from home support coming from the synagogue management, the academy has also attracted the interest of Elder Yatov Ben Israel. After his return from South Africa, where he went for an important meeting with the Maccabi South African Union, he visited the Gihon Hebrew Synagogue before the end of November. There, he donated several books on behalf of the IPJD (Initiative for Progressive Judaism Development), which were handed over to Shlomo to enrich the library of the Gihon Eden Academy. Yatov, although a member of another synagogue in Abuja, is a longtime friend of Gihon and supports them as a sister synagogue.

Support of this nature continues to help position the academy as a Torah-learning hub, not just for younger children but also for those returning to Judaism and others interested in learning Jewish halachot and the Hebrew language. Think of a Torah-learning hub as a digital version of a rabbi, a substitute at this point, bridging the gap of a rabbi's absence in the country, ready to teach, motivate, uplift, and build the community in the ways of the Torah. The beginners' classes of the academy are suitable for new returnees who often struggle to adapt in their early stages due to their former Christian-related practices, which they have known since childhood.

Feedback from several students highlights the impact of months of dedicated learning. Sarah, 13, shared, "I am thrilled to be part of this academy, which has helped me learn how to live as an observant Jew and made me proud to tell my friends in school about Judaism." Kayim noted that the lessons have deepened his understanding of what it means to be a Jew while also improving his Hebrew reading skills. Yehuda, one of the returnees, said the classes have greatly helped his children grow in their knowledge of Judaism. In his words: ***"Since my children started taking classes with Gihon Eden Academy, they have learned a lot. And one significant thing is that the classes are free. I am glad they are part of it, and I commend the tutors for their sacrifices."***

Currently, the academy relies entirely on donations to sustain its mission of providing Torah-based education throughout each term. Through the dedicated efforts of its management and tutors—who serve not on payroll but as committed volunteers—the academy functions typically like a formal school. It includes all essential academic components: quizzes, assignments, presentations, projects, and examinations that assess each student's progress and promote them to higher classes.

In traditional Jewish education, children are gradually introduced to core literature like the Mishnah, the Talmud, and subsequently the Shulchan Aruch, building a foundation for lifelong learning and observant Jewish living. But this important foundation has often been missing in Nigeria, where there has long been a lack of indigenous rabbis and structured Torah schools. Gihon Eden Academy is specifically addressing this exact need. The academy is planting the seeds for a future generation of African Jews who may one day become scholars, teachers, and rabbis, who would strengthen and shape the future of the country's Jewry for decades to come.

# Africa's Jewish Sporting Revolution: Inside the Formation of MAC



By Israel Abraham



Maccabi FC Nigeria's technical staff monitors player performance from the touchline during a training session in Abuja.



With eyes set on Israel, the players of Nigeria's Maccabi FC train for their dream: a place at the international Maccabiah Games.

In recent times, the practice of Judaism by many Jews living in Sub-Saharan Africa has expanded beyond Shabbat and festivals, which are the main religious aspects of the faith. It has notably evolved into areas like sports development, media ownership, philanthropy, entertainment, and tourism. Education at different learning stages is springing up, as well as adaptation of technology in tackling food insecurities and cases of climatic change.

In the area of sports and youth development, history will soon be recorded among African Jews as a new Jewish organization, tentatively known as the Maccabi African Confederation (MAC), is on the verge of revolutionizing sporting activities on the continent. The organization will be an offspring and affiliate of the Maccabi World Federation—a Jewish organization that uses sports to empower sports-loving Jewish lads—when it finally becomes a reality.

The proposed formation is a historic step toward uniting African Jewish sports under one formidable umbrella. According to the organization's proposal document, the organization will ensure the strengthening of Jewish identity around Africa through athletic excellence. It will also foster talent collaboration to ensure that African Jews' full representation within the global Maccabi movement is actively efficient.

We cannot over emphasize the impact of the proposed MAC organization on African Jewish communities. As a continental organization, it is evident that it has the potential to make a significant impact on both existing and emerging Jewish communities in Africa. With a focus on promoting Jewish identity, community engagement, and sports excellence, the body can provide a platform for African Jewish youth to develop their skills, build confidence, connect with their heritage, and escape some of the limitations and challenges that are still prevalent in this part of the world.

If recognized and formally launched, Maccabi African Confederation involvement in African Jewish communities will help address some of these challenges. The formation of the confederation will provide both stakeholders and supporters with a powerful tool to transform expectations of the African Jewry into reality. By providing access to sports training and competitions, the platform will help young people develop important life skills, such as teamwork, discipline, and perseverance. Additionally, emphasis on Jewish identity and community engagement can help young people connect with their heritage and build a sense of belonging as they become a part of the global Jewish sports community



*Maccabi FCN players train during a practice session in Abuja, Nigeria's capital city.*

The potential benefits of MAC's involvement in African Jewish communities are not only significant but also promising. These benefits include the promotion of Jewish identity and the idea of inclusivity irrespective of affiliation, race, or region. The organization's outlined programs can help young people develop a stronger connection to their Jewish heritage and community. Therefore, build a stronger and more connected, flourishing community across the continent in the long run.



*Michael Moshe, a versatile athlete excelling in both table tennis and lawn tennis, trains with determination as he aspires to represent his home country, Kenya, at the Maccabiah Games.*

The historic formation of this sporting organization, currently awaiting formal recognition and approval, has already in its background sighted prospects in numerous African countries that were previously undetected by the Maccabi World Union radar. Currently, active football teams from various Jewish communities exist in Nigeria, while basketball and netball activities thrive in Uganda. Kenya organizes track events, indoor games like table tennis, and outdoor court games like lawn tennis. Dedicated Jewish leaders in Ethiopia, Cameroon, and Ghana are prepared to contribute their efforts towards the recruiting and development of sports in their respective countries.

The proposal to form the organization and officially affiliate with the Maccabi World Union was conceived and proposed by the Maccabi South Africa Union. However, it all began after a sports editor of an Israeli newspaper stumbled upon an article, "Making History in Jewish Football," by Eben Cohen, published on the African Jewish Voices. In the weeks that followed, after back-to-back interviews and fact-finding, the Yedioth Achronoth newspaper headline in Israel broke the news, which eventually got many people talking.

**From Nigeria to the Maccabiah: Nigeria's Jewish soccer team aiming to compete in Israel. The Igbo Jewish community, claiming to be descendants of a biblical Israelite clan, hopes to play against other teams in Israel and cement their Jewish status in what's known as the "Jewish Olympics."**

With other Israeli news outlets picking up on the trending information, Ros Goldin, a former director of the Maccabi South African Union, reached out, offering guidance to see things through. The push for the historic inclusion of the Nigerian football team got underway with Ros and Cliff Garrun, the head director of the Maccabi Union in South Africa. However, due to limited timing for formal application and the structural fixation of the already participating football teams, getting onboard didn't look feasible. But with the breakout of the 12-day Israeli/Iranian war, the unexpected yet necessary decision was taken by the Israeli government— Maccabiah postponement: now scheduled for 2026.

Further discussion followed, going beyond Nigeria and South Africa, as our radar beamed light on the other parts of the continent, revealing the sporting landscape of sporting activities across most parts of sub-Saharan Africa. The fact that the Jewish population exists from one country to the other means that Jewish sporting activities are also developing at a rapid pace. The discussion led to the ultimate question— why is there no Maccabi Continental platform that can organize these Jewish talents into one fold, just as obtainable in other parts of the world, such as the United States, Europe, and Asia?



*At just 13 years old, Tehillah Bat Rishon from Nigeria trains with determination, dreaming of becoming a professional table tennis player.*

Examining the extent of activities at the continental level reveals a variety of sports involving male and female participants, as well as age-group engagement, all contributing to a growing number of active participants. The South Africa Maccabi organization has a long-established history of active participation in various sports and has consistently attended the Maccabiah Games in Israel since the event's inception.

In Nigeria, the Maccabi Football Club is already formidable, taking the lead in getting prepared to reap the benefits that will come with the official recognition of the Maccabi Africa Confederation (MAC). The team comprising youths from Gihon Hebrew Synagogue and Tikvet Israel Synagogue has been the most active football team in West and Eastern Africa, preparing and hoping to participate in future editions of the Maccabi Olympics in Israel. The team is actively training, organizing friendly matches in Abuja, and recently featured in a football match during the Camp Sarah 2025 held in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria.

Another active Jewish team is Ha'arachaman FC in the southern part of the country. It is owned by the Beth Ha'arachaman Jewish Community in Akwa Ibom State. It was among the 32 teams that participated in a state government-sponsored football tournament in 2024. The team regularly plays friendly matches with other teams in the neighborhood to keep players fit and ensure they have adequate playing time, helping them to improve significantly. Mehamizrach FC and the National Jewish Youth Team, based in eastern Nigeria, are among the other Nigerian football teams. Both teams usually meet during the quarterly national youth Shabbat gatherings to compete against each other in a football match that has 100% Jewish identity.

A women's netball team is currently active in Uganda, East Africa. And on the other hand, a male basketball team is gearing up for formation in the country, aiming to form the first-ever Jewish basketball team in the region. There is also a swimmer and chess player available to compete in Uganda.

Kenya hosts Jewish athletes in table tennis and lawn tennis, as well as long-distance runners, all of whom are Jews from the Jewish communities.

In Ethiopia, they have long-distance race athletes and swimming activities on the island of Madagascar off the east African coast. In Morocco, there exist football activities too, while Ghana and Zimbabwe are developing frameworks to establish football teams within their respective countries.

In a conversation with Avraham Ben Abraham, the director of media and communication for Maccabi FCN, he emphasized the significance of the initiative to establish the Maccabi Africa Confederation. He stated that young African athletes can discover a route to professional play in Europe and America through sporting tournaments held on African soil or in Israel. Avraham stated that if they succeed in establishing the African Confederation, a new frontier will emerge, presenting numerous opportunities for young Jews aspiring to engage in sports.

***"We are embarking on a new journey in community development through sports. Success in the creation of MAC (Maccabi Africa Confederation) would be unprecedented."***

The Maccabi African Confederation will serve as a continental body that unites, coordinate, and represent Jewish sporting organizations and individuals. And if successfully created, the organization will be a recognized platform that will promote Jewish identity through sports and foster unity among African Jewish communities through a well-organized sports and cultural exchange.

According to the document proposing the formation of MAC, which was made available to us, the Confederation is on a mission to revolutionize Jewish sports participation across the continent as they focus on encouraging community ownership, youth engagement, inter-country collaboration, and partnerships with established sports institutions. Furthermore, the organization is poised to make a lasting positive impact on the Jewish world through sports.



Female athletes gather for sports activities during the 2025 National Youth Seminar in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

In August 2025, after a series of months of online meetings with progressive discussions between the Nigerian Maccabi management and their South African Union counterparts, who oversee the continent and official representatives to the Maccabi World Union, the first meeting in Johannesburg was held. The SAJA (Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance) network and the African Jewish Voices effort were instrumental in discovering most Jewish athletes across several countries. This initiative was praised as a historic move, even though it is still a work in progress; the athletes embraced the vision, and country representatives volunteered to manage and enhance their community sporting activities. The countries with existing sports teams are commencing revitalization awareness, while those with none are putting effort into organizing talented youths to form teams

During the strategic meeting in Johannesburg, Jator Abido, Executive Director of Maccabi FC Nigeria and Head of SAJA's International Working Committee, sat with Cliff Garrun to advance discussions on the proposed MAC formation and explored practical pathways toward its establishment. The growing presence of Jewish athletes and active sporting activities across Africa provides a strong foundation for forming a continental confederation. With hundreds of athletes already engaged in different sports, the momentum for a unified Maccabi structure is steadily gaining ground.

Speaking after his return from South Africa, Jator expressed deep optimism about the outcome of the meeting. He noted that the discussion also featured virtual participation from Avraham, media director of Maccabi Nigeria, who joined online from Kenya, where he was working on identifying and organizing country coordinators in East Africa and beyond as part of the wider MAC groundwork



Jewish spectators watch from the stands as their team competes in a Sukkot football match on October 22, 2024, in Southern Nigeria.

***"The meeting was wonderful," Jator emphasized. "We raised important issues about structure, planning, and how to ensure that every country progresses together. While some communities are already organized and advancing in sports development, others will require assistance, particularly in areas such as training, athlete recruitment, and sponsorship. Financial sustainability remains essential, as sports development cannot succeed without it."***

Generally, the progressive report so far looks promising. However, long-term success hinges on sustainability and engaging all age groups in different sports. Active collaboration is key, providing grounds for regular training, just as seen by Maccabi FC Nigeria's recent partnership with Xriso Sporting FC, a football club in Abuja, to share training facilities and engage in friendly matches to allow players more training time and improve their performance and skills. Other teams should absolutely emulate this type of partnership.

Furthermore, the existence of Jewish-owned primary and secondary schools in Uganda, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, and Cameroon would ensure a continuous supply of young athletes, securing the sustainability of the Maccabi program. Large-scale media and promotion are equally instrumental in increasing visibility and attracting supporters, sponsors, and global donors. Both regional and country coordinators selected as volunteers need to give their best by holding their responsibilities firmly, keeping teams motivated and performing, while awaiting the establishment of this proposed territorial organization.

In summary, it is essential for Jews worldwide to back the Maccabi African Confederation because of its considerable potential influence on Jewish communities in Africa. This organization is set to both organize and host upcoming African Maccabi tournaments while also creating opportunities for more African athletes to participate in the Israeli Olympics in the future. Likewise, the confederation aims to assist young individuals in African Jewish communities in creating a more promising future for themselves and their communities. This goal will be achieved through access to sports training and competitions, the promotion of Jewish identity and community involvement, and the encouragement of life skills development.



Cliff Garrun and Jator Abido pictured in Johannesburg, South Africa, August 2025.



Fans and members of the Beth Ha'arachman Jewish Community in Akwa Ibom State, Southern Nigeria, pose proudly with Harachman FC following a Sukkot football match in which Harachman FC secured a decisive 4-0 victory over Uruan Feeder.

# A Book Review

## INSIDE THE JEWS OF NIGERIA



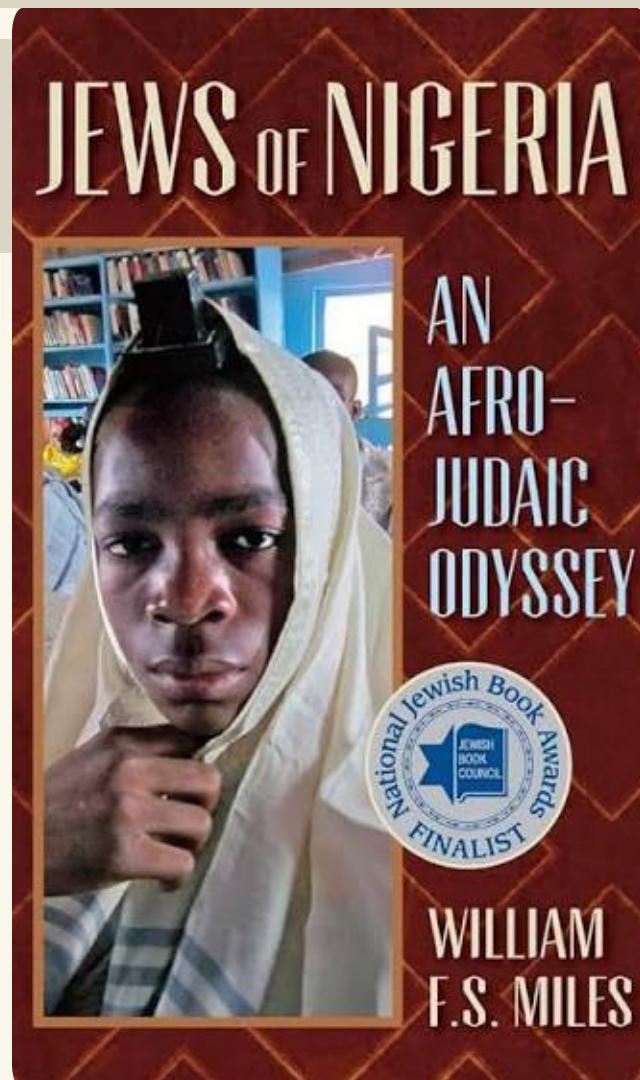
By Netzach Ekwunife

*I must say that reading William F.S. Miles' book, Jews of Nigeria: An Afro-Judaic Odyssey, published by Markus Wiener Publishers in 2012, was an engaging experience. It felt like I was sitting with a wonderful storyteller, full of humor but yet paying excellent attention to details.*

The book, covered in brown and with the face of a young boy putting on a tefillin, ushered me into a world filled with warmth, quests, and cultural intrigue. It felt like I was stepping into a vibrant room that was pulsating with ancient traditions, modern findings, and a deep yearning for discovery, all intertwined in a very captivating way.

The book explores the unique phenomenon of rabbinical Judaism's emergence in Nigeria, particularly among Igbo people, and is a valuable addition to studies on African Judaism and intercultural religious dynamics.

What grabbed me was Miles's ability to convey the raw passion and spiritual hunger of these Igbo communities he encountered, whom he affectionately termed 'Jubos' journeying into rabbinic Judaism. The term "Jubos," an acronym derived by combining the "Jewish" and "Igbo," or rather "Judaism" and "the Igbos," was employed consistently throughout the book. Similarly, in this review, I will employ the same terminology to align with the author



He tells about the Jubos adopting a religion where Igbo traditions intersect with rabbinical Judaism. It feels like they're reconnecting with ingrained ancestral echoes that intimately resonate with their souls. Miles captured the scene beautifully with his firsthand account of heartfelt Hanukkah celebrations and a touching bar mitzvah he attended in Abuja. One could sense their sincerity and longing to live Jewishly in Nigeria's diverse religious landscape, where Islam and Christianity have strong presences. It speaks volumes about faith being a remarkably personal journey.

The author touchingly conveyed the devotion of the Jubos. I loved the story he told about a heartfelt Sabbath dinner where challah tastes sweeter when shared with a genuine community. The Jubos' journey into Judaism is not an isolated phenomenon. It is a testament to the fluid and seeking nature of spiritual identity. And Williams Miles captured this quest with a warmth that feels like sitting with an old friend sharing cherished stories.

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Miles captured the deep passion the Jubos exhibited in their spiritual journey and their desire to connect or reconnect with what they view as ancient Hebrew roots. I must say that the cultural parallels they highlighted between certain Igbo traditions and Jewish customs felt like finding unexpected harmonies in a musical composition. That, I couldn't help but wonder, is the possibility of ancient linkages and the shared human narratives vibrating subtly across continents.

However, the author stressed that, according to his research on the Judaization of contemporary Igbo, theology trumps genealogy. This implies that the Igbo Jews did not first and foremost perceive themselves as a lost tribe of ancient Israel, leading them to learn and practice rabbinical Judaism. Instead, they embraced rabbinical Judaism as part of their quest for spiritual truth, and only then did they recognize similarities between Igbo traditions and Jewish practices. His candid expression of the idea was a brilliant observation that I had never considered before.

Undeniably, Miles' notion of them being "the world's first Internet Jews" strikes me as both apt and touching. Their innovation and adaptability in faith expression, as well as their resourcefulness in navigating digital spaces to learn and practice Judaism in Nigeria, where traditional infrastructure is very limited, are clear for all to see. He gave one such example as the Jubos conducting prayers with a photocopied siddur, a digital Torah. I agree with his stance on this; I know one of the first people to learn to read and pray in Hebrew, Eben Cohen. Cohen reportedly used the internet to master reading and praying in Hebrew, a skill he eventually passed to many others, who in turn taught others.

The author highlighted the struggle of these Nigerian communities who are fervently pursuing Judaism in a country that is dominated by Islam and Christianity. In Nigeria, it is estimated that between 6,000 and 10,000 Igbo people have adopted mainstream Judaism, yet the number feels like a pebble at the beachfront compared to the overall population of the country. Issues such as assimilation, internal discord, and recognition struggles from both Nigeria and Israel confront these Jewish communities. He asserts that rabbinic authorities in Israel do not recognize the Igbo Jewish community (Jubos), thereby undermining their legitimacy and acceptance within the global Jewish community. He cited an example whereby a Jubos can only travel to Israel on pilgrimage if he passes as a Christian tourist because he is not recognized by the Nigerian and Israeli governments as a Jew. Furthermore, there are no subsidies from the Nigerian government available to Jewish pilgrim seekers because Judaism is not a religion recognized by the Nigerian government.

Miles also noted an Israeli embassy official in Abuja who suggested hesitation about recognizing the Jubos. I was saddened by his submission. He feared potential mass conversions and immigration claims due to the economic crisis in the country.

The book also highlighted the challenge of not having an indigenous resident rabbi. It is a real issue that lingers, 13 years after the publication date of the book 'Jews of Nigeria' in 2012. There is, as yet, no resident Jewish rabbi in the entirety of West Africa

As Miles noted in his book, "The geographic calculations become dizzying, the conclusion identical: when you're a Jew in Nigeria, and you need a rabbi, you've got a long way to go.

*"He stirred contemplation on the very meaning of Jewishness, personal identity, and belonging that left me reflective. He gave a firsthand account of his experience with the Jubos in their home and synagogues, which he described as "a profoundly moving experience."*

Reading Miles' account of his first encounter with the Jubos filled me with pride as a Jubo. He spoke about how it affected his spiritual life. "The Jubos make me feel ashamed as a Jew; sometimes, this feeling even motivates me to go to shul." They live more Jewishly than most Jews do in America. References to the Torah and Jewish ethics are sprinkled in routine conversations."

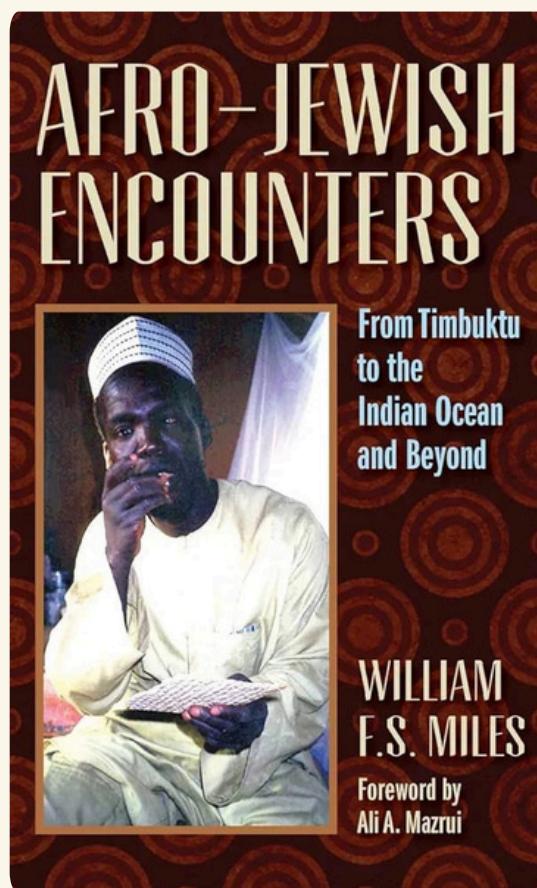
He raised questions about Jewish identity at large and the Jubos' legitimacy. "But are they really Jews? Who, after all, is a Jew?" I was moved by his submission in the case of the Jubos. He artfully balanced scholarly insight with stories of his personal encounter with the Jubos."

Orthopraxy, I submit in this case, ought to trump orthodoxy. In other words, the fact that the individuals you will encounter in this book live as Jews—practicing, worshiping, studying, gathering, and, yes, disputing as such—is infinitely more important than whether or not they descend from some long-lost tribe of Israel. "They are vastly more Jewish than Western Europeans or North Americans, whose DNA may bear traces of Jewish ancestry but whose lived experience, individual sense of identity, religious practice, and group identification are anything but."

I was reminded of the book *Black Zion* while reading Miles' *Jews of Nigeria*. Miles' unique insight into the spiritual journey of the Jubos underscores the universal themes of identity and spiritual belonging, adding a fresh perspective to the global Jewish mosaic.

However, I observed that the book focused almost exclusively on the Igbo communities (Jubos), whereas judging from the title (*Jews of Nigeria*), a reader will be quick to assume that only the Igbo tribes represent the Jewish demographics composition in the country. Secondly, the event described in the book take place largely in Abuja, the northern part of the country, and most of the interviews conducted are from guests who attended a bar mitzvah in the capital. These observations prompted me to consider other communities beyond the author's personal experience, particularly the non-Igbo tribes not included in the book. The Igbo communities are not the only Jewish people in Nigeria. In the southernmost part of the country, Akwa Ibom and Rivers State have thriving Jewish communities. This narrowing of focus raises questions about the book's ability to fully represent the nationwide diversity required to justify the book title

Nonetheless, Miles' storytelling skills captivated me. I couldn't lift my eyes off the book and couldn't help but crave more. I would truly adore seeing Miles expand on this narrative in a future edition by weaving broader interactions with Nigeria's diverse Jewish communities. Definitely, he should create a more inclusive term instead of "Jubos," unless he plans to rename the book "*The Igbo Jews of Nigeria*." I'm hopeful for continued explorations. It would make for a wonderful read.



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9–10 March 2026

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Conference theme: From Beyond the Rivers of Cush  
African Communities Negotiating Jewish Identities

### Exploring the Theme:

An academic study of the emergence and growth of African Jewry, particularly in the context of the spread of Jewish identity to new regions and the significant changes in the history of religions in Africa and Jewish history



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