

## Be'chol Lashon Update July 2006

### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### SAN FRANCISCO

- **Be'chol Lashon presents: "Sisai" An Ethiopian Israeli documentary**  
Wednesday, July 26, 2006 Saturday, July 29, 2006

#### NEW YORK

- **New York's Best Emerging Jewish Artists: Vanessa Hidary**  
Wednesday, July 19, 7 P.M.

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- **Ghana soccer player waves Israeli flag to celebrate World Cup goal**
- **Lawmakers Hail Inclusion of Israeli Branch Of Red Cross Into International Organization**

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### UPCOMING EVENTS

#### SAN FRANCISCO

**Be'chol Lashon Presents: "Sisai" A moving Ethiopian Israeli documentary about identity, race and the meaning of family.**

**Wednesday, July 26, 2006**

San Francisco, Castro Theater

Film: 6:30, Panel: 7:30

**Saturday, July 29, 2006**

Berkeley, Roda Theater

Film: 4:30, Panel: 5:30

Buy tickets: [www.sfjff.org](http://www.sfjff.org)



Co-sponsored by Be'chol Lashon as part of the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival's "Spotlight on Ethiopian



Jews and Jews of Color," Sisai is followed by panel discussions in San Francisco and Berkeley on race, adoption, and Jewish identity with director David Gavro, his brother Sisai Bayo, Dr. Ephraim Isaac, and others.

Winner of the 1st Prize for Documentary Film at the Jerusalem International Film Festival Sisai is an emotional and eye-opening portrait of immigrants caught between two worlds and two identities. When 23-year-old Sisai, an Ethiopian Jew living in Israel, learns that his adoptive dad has located his biological father in Ethiopia, the two of them, along with his brother (and filmmaker) David Gavro, embark on an unforgettable journey back to Africa.

*Note for Families with Children:*

*While the film is unrated, Sisai deals with themes of adoption and death from the perspective of a 23-year-old and may not be suitable for younger children. Older children familiar with adoption may be confused by some of the language used to describe Sisai's biological family (e.g. referring to Sisai's birthfather as his "real" father).*

Additional Film Festival Showings of Sisai:

Tuesday, August 3, 2006  
Mountain View Century

Sunday, August 6, 2006  
Smith Rafael Film Center

## New York

### New York's Best Emerging Jewish Artists: Vanessa Hidary

**Wednesday, July 19, 7 P.M.**

Museum of Jewish Heritage  
36 Battery Place  
New York, NY 10280



Hosted by author and stand-up storyteller Jonathan Ames, with producer Michael Dorf, DJ Handler, animator Hanan Harchol, actress and poet **Vanessa Hidary**, comedian Corey Kahaney, monologist and storyteller Josh Lefkowitz, comedian Lenny Marcus, MC Y-love, singer/songwriter Chana Rothman, vocalist and songwriter **Amy Tobin**, pianist Ben Waltzer, musical comedy duo What I Like About Jew, Zagnut Orkestar, and others to be announced

New York City has always been a hot bed for up-and-coming talent, and it is no coincidence that this city is also home to one of the largest Jewish communities. From the Yiddish theaters of the Lower East Side and Greenwich Village's beat poets, to the galleries of SoHo and rock clubs on the Bowery, the contributions of Jews have left an indelible mark on downtown culture. Come hear the next generation of Jewish voices and be able to say I saw them when. . . .

This event will showcase the best local Jewish talent from a variety of performing and visual arts. Established performers will introduce emerging Jewish artists gathered for a dynamic evening of cutting-edge literature, art, comedy, and music. Enjoy these performances by artists on the verge

of stardom and don't miss the chance to see them in an intimate setting in Lower Manhattan. After the program the festivities continue on the Museum's third floor terrace overlooking NY Harbor and Statue of Liberty with an after-party featuring the musical stylings of DJ Handler.

\$15 members, \$20 non-members

[http://www.mjhnyc.org/safrahall/visit\\_safra\\_hall7.htm](http://www.mjhnyc.org/safrahall/visit_safra_hall7.htm)

## CURRENT NEWS

### U.S. Rabbis Stand Up To Chief Rabbinate

By Michele Chabin and Rabbi Dale Polakoff, June 16 2006, The Jewish Week

***Orthodox rabbinical group here forms joint commission with Chief Rabbinate, which backs down from former demands.***



Israel's Chief Rabbinate and the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) last week established a joint commission to set uniform conversion standards, including a commitment from the Rabbinate to automatically recognize all past, current and future conversions approved by the RCA and the Beit Din of America (BDA).

According to a statement released by the RCA, which has more than 1,000 member rabbis in North America, the meetings held here by representatives of the two rabbinic authorities resulted in several "reciprocal understandings and agreements."

The agreements apply only to conversions performed by RCA member rabbis who registered the conversions with the RCA and BDA.

After it was learned several weeks ago that Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar's policy was to accept only conversions performed by Chief Rabbinate-approved diaspora rabbis, as first reported in these pages, American rabbis were upset. But now, as one observer noted, the Israeli and U.S. rabbis have 'kissed and made up.'

Moreover, the American rabbis, who were caught off guard by a flap that seemed to question their credentials, appeared to gain a more equal footing through the agreement on a joint commission.

The Chief Rabbinate, while still insisting on uniform standards, has backed away from its position calling for diaspora rabbis to come to Israel for an exam before being deemed acceptable to perform conversions.

The Americans viewed such a demand as totally unrealistic and even insulting, since it did not seem to recognize the tradition and authority of the RCA.

"This agreement, hopefully, will standardize" the positions between the two rabbinic groups, "and marks a real improvement," noted Rabbi Kenneth Hain, rabbi of Beth Shalom in Lawrence, New York and a former president of the RCA.

The joint commission, made up of representatives from both rabbinical bodies, is expected to submit its recommendations to the Chief Rabbinate no later than Sept. 11.

Specifically, the agreement calls on the parties to immediately establish a commission to examine, "in light of halacha, current standards and procedures in the realm of conversion and personal status to achieve clarity and consistency whenever possible."

Each party will prepare a list of who it considers to be "approved Beit Din (rabbinical court) rabbis and rabbis (not working within the Beit Din framework) in North America" who already deal with personal status issues like conversion and divorce.

"From time to time," the announcement says, "the composition of the lists will be appropriately reviewed in light of new realities and circumstances."

In the future, any rabbi who wants to be involved in personal status matters – officiating at a conversion, marriage, divorce -- that he wishes to have recognized in Israel "will need to comply with the standards thus agreed to by the Chief Rabbinate and the RCA," according to a statement released after the meetings.

Arguably the most important part of the decision relates to the automatic recognition of RCA-approved conversions.

In reality, some RCA-stamped conversions (as well as conversions from other well-known rabbinical bodies) have not been automatically approved by the Chief Rabbinate for the past year or two, since Rabbi Amar quietly ordered clerks dealing with conversion and other personal status matters to scrutinize all Orthodox conversions performed overseas.

But Rabbi Basil Herring, executive vice president of the RCA, insisted in a Jewish Week interview that "there's an absolute agreement on the part of the Rabbinate, effective immediately, that any convert who comes with the ishur, or proper authorization, of the RCA/BDA will be automatically recognized."

He added that "the problems RCA-approved converts have encountered in the past year are a thing of the past" and "they won't receive the run-around."

This may not be the case for converts whose RCA-affiliated rabbis did not seek approval from the BDA, the rabbi acknowledged.

"They may still encounter the same problems," he noted.

But the overwhelming number of conversions performed by RCA rabbis are registered with the RCA and BDA, according to Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, rabbi of Kehilath Jeshurun in Manhattan.

Others suggested that there may be 'more than a few wildcat rabbis' who perform conversions without registering them with the BDA, not to mention conversions performed by non-RCA rabbis — even haredi Orthodox — whose conversions presumably would not be acceptable to the Chief Rabbinate unless they were on a list of approved rabbis.

Several RCA rabbis noted that while the Chief Rabbinate created an unnecessary controversy initially, reflecting a lack of understanding of the American Jewish community and rabbinate, in the end the situation is, as Rabbi Dale Polakoff of the Great Neck Synagogue put it, "a win-win for all concerned."

He said that is especially true for the converts, and the agreement "should open the lines of communication between the RCA and the Chief Rabbinate and lessen the confusion."

Rabbi Herring said the RCA would insist that the Chief Rabbinate conversions adhere to the same high standards it is demanding from rabbis abroad.

"People who convert in Israel — some people go to Israel from other countries to convert, including from the U.S. — will have to go through conversions that conform to the same standards that will apply in the United States if they wish to be recognized in North America as Jews," he said.

"Just as the Israeli Rabbinate has full jurisdiction [in Israel], so does the American rabbinate retain full jurisdiction here," he continued.

The issue of standards could be problematic, though.

Rabbi Nachum Eisenstein, the chairman of the Va'ad HaRabbonim Haolami Leinyonei Giyur, a fervently religious organization that sets rabbinical standards and examines the credentials of individual rabbis at the request of the Chief Rabbinate and other authorities, believes that American rabbinical standards are sometimes slack.

While acknowledging that some European and Israeli rabbis do not live up to his organization's standards for conversions and divorce, Rabbi Eisenstein said "the problems in America are even worse. There is no control over what a rabbi does. He can do whatever he wants. The registrations aren't done properly."

Rabbi Eisenstein said that "only the leading rabbis of this generation" can set the standards that should be adopted by the Chief Rabbinate and the RCA. He cited Rabbi Yosef Shalom Elyashev, a fervently Orthodox rabbi with a huge following in Israel, as one such leader.

An Orthodox rabbi who was a member of the RCA prior to making aliyah several years ago, and who requested anonymity because he deals with the Chief Rabbinate, expressed concern that the Rabbinate's standards do not take into account how Jewish communities abroad work. In particular, he said, Israeli rabbis find it "anathema" that American Orthodox rabbis sometimes work closely with non-Orthodox clergy.

"If the Chief Rabbinate decides to impose standards like this on the Orthodox rabbinate abroad, we could be back at square one," he said.

Said one New York rabbi: "It's just that kind of lack of understanding of the American rabbinate that set off this whole tinderbox in the first place."

Editor Gary Rosenblatt contributed to this report.

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## **Ghana soccer player waves Israeli flag to celebrate World Cup goal**

By Haaretz Service, June 17 2006, Haaretz.com



Ghanaian soccer player John Pentsil celebrated the goals scored by his teammates against the Czech Republic at the World Cup on Saturday by waving the Israeli flag at the stadium in Cologne.

Ghana beat the Czech Republic 2-0 in a convincing display of fast-paced soccer, increasing the chances the African team will be the first from that continent to qualify to the next round in the quadrennial soccer tournament.

Pentsil, who plays for Hapoel Tel Aviv, is one of three Ghana international squad members who play for Israeli soccer teams.

He apparently kept the flag tucked away into his sock during the match. In the past, Pentsil has displayed both the Ghanaian and Israeli flags during soccer matches, most recently after Hapoel TA won the Israeli Cup.

Israel failed to make the World Cup after finishing third in its European qualifying group.

### Lawmakers Hail Inclusion of Israeli Branch Of Red Cross Into International Organization

By Leora Falk, June 27 2006, The New York Sun



New York elected officials joined in a celebration of the inclusion of the Israeli branch of the Red Cross, Magen David Adom, into the international Red Cross.

While yesterday's breakfast - hosted by the American Red Cross in Greater New York and the Jewish Community Relations Council - was celebratory, there was an acknowledgement of the struggles the MDA faces in gaining full recognition.

"I was fearful, honestly, that once again the deal was going to fall through, that there would be some excuse, some inertia that would prevent this from happening," Senator Clinton, the keynote speaker, said. "It's been a hard-fought victory."

The Red Cross's recognition "comes at a particularly poignant, painful, tragic time," Mrs. Clinton said, referring to the terrorist killings of two Israeli soldiers and the kidnapping of Corporal Gilad Shalit, 19, on Sunday.

A December amendment to the Geneva Conventions accepted the neutral red crystal as an alternate symbol to the red cross or red crescent. Israel will use the red crystal as its symbol of protection when working outside of the country, and the star within the crystal as the official symbol of its chapter of the international Red Cross. The Magen David Adom and the Palestinian Red Crescent were officially accepted in a June 22 vote of the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent.

"What we hope is that the crystal will become the surrounding emblem" for all three symbols - the red cross, red crescent, and red Star of David, the CEO of the American Red Cross in greater New York, Theresa Bischoff, said after the event. "We will certainly support the international use of the symbol."

"This is what the Israeli government thinks is an equitable compromise, so it's acceptable," the executive vice president of American Friends of Magen David Adom, Daniel Allen, said of the acceptance of a neutral symbol rather than the official inclusion of the Star of David.

Rep. Jerrold Nadler of New York offered a harsher view of the compromise. "Let us all hope that in the future the world will not see the Magen David so offensive that it must be contained in another insignia," he said. "Rather, it will be seen for what it is - a beacon of commitment."

The American Red Cross has withheld six years of dues from the international organization in protest of the exclusion of the MDA.

## IDENTITY

### Professor Sholomo Levy chooses field of study close to home

By Dan Berrett, June 5 2006, Pocono Record



For Sholomo Levy, history is more than a matter of intellectual curiosity. It lies at the core of his identity.

Levy, 42, an assistant professor of history at Northampton Community College, is both black and Jewish.

He has pursued both facets of his identity through his scholarship and his spiritual practice. "On the one hand, I teach American history," he said, "and on the other hand, I'm an ordained rabbi."

A graduate of Middlebury College, Levy later earned his master's degree from Yale and is completing work on his Ph.D. from Columbia University. His thesis and dissertation have focused on black-Jewish relations and the history of black Jews in New York, respectively.

He came to Northampton after working at Harvard as an editor on the African American National Biography with renowned scholar Henry Louis Gates. Northampton seemed a good fit; the biography project was wrapping up, and Levy wanted an academic schedule that would allow him to finish his Ph.D.

Still, his identity poses inherent questions for some people, especially white Jews. How can someone possess two identities that seem, on the surface, to be so disparate?

As it turns out, the answer lies in the past — specifically the 1920s.

During that time, African-Americans were consciously defining their culture, including religion.

"This was a moment in history when everything was on the table and they were forming their identity," Levy said. The prior decades had seen enormous change for African-Americans, including emancipation from slavery, efforts to reconstruct the American South, and the Great Migration from the rural south to urban centers.

One of the leading black voices in the 1920s was Marcus Garvey, whose Afro-centric vision and Universal Negro Improvement Association attracted throngs of followers nationwide. The association sought to promote racial pride, and economic and cultural self-sufficiency. Inspired by Garvey, many black Americans looked to Africa to better understand their history, heritage and prospects for the future.

As Levy put it, "What were we before we became slaves in America?"

Religion was part of this question. Around the same time, the Nation of Islam began to attract adherents. But some thinkers, like Arnold Ford, felt the pull of Judaism. He traced his lineage back to Africa and the tribes of ancient Israel. After all, Judaism, like Christianity and Islam, has its roots in the Middle East, a region straddling Africa and Asia. According to the Bible, the tribes of Israel dispersed through Egypt and Syria. Some interpretations had them moving beyond and into Africa during later epochs.

Seen in this context, being both black and Jewish was not so contradictory. "It's as plausible as being Christian," Levy said.

In the Biography on which he worked at Harvard, Levy describes Ford as "the most important catalyst for the spread of Judaism among African Americans." Ford worked closely with Garvey's association and sought to influence the religious direction of black Americans. In fact, he served on a committee charged with determining "the Future Religion of the Negro."

Ford attracted followers. One was Rabbi Wentworth Matthew, who founded the Commandments Keepers congregation in Harlem.

It was into Matthew's congregation that Levy's father wandered one day. The experience changed his life, and that of his family. "It was an epiphany for him, a revelation," Levy said.

At the time, Levy's father still went by his given name, Lawrence McKethan. But soon after experiencing Matthew's service, he started thinking of himself as a Jew. Levy's father eventually converted or "returned" the preferred term among the community of black Jews and changed his name to Levi Ben Levy.

Though he had been raised in Fayetteville, N.C., in a Baptist home and was the son of a deacon in the church, Levi Levy had developed a high regard for the Old Testament, with its narratives of suffering and justice.

Judaism also appealed to Levy's father theologically. For one, it was the religion that Jesus himself practiced. It also offered a direct connection to God. "We worship the same God as Christians, but we don't use a mediator or intercessor," Levy said. When he was a Christian, Levi Levy came to see that he had been praying to Jesus all along, not to God.

Levy practices a version of the faith that is closest to Modern Orthodoxy. This branch of the faith promotes strict adherence to Jewish law, while acknowledging the realities of modern life. As per tradition, Levy wears a yarmulke on his head, maintains what he calls a biblically kosher diet he will eat meat and milk, but not pork or shellfish, observes Jewish law and worships in a synagogue that separates men and women.

But his synagogue, Beth Elohim, in St. Albans, N.Y., also embraces more contemporary sensibilities. It fully recognizes the equality of women and "affirms the brotherhood of all people who worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob without regard to race, tradition, or terminology," according to its Web site.

Levy also drives to his synagogue to observe the Sabbath. In observance of that holiday, strictly Orthodox Jews are not allowed to operate machinery, use electricity or work.

Levy's style of observance is also a by-product of history. When Ford and Matthew were forming and returning to their Jewish identities, the predominant branch of American Judaism was Orthodoxy. It proved to be a double-edged sword. White Jews at the time were preoccupied with assimilating and being seen as white. This left them little room to welcome non-white Jews into the fold.

"While the black press accepted the validity of the black Jews," Levy wrote in the Biography, "the white Jewish press was divided." Quoting an article in Newsweek magazine in the 1930s, Levy wrote that some ridiculed "King Solomon's black children" and mocked Matthew's efforts to "teach young pickaninnies Hebrew." As a result, black Judaism developed apart from mainstream, white Judaism.

Levy said white Jews still tend to be skeptical about his religious identity. "White Jews want to know if I keep kosher or if my mother was Jewish," he said, referring to two tests of Jewish identity.

But the black community takes his faith at face value, he said. In part, it is because that community has historically cast a wider net, counting as its own even those of mixed racial lineage, he said. "Black people have to accept people as white as Colin Powell and as black as Michael Jordan."

Today, Levy estimated there are, at most, some 40,000 black Jews in America. Their representatives have included the entertainer, Josephine Baker, the legal scholar Lani Guinier and the writers Walter Mosley, Jamaica Kincaid and James McBride. Some, like Kincaid, converted, while others were the products of intermarriage.

Their contributions, Levy noted, are far disproportionate to their numbers.

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## The Challenge of Being Me

By Kyra Davis, June 21 2006, InterfaithFamily.com



One of the very first reviews I received for my debut novel was in Z!NK magazine. It was a rave which obviously made me happy, but what stuck with me was the following comment:

Davis . . . explores (and explodes) racial boundaries with the book's charming protagonist, Sophie Katz, a half-Jewish, half-black best-selling mystery writer.

Explores and explodes? Really? If that's true then I'm exploring and exploding racial boundaries every day of my life just by existing. And if that's true then I'm certainly not doing it by myself. There are lots of "Jews of color" out there. But in the eyes of mainstream America we're still an anomaly. The general public tends to see all multiracial individuals as being "original" and "exotic," but when you're a member of two minority groups that have been saddled with completely opposing stereotypes . . . well that's radical indeed.

Except I don't feel radical. I feel like a normal person going about my life. I also don't feel like a societal misfit, but according to daytime talk shows the Jews in my life are supposed to hate blacks and my black friends are supposed to be severely anti-Semitic. Based on most media reports I should be rejected by everyone even while I plead for acceptance. But that hasn't been my experience nor has it been the experience of any of my multiracial friends.

That is the biggest challenge multiracial people face today. Not an inability to be accepted, but an inability to communicate to the world that (on the whole) we have not been rejected. People are always asking me about what it's like to be "mixed." They want to know if I've been called an "Oreo" or if I feel self-conscious when I walk into a synagogue and note that I am the darkest person in the room. When I was in middle school a girl actually asked me if my mother permed her hair so she could look more like me. The answer to all these questions is a big NO. Of course I'm aware that there are a few racist Jews out there and there are some anti-Semitic blacks, but I've encountered very few of these individuals and I'm convinced that's because their numbers have been greatly exaggerated.

The perception that multiracial people are troubled and victimized creates a very unhealthy dynamic. People want to handle us with kid gloves; they look for emotional problems. When I was in grade school I had a teacher who always treated me like I was a ticking time-bomb ready to explode despite the fact that my behavior in class was always highly cooperative. She explained to my mother that she suspected I was going through an identity crisis . . . at seven. I've had my fair share of crises in my life but none of them have been in relation to my identity. I have always known and liked who I am. My race and religion wouldn't have been an issue for me if that particular teacher hadn't been so desperate to make it one.

Other challenges I've been faced with relate more to my upbringing than my race. I was raised by an Ashkenazi Jewish mother and Irish Catholic stepfather in a California beach town, so my behavior and tastes tend to diverge from what many people expect to see in a woman of black ancestry. I don't read *Essence*, I love shellfish, and my slang is more likely to resemble that of a valley girl than a hip-hop artist. So basically I am living breathing proof that the stereotypes don't always hold up. But humans are funny creatures. If a man who has been raised to believe that blacks are illiterate, violent people and Jews are cheap, deceitful money grabbers, meets a black and/or Jewish individual who is educated, gentle and generous, he will usually assume that his new acquaintance is the exception to the rule. Never mind that he's never met anyone who does fit the stereotypes he holds so dear. The point is that this is the worldview that was pounded into him as a child and nothing short of divine intervention is going to get him to rethink it.

But it's okay to be friends with the "exceptions." It's better than okay, because most people today are uncomfortable with their own prejudices and if they can befriend an "exception" then they can point to them and say, "See! I have a Jewish/black friend! Color and ethnic heritage mean nothing to me!" But it's a rare person who can truly discard their ethnic biases. There have been numerous occasions when a friend or co-worker of mine has actually forgotten that I was ethnic at all because I just act so "white." And that's usually when the racial slur slips out in my presence. If the offending person catches himself (and that's not always the case) he or she will usually say something like, "Of course, I don't mean you. You're different."

I'm not different. I am not the exception. When I look in the mirror I see a woman with brown textured hair and a broad African nose. I am black. And when my son and I look through the pictures of my mother's family we see the faces of young Eastern European immigrants clutching the Torah as they celebrate their Bar Mitzvahs. We are Jews. The fact that I speak neither Ebonics nor Yiddish does not dilute my ethnicity. When someone insults blacks or Jews they are insulting my people.

That's the challenge of being black and Jewish. That is the challenge of being me.

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### **Awareness Growing, Local Rabbi Says**

By Christine Cox, June 22 2006, Southbendribune.com





*Livya Zeitler, 6, of Elkhart shows the Hebrew word for cat in her Hebrew coloring book to a Tribune reporter. Her mother, Melanie Zeitler, right, is shown at the South Bend Regional Art Museum, where she is director of development. Zeitler, who is Jewish, is raising her daughter in the Jewish faith.*

Every Friday at sunset, 6-year-old Livya Zeitler of Elkhart helps her mother, Melanie, light candles to welcome Shabbat, the Jewish Sabbath.

Together they pray over wine and the traditional chalah bread, covering their eyes to show God respect. Livya has been able to recite these prayers since she was 3 1/2.

At South Bend Hebrew Day School, an Orthodox elementary school, Livya studies oral and written Hebrew and learns about Jewish customs, traditions and history.

As traditional as her upbringing is, Livya's starting point with Judaism isn't. She was adopted from China.

Livya's just one example of numbers of racially and ethnically diverse Jews in the United States. Today, more American Jewish communities reflect the fact that not all Jewish faces are white.

### **Who is a Jew?**

Diversity in Judaism is a given. The story of the Jewish people "is filled with interracial and intercultural mixing," according to the book "In Every Tongue: The Racial & Ethnic Diversity of the Jewish People" by Diane Tobin, Gary A. Tobin and Scott Rubin (Institute for Jewish & Community Research, 2005).

According to the Web site of Jewish & Community Research, "In Every Tongue" "explodes the myth of a single authentic Judaism." And in exploring the question of "Who is a Jew?" the book reminds readers of the worldwide spread of Judaism in ancient times.

After the enslaved Jews fled Egypt, they journeyed for 400 years "from Asia to Africa and back again." Jewish regions were conquered by the Greeks, Romans, Turks and others, and "had long and deep connections with other Mediterranean and European cultures."

With each encounter with different peoples, Jews intermarried and picked up other cultural practices. In the United States, however, the overwhelming majority of the Jewish population, 80 percent of an estimated 6 million Jews, are Ashkenazi Jews from eastern Europe, according to a 2002 survey by the Institute for Jewish & Community Research.

That leaves 20 percent of Jews who are racially and ethnically diverse -- including African, African-American, Latino, Asian, American Indian, Sephardic (Jews of Spanish descent), Mizrahi (Jews of Middle Eastern origin) and mixed-race Jews by heritage, adoption and marriage.

Although "In Every Tongue" does not provide specific data, it cites the study as saying those diversity figures are growing.

Even so, the book's interviews with diverse Jews give a candid look at the challenges they face, particularly with having to "prove" their Jewishness because of their skin color, ethnic background and/or different customs.

### **It's much better now**

Rabbi Stanley Halpern, of Temple Israel in Gary, a Sephardic Jew, understands both sides.

"I think there is a suspicion among a lot of Jews of individuals who they don't perceive as being originally Jewish," he says. That suspicion is "very often" directed to converted Jews and even "families of Hispanic Jewish heritage that go back hundreds of years but don't eat the same food as Jews out of eastern Europe, have different last names and didn't speak Yiddish."

But, "Maybe any group that is routinely persecuted is suspicious," he says.

Perhaps in response to that memory of persecution, synagogues with mixed congregations such as Temple Israel congregation tend to be very welcoming. Temple Israel's congregation is largely Caucasian, but "in comparison to the other congregations in this area, we probably have a lot more of Hispanic and African-American families," Halpern says.

Plus, Jews and non-Jews alike have become more aware of diversity in Judaism, he says. "It's much better now."

### **A desire to embrace**

Any doubt that Judaism reflects every skin color would be cleared up by looking at Israel, says Rabbi Michael Friedland of Sinai Synagogue in South Bend.

"All you have to do is take a trip to Israel to see the diversity in the Jewish world," he says.

In his 10 years in South Bend, Friedland has had African, African-American and Asian members at his temple. Though the numbers haven't been large, he says they're significant for a community the size of South Bend.

He has seen increasing acceptance of diverse Jews. "In today's Jewish world, there is such a desire to embrace. There's a sensitivity to the fact that Jews in the United States are so homogenous. ... The reaction is not to put up obstacles, but just the opposite."

### **A pleasant experience**

Livya has never had a problem being accepted as Jewish.

"It has been a most pleasant experience," Zeitler says. And she's not surprised by this.

"I think that it's typical in that in most Jewish families ... it's part of your duty to welcome all, to welcome what you call K'lal Yisrael, 'all of Israel,' " she says.

Zeitler is passionate about her daughter having a stronger connection to Judaism than she had when growing up. Although she was very aware she was Jewish and they celebrated the High Holy Days, her family was more culturally Jewish, she says. They didn't attend temple regularly, she did not study Hebrew, nor was she bat- mitzvahed. Even though there were holes in her knowledge about Judaism, Zeitler picked up on her heritage and never felt as if she were an outsider.

As an adult, she studied the Torah and was bat-mitzvahed. She's now working toward a master's degree in Jewish studies.

As to future challenges with a Chinese-born, Jewish-raised girl, Zeitler says it will be a matter of balancing Livya's born identity with her family identity.

Right now, "I don't think it's complicated for her," Zeitler says. "It's more, again, what the outside world brings in upon you."

### **Religious rebel**

Born to a Jewish mother and non-Jewish father, Susan Enamorado, of New Carlisle, grew up in New York. Her experience, or non-experience, with Judaism was similar to Zeitler's.

"Religion was kind of taboo in our house," she says. Her interest in it made her "the rebel as far as religion."

Like Zeitler, Enamorado has always felt as Jewish as anyone else, gaining her Jewish identity through her grandfather and going to a school with a high number of Jewish students.

When she was a new mother, she wanted her sons -- 11-year-old Sebastian and 6-year-old Alex -- to have a religious background.

She chose Judaism because it touched her core through "Hebrew songs or Jewish songs or songs from hidden Jews in Russia," she says. "I kind of call it reverberations." She visited many churches, but "I didn't feel the same kind of emotional and spiritual response," she says. She hopes her multiracial, multispiritual sons feel the same about Judaism.

Enamorado's husband, Roberto, is a Latino/African native of Honduras who was raised Catholic but claims Jewish ancestry as well as spiritual roots in Africa.

Enamorado is dedicated to giving her sons a greater connection with Judaism than she had growing up. She and the boys attend Sinai Temple, a Reform temple in Michigan City. They study Hebrew and celebrate Jewish holidays.

Though people "have gone out of their way to make sure we feel welcome," she says, Sebastian at times has wished to be "like

everyone else," whether speaking of religion or race. It helps that her sons know other minority Jewish kids, she says.

Enamorado won't force bar mitzvah on her sons, though she hopes they'll choose it someday. She'd like to be bat-mitzvahed herself. Neither will she pressure her sons to marry Jewish when the time comes, though she admits "it's crossed her mind" that she'd love it if they did find Jewish partners to preserve their faith.

Ultimately, "I trust their judgment," she says, "and I want them to pick a good person no matter what race, what religion."

Staff writer Christine Cox: [ccox@sbtinfo.com](mailto:ccox@sbtinfo.com) (574) 235-6173

## JEWISH COMMUNITIES AROUND THE WORLD

### Jews who fled Arab countries take campaign to European Union

By Joel Clark, March 28 2006, JTA



**Stanley Urman, director of a campaign to gain restitution for Jews who fled Arab countries, meets with other delegates in Brussels.**

Jews who fled Arab countries following the creation of the State of Israel have taken their demands for restitution to the European Union.

More than 20 delegates from Jewish communities in seven countries gathered in Brussels on Sunday and Monday under the auspices of the International Rights and Redress Campaign, meeting members of the European Parliament to discuss their demands.

The global campaign aims to raise international awareness of the heritage of Jewish refugees from Arab countries and to document human rights violations and loss of assets.

The campaign's official launch had been due to take place during Passover, but the sudden incapacitation of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in January and Israeli elections delayed the launch until November.

Organizers hope to bring worldwide attention to the issue in November through media, politics and education.

The campaign was launched by the U.S.-based Justice for Jews from Arab Countries, in conjunction with the World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries.

"We want to underscore the fact that Jews were also victims of the Arab-Israeli conflict and should be recognized as such," said Stanley Urman, the campaign's director. "It's an injustice to recognize one victim population but not another."

At least 850,000 Jews lived in Arab countries in 1948, but fewer than 8,000 remained by 2001. Two-thirds were absorbed into Israel, while some moved elsewhere.

Most fled or were forced to leave their homes after the creation of the State of Israel in 1948, receiving little or no compensation from Arab governments for their considerable assets.

The campaign seeks to register all these refugees and to preserve their testimony at a special unit of Israel's Justice Ministry.

Organizers are targeting the United States, Russia, United Nations and European Union — the four members of the diplomatic "Quartet" working for Israeli-Palestinian peace — to put the issue on the international agenda before the campaign is officially launched.

Frederique Ries, a member of the European Parliament, met delegates in Brussels on Monday and said she would work to put the issue on the E.U. agenda.

"Although this was not a new issue to me, most" Parliament members "will be unaware that there were in fact more Jewish refugees than Palestinian refugees," Ries said. "This is a question of justice, and I welcome the representations that have been made to put this on the agenda."

Urman said the campaign was focusing for now on securing international recognition that there were Jewish refugees from the

Arab world, and that human rights violations took place.

Next month, a bipartisan resolution will be proposed to both houses of Congress requiring all U.S. officials to make references to Jewish refugees alongside Palestinian refugees whenever the issue is raised in an international settings.

Organizers have held preliminary talks with Russia and are hoping to meet Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in the near future.

Nessim Hamaoui, who was forced to leave Egypt in 1958, traveled to Brussels from his home in Sao Paulo.

"I'm here not just for myself, but for the 1 million other Jews who were expelled from their homelands after 1948," Hamaoui told JTA. "We had our homes, our hopes and our dreams there. All that vanished, and it's time to bring justice to the refugees."

The International Rights and Redress Campaign is supported by Jewish communities in 33 countries.

Julien Klener, president of the Consistoire, an umbrella organization for religious Belgian Jews, welcomed the meeting in Brussels.

"Somehow the existence and history of Jewish refugees has been forgotten over time, and the Palestinian issue has been overstressed," he said.

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### Unrest spurs Venezuelan Jews' interest in aliya

By Ruth Eglash, May 18 2006, The Jerusalem Post



A delegation of Jewish community leaders from Venezuela arrived here this week as part of a mission intended to explore options for Venezuelan Jews who want to leave the troubled South American country and move to Israel.

The members of the mission, including the 16 community leaders and their partners, met Wednesday with President Moshe Katsav in Jerusalem. They discussed issues ranging from Israeli politics to economic concerns. The visitors also told Katsav of the growing unrest in Venezuela and their fears for the future of the 15,000 Jews living there.

The trip was supposed to have been conducted under a low profile following growing friction between Venezuela and the US, as well as an alleged anti-Semitic statement made by Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez in December.

"The situation in Venezuela is very difficult," said Edwin Villamizar, 24, who moved to Israel in January. "It is a very violent country with many murders, and we have to work very hard to make a little bit of money."

Villamizar said that back home he did not feel connected to the Jewish community and that in Israel it was easier to connect with his Jewish roots and meet other young Jews.

Nathalie Mizrachi, 26, made aliya four years ago, leaving all her close relatives in Venezuela. "They did not want to leave their lives and their jobs over there," she told The Jerusalem Post. "If something happens and Chavez says they might not be able to leave, then they will get out quickly." "Venezuelan Jews are not really interested in coming to Israel," she said. "Most of them prefer to go to America, I think it is good that they are now encouraging Jews to come here." "The situation over there is not good, but not specifically for the Jews, but in general," said Mizrachi. "There are no jobs and it is hard to make a living. Jews are now looking for other options." "There is not a great feeling of anti-Semitism," she said. "There have been a few anti-Semitic remarks

but nothing over the top."

Earlier this week, there were media reports that Chavez was planning to sell his country's fleet of 21 US-made F-16 fighter jets to another country, perhaps Iran. The reports were denied Tuesday by Venezuelan Defense Minister Orlando Maniglia. Previously, the US announced a ban on arms sales to Venezuela.

The visiting group, led by Freddie Pressner, president of the Confederation of Jewish Associations of Venezuela, visited a Tel Aviv University program for Spanish-speaking students on Wednesday, and on Thursday they will tour Kfar Saba, which has been designated by the Jewish Agency to absorb the growing number of Jews immigrating from Venezuela.

"The city of Kfar Saba is happy to be affiliated with the Venezuelan Jewish community," said Kfar Saba Mayor Yehuda Ben-Hamo, who is scheduled to visit Caracas next week. "I see this initiative as an important Zionist endeavor of which Kfar Saba is very proud." Ben-Hamo said that 25 families have settled in the city in recent months and that more Venezuelan immigrants are scheduled to make Kfar Saba their home this year.

The city offers new Venezuelan immigrants housing assistance, a program where families "adopt" older immigrants, extra assistance for children in the school system, information on work options and a network of immigrant organizations to help ease the transition into Israeli society.

Jewish Agency officials estimate there are around 2,000 Venezuelan Jews living in Israel and that just over 100 Venezuelan Jews arrived here during the past year.

"We expect that number to rise," one official told the Post.

In January, the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center accused Chavez of making anti-Semitic comments during a Christmas Eve speech. The Wiesenthal Center even wrote to Chavez demanding he apologize for what it said was a negative reference to Jews.

At the time, The Forward reported that Venezuelan Jewish leaders had defended their president and criticized the Wiesenthal Center.

"You have interfered in the political status, in the security, and in the well-being of our community. You have acted on your own, without consulting us, on issues that you don't know or understand," they wrote in a letter.

*AP contributed to this report.*

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## **For Indian Jews, birthright gives glimpse of life as majority group**

By Dina Kraft, June 13 2006, JTA



Zohar Reuben, 24, of Mumbai explores the narrow alleyways and stalls of Jaffa's outdoor flea market with fellow young Jews from India after a long journey that has taken them from the Galilee to Jerusalem.

It's on this birthright tour of Israel, thousands of miles from home, that Reuben has found, for the first time, close Jewish friends his own age from India.

In Mumbai, he explains, Jews live spread out across the vast city. Although he comes from a kosher home and goes to synagogue regularly, he does not have a group of young Jewish friends. Most of his friends are Hindu or Muslim.

"When I tell them I'm a Jew they say, 'Huh? What's a Jew?'" said Reuben, who works in marketing.

He said he has been excited to see life in the Jewish state.

"It's good to be one of the crowd. I want to rediscover my Jewish roots," said Reuben, who visited Israel for the first time through birthright. Like many from his group, this was his first trip outside India.

For many Indian Jews on the trip, birthright offered a first glimpse of life in a place where Jews make up the majority.

This was the second time a group of Jews from India has come on birthright. The group of 40 is mostly from the Bene Israel community centered in Bombay, Calcutta, Delhi and Ahmadabad.

The community, which is ethnically Indian, claims descent from Jews from the Galilee who fled persecution in the 2nd century BCE and landed in India after a shipwreck.

Today the community of Indian Jews numbers about 5,500. Aside from the Bene Yisrael, there are Cochin Jews from southern India and Baghdadi Jews who are descended from former Iraqi Jews, as well as Jews from Syria, Yemenite and Iran.

Sharon Galsurkar, 30, a Jewish educator from Mumbai, said bringing the young adults on a trip like birthright gives a huge boost to the community, which struggles as a tiny minority to keep younger members involved.

"They relate more intensely here. It's like – quick," he said, snapping his fingers. "As a Jewish educator, I feel this is what is making our community strong."

Seeing Israel and visiting sites helps deepen the participants' connection to their heritage and history, Galsurkar said. Visiting a place like Yad Vashem encourages their curiosity about the Holocaust, he said, something about which many in India's Jewish community know little.

Birthright provides free 10-day trips for Jews between the ages of 18 to 26 who have never come to Israel on an organized tour. The goal is to strengthen their sense of Jewish identity and connection to Israel.

Nisha Namia, 26, the one Cochin Jew on the trip, found Jerusalem and the sight of a country with so many Jews deeply moving. She comes from a village in the Ernakulam district that has only 52 Jews. Her family is the only Jewish one in the village.

"We don't have a community life there. There are many synagogues in the region but only one that functions, because of the lack of people," Namia said.

Most of the Jews in her region immigrated to Israel, she said, but she plans to stay in India.

Sitting next to Namia on the tour bus as it snaked its way through Tel Aviv's clogged streets was Oshrith David Gadkar, 19. Unlike Namia, she does see her future in Israel.

Being in Israel, her first time outside India, "makes me feel strongly that I need to make aliyah," she said.

Gadkar hopes to come with her entire family — but only after she finishes a master's degree in architecture. She explains that she'd rather study in her native language and come to Israel with a profession in hand.

Like many others on the trip, Gadkar has many relatives in Israel. Hers have settled in Beersheba, Jerusalem and Ashdod.

Samuel Satamkar, 21, also has relatives in the country. He said he was excited to have a chance to learn more about his Jewish heritage.

Satamkar, who works at a call center in Mumbai and plans to study for an MBA, said Indian Jews are proud of their Indian heritage too, but sometimes lack the tools to explain their own identities.

"It is very difficult to explain to other people what being a Jew is," he said.

Experiencing Shabbat in Jerusalem, where the whole city winds down and takes a collective rest, took him by surprise.

"It's so different from what we feel in India. We don't feel it on such a grand scale," he said.

Shalom Penkar, one of his new friends, agreed.

"To be with our people is a great feeling," he said.

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