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FROM THE EDITOR

The inaugural issue of the African Jewish Voices magazine was released just over six months ago, and now, in the spirit of the Sukkot festival, it is the perfect moment to unveil the second edition. A lot has been happening around the Jewish world in the lead-up to this publication, particularly in Israel, where a bloody war rages on different frontlines following its one-year anniversary on October 7th. While opinions among many Jews residing around the world differ regarding human rights, politics, and concerns about a possible nuclear conflict, this represents the greatest threat to the survival of Eretz Israel since the establishment of the State of Israel. The aftermath of this is a new wave of antisemitism sweeping not just across the Western world but in Africa, where a significant number of black Jewish adherents exist. Despite their steadfast support for Israel, an ancestral homeland to which many feel a deep-rooted connection, numerous African Jewish communities are confronted with extraordinary threats to their continued survival. These include severe drought, poverty, hunger, and starvation; food insecurity; diseases in rural regions; marginalization; and antisemitism.

Speaking up about these challenges as separate entities simply dissipated the energy across the board with fewer effects, until the conference in Abidjan brought over 10 countries, forming an alliance, and giving them one big voice. However, with only two years having passed since the formation of SAJA (Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance) and the association still in its early stages, many current and prospective members continue to wonder if there is real potential for rebuilding and strengthening the economies of member communities.

This edition's theme aims to explore whether there is light at the end of the tunnel. The question offers a variety of answers and sub-questions, examining the alliance's mission and vision, along with the road map it is currently following. Considering the common tone of the problem and challenges, it is more effective to communicate with a unified voice rather than with multiple voices individually. As a result, new partnerships and collaborations have arisen, concentrating on a regional scale and considering multiple countries simultaneously. One of the greatest threats is food insecurity, which has worsened in the face of rising inflation and the loss of purchasing power of many local currencies around the continent. Nonetheless, the recent Gelfand Foundation's involvement has allowed around 20 communities, from a total of more than 100, to successfully embark on plans to tackle food insecurity through agricultural grants. Draught-affected areas are taking further measures utilizing solar technology to generate water for irrigation, enabling year-round crop cultivation. Some are also conducting pilot tests on greenhouse mini-plantations to determine the most effective methods. Looking through the tunnel to see the future, another question that arises is the extent and magnitude of the light at the end of the tunnel. To be frank, not only the SAJA management's commitment will determine the success of projects, but also the beneficiary communities' ability to adhere to their plans, manage execution, accountability, reinvestment, and expansion. To date, numerous countries have demonstrated a remarkable growth trajectory, suggesting that additional communities will soon benefit from available food security grants. Future predictions suggest that an increasing number of communities will achieve self-sufficiency, shifting from a role of consumers to that of producers. Technology will definitely play a crucial role in improving efficiency to achieve the optimum outcome.

Furthermore, the education sector could witness the establishment of community-owned standard schools, which will significantly contribute to the development of both Jewish and non-Jewish children. Youth development can take various forms, including the teaching of vocational skills to enhance employability, while the area of sports can provide a new frontier to help talented young stars achieve success in international stages. Ultimately, through hard work, support, focus, and resilience, Africans can successfully rebuild their Jewish communities, having local rabbis while residing side by side in typical Jewish community settlements. Thus, looking through a futuristic telescope, there are a lot of possibilities to see beyond the light at the end of the tunnel.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

AVRAHAM AVRAHAM

OPENING SHOT



Entrance into the Sukkot village in Beth Harachman Jewish Community in Southern Nigeria, consisting of more than 30 sukkah units with members and their families residing in them. They have named this year's Sukkot village "Camp Mark."

From A Sukkot Village in Southern Nigeria to the Hills of Sefwi Waiwso in North Western Ghana for Simchat Torah.

A Story of High Holidays 5784

By Avraham Ben Avraham



Members of the Gihon Hebrew Synagogue carrying out the Tashlich ritual

When traversing from the east African coast to the western region, it is highly likely to encounter Jewish communities in various countries across Africa. In addition to well-known communities like the Lemba of Zimbabwe, Beta Israel in Ethiopia, the Abayudaya in Uganda, and the Igbos of eastern Nigeria, there are actually other tribes in Africa where you can find black Jews. A lot of them have actually been around for quite a while, not really knowing about each other until the internet came along. It was the internet

that first made it possible for them to connect with other Jewish communities in surrounding countries. During the inaugural Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance meeting, which took place approximately two years ago in Abidjan, participating Jews from 10 African countries had the opportunity to meet one another and establish a strong connection. Their shared goal of embracing Jewish laws and principles formed the cornerstone of their mission of uniting and rebuilding their Jewish communities.

The rate of return to Judaism has been increasing in recent times due to several factors. These factors include a deeper understanding of pre-colonial history, the recognition of some African cultural practices described in the Torah, and the significance of monotheism as a sacred belief. Many Jewish individuals who are experiencing a spiritual awakening find that Judaism provides a meaningful connection to their heritage and a glimpse into the practices of their ancestors. In most cases, the number of returning black Jews is relatively small compared to the overall population. However, there is potential for future growth through the trend of expanding Jewish families and welcoming converts.

What is the most common way for establishing one's Jewish identity? It is the desire to follow the Torah and uphold the fundamental Jewish laws and dietary restrictions known as halachot and kashrut.

According to the commandments in the Torah, there are specific observances on certain days in the month of Tishrei. On the 1st day, there is a feast of shofar. On the 10th day, Yom Kippur is observed.



Kiddush Levana - sanctification of the moon - after the Yom Kippur fast in Gihon

Then, on the 14th day, the festival of Succot begins and lasts for a 7-day period. During this time, all the house of Israel is to dwell in booths, as a way to remember their ancestors who once lived in temporary shelters during their journey in the wilderness.

Preparations for these high holidays commence in earnest during the month of Elul, which is 30 days prior to the eve of Rosh Hashana. During this period, it is common to observe Jews blowing the shofar both in their synagogues and in public spaces. Another important spiritual exercise to prepare for the judgment on Yom Kippur is the recitation of the Selichot prayers. These prayers, focused on repentance, help individuals prepare themselves for this significant day. The selichot prayers are traditionally recited during the early morning hours or before going to bed. In certain Nigerian synagogues, the chazzan, or prayer leader, endeavors to foster a sense of community by organizing group phone calls for members to engage in collective prayer at this time.

In Abuja the capital of Nigeria, on the evening of Rosh Hashana, a Chazzan, Shlomo Ben Yaakov commenced the prayers for the evening service using the festival prayer book. After concluding the prayer services, it was time to engage in the evening rituals. These rituals involve reciting affirmations over different types of symbolic food, such as apples, pomegranates, beets, carrots, fish heads, dates, pumpkins, and more. The congregants, seated around the tables, all appeared to be in a joyful mood as they celebrated the start of the year 5784. They followed the seder order, as described in the festival prayer book. It was that time of year when the sweet fragrance of honey filled our homes, replacing the usual salt we used to eat our challah.

Due to the coincidence of Rosh Hashana falling on Shabbat, we were unable to experience the customary shofar blast during the prayer service, which is typically a part of every other Rosh Hashana celebration. It is not surprising that Shabbat serves as a fundamental aspect of Jewish culture. Due to similar reasons, the members were unable to go out after the first day of Rosh Hashana's Shacharit service. This is because it is customary to observe the ancient Jewish rituals called Tashlich. This prayer is recited beside a flowing body of water, and it concludes with the act of throwing crumbs of bread into the water. From a spiritual perspective, this act symbolizes the casting away of our sins. However, it is strongly advised that the presence of fish serves as an indication of the water's suitability for Tashlich prayers, particularly when these fish consume the bread crumbs that are tossed into the water.

However, since Rosh Hashana is observed for two days, there was an opportunity to eventually hear the blast of the shofar on Sunday, the following day. A key moment during the service was when the moderator called out the sequences of blasts, which were tekiah, shevarim, and teruah respectively representing the long, short, and continuous blasts, as well as the lengthy blast. At the conclusion of the service, the congregation participated in Kiddush, followed by Brikat Hamazon, and finally enjoyed a festive meal. Prior to participating in the Tashlich prayers, the young individuals gathered together in a jubilant atmosphere to commemorate the beginning of the Jewish New Year 5784. They joyfully engaged in singing, drumming, and dancing in circles, expressing their gratitude for being able to witness this special season.

The countdown to Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, began in earnest with the 10 days of awe. As individuals of the Jewish faith, the pursuit of forgiveness is not limited to the duration of a 25-hour fast. The process commences with the recitation of repentance prayers during the month of Elul, and the continuation of cultivating a repentant mindset throughout the ten-day period following the commencement of Rosh Hashana.

On the morning before the eve of Yom Kippur, Kadmiel ben Emmanuel, along with a group of other young males who had spent the night at the synagogue guest house, led the 4am Selichot prayers. After the Selichot prayers, the morning shacharit service commenced, followed by an engaging dvar Torah segment in which everyone actively participated. The prayer concluded just before sunrise, prompting everyone to spring into action and assist in preparing the synagogue for the Yom Kippur service. This is necessary as members will be required to stay in the facility throughout the fasting period. Throughout the day, a small group of individuals could be observed taking part in the annulment of a vow. This ceremony took place in the presence of three individuals who were assumed to be a beit din. Just before the fast began, members of the Gihon Hebrew Synagogue performed the kapparot rituals. However, they did not use a roaster as is customary. Instead, they wrapped money as charity for the poor.

In Gihon, as well as in many other congregations, it is customary to recite all the books of the Psalms that night after the Yom Kippur evening service. The reading lasted for approximately four and a half hours, during which several chazanim and younger individuals took turns reading portions from the 150 psalms. The morning service began at 7am and continued until after noon, with a short

break in between. After the break, everyone stayed in the synagogue for the concluding service. After the well known proclamation of "Hashana Haba'ah B'Yrushalayim," Kadmiel guided the members of the congregation outside to participate in the recitation of the Kiddush Levana prayers. The ancient ritual known as the sanctification of the moon is notable for its inclusion of the phrase, "just as I leap towards the moon, but cannot touch you."



A Sukkah in Jewish Central Synagogue, Uyo

After completing the fast, they still had some energy left in them. They concluded the festival by enthusiastically singing a loud aleinu and performing a musical havdallah. Everyone was extremely confident they had received a favorable judgment at the end of the fast. The significance of this season for Jews lies in their ability to gather the necessary energy to sustain them throughout the remainder of the New Year. According to tradition, the judgment book is opened on Rosh Hashana, and it is believed that the fate of all individuals is written during this time. The decision is made and finalized on Yom Kippur.

After that, I proceeded to Akwa Ibom State, which is situated in the southern coastal region of the country. A Sukkot village was constructed, which is typical of the Beth Ha'arachman Jewish Community. This practice is in line with the longstanding tradition of their community. According to the Torah, individuals are commanded to leave the comfort of their homes and live in a sukkah for a period of 7 days. By residing in their sukkah, each family is able to gain a deeper understanding of the experience that our Jewish ancestors had in the wilderness after leaving the land of Egypt.

The nightlife in the camp is definitely not boring, as most days are dedicated to specific groups within the community to entertain the camp. Each evening starts with the maariv prayer in the central sukkah. After that, we welcome the patriarchs as honored guests to our evening meal. Then, the children excitedly head over to the "camp Israel" corner in the sukkah camp, which is always bustling with activities. Although many sukkahs have a makeshift kitchen, the distribution of food throughout the camp is still primarily organized by the women's group. Two of the youngest girls in the camp are Rachamim and Hadassah. Rachamim was 8 days old, while Hadassah was 6 weeks old. They were both staying in their family sukkah.

The resurgence of Judaism in Africa has extended beyond borders, as an increasing number of people are embracing religious practices that align with the customs of their African ancestors. These practices were upheld prior to the arrival of Europeans and the spread of Christianity. In the western north region of Ghana, located over 1,450 km away from Akwa Ibom, the Jewish community in Sefwi Wiawso celebrated Hoshana Raba as the seventh day of Succot. They then observed Shemini Atzeret, which happened to coincide on a Shabbat. Tifereth Israel Synagogue in Ghana is home to the largest Jewish community in the country and has been established for more than thirty years.



Dancing with the lulav in circle under the central Sukkah at Beth Ha'arachman Jewish community

The sukkah village, also known as the "Sukkah Camp," consisted of approximately 35 sukkah units. The village was home to a population of around ninety people, with each man and his household camping in their respective sukkah. At the break of dawn, it is common to see mothers preparing their children for school, while men gather under the central sukkah for morning prayers. During these prayers, they wave the daily lulav in all six directions, standing upright. The majority of children in the sukkah village attend the Brachot Yeshiva Schools, which are owned by the management of the Jewish community. The schools are located approximately 6 kilometers away from the village.



Sukkot morning shacharit



A beautiful sunset over the Sukkot village in Beth Ha'arachman



Members of the Tifereth Israel synagogue enjoying a meal in the Sukkah at Sefwi Waiwso in Ghana.

Historically, most part of the land of Sefwi was governed by kings who upheld sabbatical laws, observing a day of rest every seventh day. On the seventh day, it was prohibited to go to work, visit the stream, or even hold a burial ceremony. The kingdom was blessed with a defensive topology, thanks to its mountainous terrain and captivating geography. Valleys filled with small streams, hilly peaks, and intermediate plateaus added to the beauty and prosperity of the land, making it a cherished home for the mountain people. According to historical accounts, early settlers arrived more than a millennium ago. Throughout generations, these mountain dwellers have faithfully observed Shabbat and adhered to certain halachot mentioned in the Torah.



Simchat Torah celebration on 8th October, 2023

Regrettably, similar to what occurred in colonized countries around the world; missionaries depicted the customs and traditions of Africa as fetishistic. This misleading portrayal led many Africans to abandon a significant portion of their cultural, traditional, and religious heritage. Right next to the historic Sefwi palace, which has served as the seat of rulership for numerous generations, there is a huge Roman Catholic quarter. This quarter houses the various missionary operations that are active in that particular region of the country. Over an extended period of time, the native kings, who shared power with the British colonial authority, exerted significant influence, resulting in the gradual erosion of the visible manifestation of Jewish identity among the populace. As a result, the visible expression of Jewish identity gradually diminished, and the religion of the colonizers became integrated into the culture of subsequent generations.

The members of the Tifereth Israel Synagogue are unique in the Sefwi land and greater parts of Ghana because they are the only ones who have preserved some of their ancestral practices within the framework of Rabbinic Judaism. As anticipated, a small group of individuals convened at the Sefwi Synagogue following Shemini Atzeret to observe Simcha Torah on Sunday, October 8th, 2023. This special day is dedicated to celebrating the Torah and signifies the conclusion of the annual reading of the parashot. Despite our efforts to celebrate and engage in religious rituals, our thoughts remained consumed by the devastating news of the Hamas attack in Israel. The attack claimed the lives of over 1,400 individuals, predominantly Israelis. And as the military retaliatory attacks and search for hostages inside Gaza intensify, it is our sincere hope that swift humanitarian resolutions will be adopted and hostilities to come to an end in the shortest time. This is crucial to prevent further uncontrollable violent escalation that could potentially destabilize the Middle East.



Light at the End of the Tunnel?

How agricultural reforms are set to boost micro economic activities across sub-Saharan African Communities

By Modreck Maeresera

The Gelfand food projects began in Uganda and Zimbabwe, and have since expanded to six more African countries and a total of 20 communities in Africa south of the Sahara. Jewish communities in countries like Ghana, Ivory Coast, Madagascar, Nigeria, Tanzania, etc. have been recipients of the life-changing Gelfand food security grants. This will be the very first time we're experiencing unprecedented agricultural support spreading from the eastern region of the continent and spreading across to the western parts. It is proof of a change, an indication of our slow but steady journey from where we were in the past to where we desire to be in the near future.

Mr. Mark Gelfand, a Jewish philanthropist from the USA, funds the Gelfand food security grants. They are designed to give food self-sufficiency to the African Jewish communities affiliated with the Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance, an organization formed in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, in December 2022. The effects of climate change-induced droughts and water shortages have caused widespread food shortages and famine across the African continent. As a result, many communities suffer from perennial food shortages and have since become chronic donor aid candidates.

A greenhouse crop planting in its first year pilot test.



The Aboisso lowland area in Cote d'Ivoire hosts a fish farming project with five ponds.

The African Jewish communities that are recipients of the Gelfand grants are all affiliated with Kulanu, a US-based organization that supports the development of Judaism in emerging, isolated, and returning Jewish communities across the world. Although Kulanu's main mandate is the development of Judaism in Jewish communities, Mr. Gelfand's approach is slightly different. Before hanging the Mezuzah on the door, we must first achieve economic empowerment; otherwise, we won't have a community to talk about. This has been one of his favorite expressions, and it has inspired him to work for the economic growth of Jewish communities who are considered to be vulnerable. He wants to make sure that Jewish communities have a way to meet their basic requirements as a people.

To that end, the economic empowerment of the African Jewish communities and the development of Judaism in the African Jewish communities are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, these programs serve to complement each other. The projects range from poultry production, animal rearing, fish farming, and irrigated crop production. Each community comes up with proposals that support agricultural activities that are suitable to its climate, skills base, as well as traditional food source preferences. All of this greatly boosts the project's chances of success.



Livestock project in Tanzania to rear goats, sheep, and cows; for meat, milk, cheese, and then animal fertilizer that can be used for growing melons and pumpkins.

The Gelfand food projects are helping create united, focused, and highly organized Jewish communities, held together both by their religion and economic development projects. Where there was despondency and hopelessness, we now have Jews who are very positive about both the present and the future. We have been empowered by the projects to hope and dream again. The execution of these projects is intended to yield outcomes within a specified timeframe, and by progressing through each phase, the roadmap of the venture is maintained. The primary objective is to execute the plan to attain the expected outcome ultimately. Should successes be achieved, the micro economies of beneficiary Jewish communities would be significantly boosted over time, transforming them from dependent consumers into self-sufficient producers.

We experience our share of setbacks, but that's the tuition we pay for experience and hands-on learning. That is the very definition of living to work, sometimes failing and sometimes succeeding, learning from our mistakes and trying again differently until we succeed. That is life. In a way, the Gelfand food projects have taught us to live again. They have given us the dignity that comes from working to earn a living. Because whether it's hectares of farmland, a crop plantation, a poultry facility, a fish pond, or an animal ranch, what counts is control and ownership of the means of production. Knowing that this is the community's property and that every contribution is intended to generate products through these community owned means of production cultivates a positive sense of duty in everyone. By concentrating on how the anticipated outcomes would address the challenges and limitations, project managers would be inspired to take all necessary actions to ensure the system operates at its best throughout the year.

Harvesting tomatoes in Zimbabwe.



A pilot test fish pond in southern Nigeria, part of the Shehecheyanu food support program.



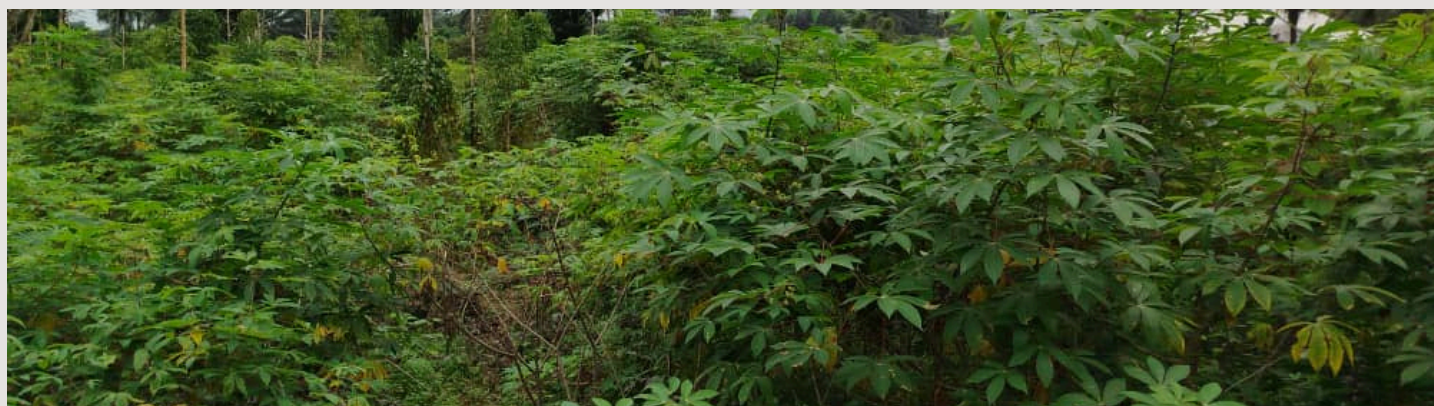
A maize farm in Zimbabwe ready for harvest.

What does the future hold? We are positive that through the Gelfand projects, we can keep on working to spread hope and positivity in the SAJA communities. We are becoming a coherent community of African Jews, bound together through common hopes, aspirations, and dreams. Through the Gelfand projects, we are learning new skills, and we are sharing and exchanging the different skills we are learning from our diverse projects. The sky is the limit; we are hoping to see more and more Jewish communities receiving the life-changing food security grants. We can now see the light at the end of the tunnel where we had lost hope.

A solar-powered borehole in drought affected Guruve in Northern Zimbabwe.



Irrigated drumhead cabbage plantation in Zimbabwe.



Shehecheyanu FSP temporary cassava farmland extension in Beth Harachman Jewish Community, Nigeria.



SPOTLIGHT

The Jewish Community in Kasuku, Kenya

By African Jewish Voices Staff

Situated in the Kenyan highlands at an elevation of approximately 8,000 feet above sea level, there exists a quiet Jewish community that has been established for over 20 years. The Kasuku Jewish community is located near the town of Naharuru, adjacent to one side of the great rift valley. The community is located approximately six and a half hours' drive westward from the Malaba crossing into Uganda, covering a distance of about 341 kilometers.

The Ol-Kalau Jewish congregation, commonly referred to as Kehillat Israel Kenya has transformed greatly over the years into a vibrant community from its early beginnings. Today, they have a stunning synagogue and a new building which comprises a

kosher kitchen and a social hall, and they recently received a donation of a Sefer Torah. The founding fathers, as is common in many African communities, initially began as a messianic congregation. After Yosef Ben Avraham Njogu and elder Avraham Ndungu Mbugua visited the Nairobi Hebrew Congregation, a 100-year-old Jewish synagogue, they departed from the messianic movement to embark on their journey in the path of Judaism.

With just two books on Judaism that they stumbled upon and borrowed, they began learning and practicing Jewish halacha and kashrout as much as they could in their family small groups. This earned them the description of self-taught Kenyan Jews on the hills. After remaining in isolation in the interior highland without recognition or affiliation with other Jews, their encounter with the Abayudaya Jews of Uganda marked a significant turning point for them. They met JJ Keki, a prominent Jewish leader from Uganda during a visit to the shul in Nairobi, and after several years of collaboration between both groups, the Kasuku Jewish community is now regarded as full members of the Abayudaya Jewish community.



Installing a mezuzah on one of the entrances into the synagogue.



Yehuda Kimani, the eldest of Njogu's 13 children, now carries the responsibility of leading the Kehillat Israel Kenya congregation. He was one of the young children who studied at the Jewish school in Uganda. While in Uganda, he also studied under Rabbi Gershom Sizomu, who, in 2006, facilitated the conversion of the majority of the Kenyan Jewish community with assistance from a beit din in the United States. Recently, the community has expanded through new births and converts, now exceeding a hundred members. Meanwhile, their relationship with the Jews in Uganda has continued to thrive, even resulting in intermarriages. Samson, a brother of Yehuda, is married to a Ugandan woman strengthen the bonds between the two countries. Similar to his brother, Yehuda attributes his leadership training to Ugandan Jews, having spent considerable time learning from various Abayudaya Jewish communities in Nangolo, Putti, and Nabugoye. He attended Semei Kakungulu High School before returning to Kenya to lead Kehillat Israel, a position he holds to this day.



Commemorating one-year anniversary since the arrival of the Sefer Torah.



Members seated at the Pesach seder table at Kehillat Israel Kenya.

The community has experienced significant growth, bolstered by the support of various Jewish organizations both within Africa and beyond. Their aspirations include the large-scale development of agriculture, aimed at strengthening the economy and achieving self-sufficiency. Their aim is to establish connections with Jewish communities throughout the continent, focusing primarily on the exchange of knowledge and resources. They aim to establish a Jewish tourism venture that not only generates revenue for the community but also provides tourists with an exceptional safari experience. This initiative is supported by their strategic location, which is in proximity to the equator, near Lake Naivasha, known for its abundant hippos, and the stunning Great Rift Valley.

Performing the ancient Tashlich ritual on Rosh Hashana, which involves throwing bread crumbs into the water bodies.



Shofar blast in Elul, two days to the start of the festival of Rosh Hashana of 2021.

A group photograph inside the new synagogue



Inside Camp Sarah in Nigeria

A children's playground for arts, sports, singing & dancing, leadership training, and learning Judaism

By Netzach Ekwunife



"Rangers" and their madrikim engage in a game that aligns with their previous lessons.

Jewish camping, as an activity, aims to provide participating individuals, families, and groups with an unforgettable camping experience that encompasses Jewish culture, traditions, and educational values. It is common to observe that these camps blend recreational activities with Jewish learning, cultural immersion, and community building to create delightful memories. In the majority of campgrounds in the United States, camping often takes place during the summer vacations and stretches out over a period of time that can be as long as ninety days.

On the other hand, there are no regular, structured summer camps that take place annually anywhere from the west coast of Sub-Saharan Africa to the central and eastern regions of Africa. Because of this, the establishment of a Jewish camp in Nigeria in 2023 was a commendable effort on the part of the organisers, and it was a great accomplishment for the black Jewish communities, particularly those in West Africa. According to its objective, Camp Sarah is a Jewish organisation that teaches Judaism to children between the ages of five and sixteen. The organization's mission is to promote unity among Jewish communities for the purpose of enhancing Jewish life in Nigeria and beyond.

Prior to making the decision to establish a Jewish summer camp in Nigeria, the organizers of Camp Sarah first sponsored a number of young people to participate in summer camps across the United States. Now, the primary

mission is to achieve a greater impact by allowing more individuals to enjoy the experience of camping in Africa rather than just taking a select few children to the United States.

In the summer of 2023, the inaugural summer camping event took place in Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, at Tikvat Yisrael Synagogue at Kubwa, a suburb of the federal capital territory. The camping program debuted as a one-week gathering, running from August 21st to 26th, accommodating a record of forty campers who shared in living, learning, praying, and celebrating together. Nevertheless, after that ground-breaking debut, the camp organizers held two additional events before the next summer camp. Firstly, the camp organizers sponsored a joint Hanukkah festival service at the Gihon Hebrew Synagogue, one of the earliest Jewish communities in the country. Then next was a Purim event, which was brightened by a Camp Sarah colorful children celebration in Gihon Hebrew Synagogue.

Between August 5th and August 16th, 2024, children mostly from the Jewish communities in Abuja had another amazing and unforgettable summer camp experience in Tikvat Yisrael Synagogue. The second edition of summer camping began with a 3-day leadership training program hosted inside the social hall at Gihon Hebrew Synagogue. Prospective camp workers, volunteers, and instructors received a briefing on the planned activities for the 2-week camping period. Selected individuals were drawn from 2 synagogues in Abuja and from at least 4 other synagogues outside the capital territory.

The final day of the leadership training coincided with the start of a National Youth Shabbat, which was hosted in Gihon Hebrew Synagogue. This special Shabbat was attended by youth from nine different states across the country. It was indeed a super weekend for the youth, with lots of activities beginning with a colorful Shabbat candle lighting and ending in a high-spirited musical havdallah. On Sunday, the following day, spectators gathered in a field to witness the road to the Maccabi Games as a Nigerian youth soccer team was set to make its debut in the Jewish Olympics.

Camp Sarah officially opened the following day at Tikvat Yisrael Synagogue in Abuja, where preparations were made for the event. This year's camp hosted a total of 79 children, who were separated into four age groups: ages 5-7, 8-10, 11-13, and 14-16, with around 20 children in each group. Each group was supervised by counsellors who were volunteers.

A total of eight international volunteers from three continents and three nations provided assistance to the camp. These volunteers were Rotem from Israel, Degania from Denmark, Aviv, and five others from the United States of America. In addition, the success of the camp was primarily attributable to the involvement of twenty-two Nigerian volunteers. These volunteers included Shlomo Ben Yaakov of Eden Hebrew Class, Kadmiel Ben Emmanuel, Olachi, Edina Bat Emmanuel, and a number of other enthusiastic youth teachers.

While speaking with Mrs. Debbie Isser, the director of Camp Sarah, during an interview at the Tikvat Israel Synagogue, the venue of the camping, she disclosed that Camp Sarah generated funds for its activities through donations and fundraising. She mentioned that Rabbi Kerit's son Micah had his bar mitzvah this year, and for his bar mitzvah project, he asked people to contribute to Camp Sarah. She also said that people contributed to Camp Sarah in memory of her mother, Charlotte (Sarah) Isser, a renowned Jewish educator who has contributed immensely towards Judaism. She laid emphasis on Camp Sarah's mission of fostering a sense of community, strengthening the bond between campers, strengthening Jewish identity, and promoting leadership skills while having fun.

Rotem Azar leads the "Chaverim" group as they put the theory of teamwork into practice.



Meditation time with the Minnies.

"We begin every day with a big circle and end every day with a big circle; we have songs and other different activities, including leadership skills and bonding as part of our daily activities."

The creation of a unique Camp Sarah Siddur by Anya Herzberg, daughter of Debbie Isser, is an interesting feature of the summer camp that took place this year. The Camp Sarah Siddur, which is a collection of prayers and blessings that members of the camp community recite as part of their daily routine, was used in teaching the youngsters who were present at the camp. The prayers in the Siddur aim to fulfil Jewish obligation and strengthen the Jewish bond within the camp community. The Siddur is

dedicated to Charlotte (Sarah) Isser (zichrona l'vracha), whose creativity and innovation as a Jewish educator inspired the establishment of Camp Sarah.

During an interview, one of the campers expressed that the activities at the camp provided her with a sense of belonging and opened up opportunities for her to interact with other Jewish children from other parts of the country as well as children who had travelled from abroad to participate.

"My name is Batyah I am one of the campers. What interests me the most about Camp Sarah is their high level of principle when it comes to management, organisation, and time management. I learned so many new things, like bead making and painting, and I am most excited about the opportunity to socialize with Jews from all walks of life. Camp Sarah made my holiday enjoyable and memorable."

In an interview with a guardian of some children who were at the camp, Mr. Kaim, who introduced himself, expressed his reasons for enrolling his wards in the camp. He conveyed his wish for them to expand their Jewish connections and fully embrace their Jewish identity by engaging with the instructors' insights. He emphasised his belief that the experiences at Camp Sarah Summer Camp would enhance the Jewish identity and understanding of the children. Their ability to respond to questions and defend their Jewish identity was important. In another brief discussion, Sar Habakkuk, the leader of Tikvat Israel synagogue, expressed his joy regarding the impact that Camp Sarah has on the upbringing of Jewish children in Nigeria. He asserted that Camp Sarah's vision surpasses his own vision for Judaism in Nigeria because it includes ambitious plans for the younger generation, who are poised to become the future of the Jewish faith. He admired the effort the camp organisers are putting into raising our children to become leaders, and as a result, his message for Camp Sarah is one of encouragement.

"The prayers and singing are very inspiring for me and so much more beautiful than my community in the US because it is so lively and seeing the kids really know and dance to the songs. It's a very spiritual experience for me, I haven't felt this connected to Judaism"

Another overseas volunteer, Aviv, shared how the activities at the camp, especially the song, helped her to develop deeper connections with members of the Nigerian communities to Jewish, allowing for the exchange of ideas. Some of the indigenous volunteers also had a lot to say about their time at the camp. Olachi, a Nigerian volunteer, pointed out the possibilities of expanding her Jewish social networks beyond the duration of the camp. During the course of the camp, she had the opportunity to meet and engage in discussions with many different new people, both on a national and international level. She led the camp's oldest age group, and her favourite activity was badminton. This is because it is extremely engaging for the children. They were able to socialize and bond with one another as a team while playing the game, which was a lot of fun for them.

Kadmiel, who is a cantor at the Gihon Hebrew Synagogue and is also one of the Nigerian volunteers at Camp Sarah, shared his thoughts on the leadership skills that he gained during his time at Camp Sarah, as well as the exchange of ideas and values that he experienced while serving as a counsellor to the children.

Activities such as singing, art and painting, various types of presentations, public speaking, meditation, sports, and Jewish education are among the most important activities that take place within the camp. With these regular exercises, the children's mental, physical, and spiritual abilities are said to be transformed and enhanced. The organisers of the camp had implemented a standard grade system in order to monitor and evaluate overall performance, and they had also encouraged teamwork in order to accomplish their objectives.

Anya Herzberg, who is an international volunteer for Camp Sarah, acknowledged that her involvement with the Nigerian Jewish community had a huge impact on her spiritual life during another important chat. Anya Herzberg is a member of the Camp Sarah international volunteer program.

"With the help of international counsellors, we have worked to create a welcoming and inclusive environment for the children. We have learned that there are subtle approaches to managing activities with the children, such as inviting and accommodating them, and refraining from beating or yelling at them, a practice that differs greatly from the general practice in Nigeria. We play games and have fun with them (children), and we ensure that they feel comfortable. We structure our daily prayers to be interactive, inclusive, and fun, fostering their learning."

According to all the evidence, it is evident that both campers and volunteers expressed good responses, highlighting the sense of belonging, socialisation, and Jewish connection that they were able to cultivate. A number of children who are currently residing outside of Abuja, in the more faraway parts of eastern and southern Nigeria, have expressed interest in enrolling and attending subsequent summer camps. Parents also expressed their hopes that future editions of the camp could take place in parts of the country with significant Jewish populations.

On top of that, given that it is the only Jewish summer camp in West Africa, it would not be strange to learn that Jewish children from nearby nations like Cameroon, Gabon, Ghana, and Cote d'Ivoire would be just as excited to come and get some important experience as their counterparts from Nigeria.

From all indications, Camp Sarah is more than just a summer camp—it's a beacon of hope, inclusivity, building Jewish literacy, and addressing Jewish continuity. With only two years of existence in Nigeria, Camp Sarah has

demonstrated outstanding commitment in their sacred mission for Jewish children. The camp's on-going growth and evolution will impact future generations as these children grow to become knowledgeable leaders and devoted Jewish adherents. With adequate funding, future editions will not only include children and counsellors from various regions of sub-Saharan Africa but also extend the camp duration to a minimum of 30 to 60 days. Building bridges within and beyond the Nigerian Jewish community—Camp Sarah will strengthen Jewish identity, build a stronger connection to Israel, and increase participation in Jewish community leadership.



During the "human Hebrew alphabet task," Batyah, Minasheh, and Yeshayahu each formed the letter "vav".



Debbie Isser, director of Camp Sarah.



The Minnies group presents art works that teach Tikkun Olam (repairing the world).



On the final day at Camp, the staff constructed a human hut, and the children ran beneath it.



Eden group, prepare for lunch.

Second Wave of Conversion Hits Nigerian Jewish Communities

My Journey to Conversion

By Rishon Ben Avraham

Many people, across many congregations and communities, have fiercely contested the topic of conversion. Not only in Nigeria but also in other parts of Africa, brothers and sisters have had their own share of experiences, with some transitioning from a period of chaos and disagreement to a phase of collective mutual acceptance. Some argue that their claims of ancestral linkage to Israel qualify them, thereby eliminating the need for conversion.

Examining the entire scenario, multifaceted like the sides of a square, reveals that, despite the differences in belief patterns held by each group, we as Jewish people share many core principles that keep us as one. While Israel strictly considers and recognizes some conversions, it does not acknowledge others unless they take place in the country. It was just recently that the Israeli Supreme Court, after years of court proceedings, made a historic ruling that acknowledged nonorthodox conversion to Judaism in Israel. The decision ignited a worldwide celebration, and in due course, additional decisions would follow, giving the majority of Jews living in Africa a chance. In most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, where there is no resident beit din, the most common procedure involves rabbis travelling from abroad to form a beit din for conversion. My family, along with some members of my synagogue, recently fell into this category and underwent conversion.



People from different synagogues in Nigeria converge at K'nesset B'nai Avraham for conversion.

My journey in the search for truth began in my youth. At the age of 19, after completing my West Africa Examination Certificate (WAEC), a friend of mine who is not a Christian noticed my fervor for Christianity and asked, "What if you were born into a Muslim or Hindu family?" Would you still believe in Jesus? His question led me to become a seeker. I started attending different religious seminars and read books from various religions, but I was still unsatisfied.

In 2015, with God's help, I met someone who introduced me to Judaism and helped me see the truth in the Torah. He revealed the Bible writers' misinterpretation of the Tanakh to fit their narrative, leaving me in a state of shock. I became desperate to delve deeper into the Torah and discover the truth it holds.

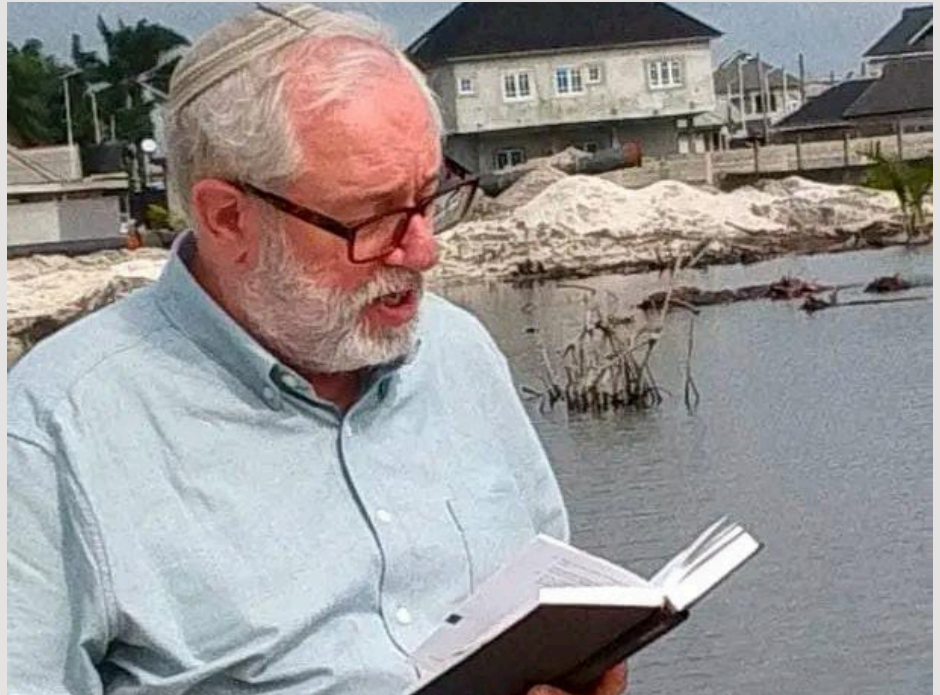
He told me that God does not accept human blood as atonement, citing the book of Jonah, where God forgave the sins of Nineveh without them using blood as atonement. He said, "The God of the Jews is not a vampire." This statement changed me. This person also encouraged me to join a local synagogue in our community, where I learned about the laws of kashrut, the observance of Shabbat, the festivals, and how to use Siddur. Although these practices felt strange at first, I grew to love them, and they strengthened my belief that I have a Jewish soul.

Fortunately, my wife also embraced these teachings, although she initially worried about the kashrut aspect, which meant forgoing some typical African delicacies that included crayfish in almost every dish, as well

as pork and dog meat, which are common in our state. I recall the day she asked me, "How would we be cooking now without crayfish in the soup?" But she later overcame this and recognized the truth in the Torah, as explained by the Rabbis. In fact, she learned how to bake challah and separate the dairy utensils in the kitchen.

By 2019, through my studies, I discovered that Jewish law (Halacha) requires conversion to Judaism. We discussed this with our community and agreed to continue practicing Judaism until we could have a Beit Din to facilitate our conversion, as Nigeria lacked Rabbis to form one. In 2020, the first Conservative conversion took place in Abuja, Nigeria. Regrettably, the distance and the ongoing debates about Orthodox versus Conservative conversion prevented me from attending. One occasion solidified my resolve to pursue the Conservative conversion. At my in-laws' house, I was asked by my wife's uncle, "I have heard that you are now a Jew." "Is it this Nigerian Jewry that is not recognized outside of Nigeria, or are you converted to being a Jew?" He went on to inquire, "Do you possess a Jewish certificate?" I was embarrassed by this question from a non-Jew, and I vowed to join the next Jewish conversion I came across. Also, as a student of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, I have learned that a Jew is a Jew, irrespective of the sect, since there were no Orthodox, Conservative, or other distinctions in earlier times.

The next Conservative conversion opportunity in Nigeria came in 2024, and I was determined not to miss it. On August 5, 2024, my family and I, along with 80% of our synagogue members, travelled to the Ozuboko Jewish community in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, with the singular goal of conversion.



Rabbi Moshe Saks, head of the beit din, recites a prayer during the mikveh for new converts.

Our journey from Akwa Ibom State was filled with excitement, with Mrs. Jack Rabin playing a leading role for the women, Elder Aron Ben Avraham acting in a fatherly capacity, and I serving as the coordinator. Our two Moreh, Emmanuel Azaria and Emmanuel Ozni, enriched our trip with fascinating Jewish stories.

Upon arrival, we met brothers and sisters who had travelled from various parts of the country for the conversion. Abah Yerimyah Eyong, the Rosh, was exceptionally accommodating and ensured everyone's well-being. He gathered us and said, "Rishon, this is the best Jewish decision that you and your community have made. This is not just an ordinary conversion, but a Masorti conversion—a traditional Jewish conversion in line with Jewish standards." His words reassured us of the right path we had taken. My children were thrilled to meet Rabbi Moshe Saks in person, having previously followed his teachings online. Rabbi Moshe Saks was the head of the Beit Din for our conversion. He is well known for his expertise in kashrut for the

Conservative movement, having served as the Rav Ba-Machshir (Director of Kosher Certification) for the Rabbinical Assembly's Philadelphia region. The Rabbi took time to explain the three aspects of conversion for men and the two aspects for women. The Beit Din interviewed us on the first day, and with God's help, we all from Akwa Ibom successfully made it through.

Rabbi Saks instructed the women to remove their wigs for the mikveh, while the men underwent the most daunting part of the conversion process, the hatafat dam brit. Rabbi Saks enquired if any uncircumcised males were present, as they would require a different procedure. Rabbi Saks then called each man individually into the room to perform the hatafat dam brit. I was scared at first, but Rabbi Gershom Sizomu, who was in charge of the hatafat dam brit, assured me it would not be painful. I thank Hashem; it was over before I knew it. On the third day, the women first went for the mikveh at a nearby sea, and the men followed afterward.

One of the most memorable moments was the question-and-answer session with Rabbi Gershom Sizomu. Rabbi Gershom, a member of the Beit Din for our conversion, is the first native-born Black Rabbi in Sub-Saharan Africa. He is the chief rabbi of Uganda and spiritual leader at the Stern Synagogue, the headquarters of the Abayudaya community in Mbale, Eastern Uganda. The Abayudaya (which means people of Judah in the Luganda language) recently celebrated 100 years of practicing Judaism. Originally found in the Mbale area, the Abayudaya, numbering over 3,000, have now spread and established synagogues in the north and central regions of Uganda.

During the interactive session, Rabbi Gershom provided valuable insights into many halachic matters in Judaism. Emmanuel Azaria, a member of my community, then asked Rabbi Gershom if it was permissible for other "Jews" in Nigeria who had not undergone conversion under any Jewish authority to daven as cantors for us who had converted, to which he replied in the negative. He further explained that, in Halacha, they are not Jews but merely practicing Judaism. He also pointed out that they are not eligible for Aliyah. This prompted me to ask the Rabbi about the various divisions in Judaism, including Conservative, Orthodox, and Reform. He responded by saying it was primarily political. He explained that in the Talmud, there are diverse opinions on certain subjects, which may seem contradictory to a layman but are all correct. This reminded me of the opinions of Rabbi Hillel and Rabbi Shammai on whether to stand or sit during the Shema, both of which are correct. Rabbi Gershom enlightened us that these differences arise from interpretations of the law. The women were particularly pleased when he addressed the issue of marrying one or more wives. He advocated for the custom of marrying a single wife, a practice that has been a *takana* (law) for more than a millennium. We were all filled with joy, realizing that a Black Rabbi could possess such profound knowledge and a deep interpretation of the Jewish code of laws, drawn from many references.

On the fourth day, over 100 of us, including about 21 from Akwa Ibom, received our Jewish conversion certificates amid celebrations and singing led by Rabbi Moshe Saks. Over the course of six months, we have diligently followed online lessons and studies to prepare for the practical conversion process. He said to us, "Today, you have joined the holy nation of Israel." Keep kosher and be observant in your mitzvot." He also guaranteed the authenticity of our certificates and confirmed their global recognition.

Sar Habakkuk, the spiritual leader and founder of Tikvat Yisrael Synagogue in Abuja, where the first Conservative

conversion in Nigeria took place, delivered our farewell message. Sar Habakkuk urged us to unite and assured us of our Masorti conversion, which came from a recognized authority. During that first mass conversion, approximately 96 individuals underwent conversion, and ten Jewish weddings took place. However, the majority of these were non-Jewish married couples who had only recently returned to Judaism.

One of the new converts, Eben Cohen, a popular Hebrew and Torah teacher in Nigeria, lamented how he kept waiting for an orthodox movement from abroad to organize a conversion for some of the Nigerian Jews, who had been clamouring for one.

"It is disheartening to wait endlessly for a brother who has not acknowledged your current Jewish status as part of the lost tribes- and the difficulties we face in this part of the world- and who may never show up even as time swiftly passes. Nine years ago, I made the decision to convert through the Masorti Movement, choosing a globally recognized certification as a Jewish adherent over having none and enduring an unending wait. "

Our journey back to Akwa Ibom was exciting as Mrs. Jack Rabin sang us a song with the lyrics, "We travelled to Port Harcourt as Jewish claimants but returned as members of Am Yisrael." We also discussed how to respectfully educate our brothers about the importance of conversion and the reasons they could not be considered as a minyan.

Back home in Akwa Ibom State, we began an enlightenment campaign to help our brothers understand why conversion is essential to being Jewish. Rabbi Moshe Saks had also given us the book *Embracing Judaism*, which explained that someone could be practicing Judaism but is not a Jew. This inspired one of the Elders in our community, Ozni Ben Yehoshua, to donate land for building a synagogue in Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom State, for those who convert and are certified. One of the elders, Gaddi Azaria, after reading *Embracing Judaism*, said, "Now I understand why conversion is necessary. It is wrong to recite certain berakhot with Hashem's name (e.g., Baruch Atah Hashem, King of the Universe, for not making me a Gentile) if it's not truthful." Many of our people who did not join the conversion are now eager and looking forward to the next opportunity in Nigeria. All of us are grateful to the Conservative movement for giving us this opportunity.

Today, as Jews, we have accepted the yoke of the Torah and understand that we are linked with our forefathers—Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov—and with all of Am Yisrael to reveal to the world that God is One.

PICTURE STORY

SUKKOT ACROSS THE CONTINENT



Photos of Sukkah
from different
Communities in
Sub-Saharan
Africa

BY SAJA Team



www.sajalliance.org/media-and-publicity/

Cameroun



Sukkot in Cameroon

On the occasion of Sukkot, Beth Benei Yeshouroun community in Cameroon is preparing to celebrate this holiday by temporarily leaving our solid houses to settle in souccas, these precarious huts that recall the tents of our ancestors in the desert.

Our rabbi teaches us that this gesture has a deep meaning: throughout the year, we live in homes chosen for their solidity, capable of protecting us from bad weather and danger. But in Sukkot, we retreat into these simple structures to affirm an essential truth: our true protection does not come from the robustness of our walls, but from God. This symbolic act invites us to renew our trust in the Lord, because "If Hashem does not build the house, those who build it, build it in vain" (Psalms 127:1). During these seven days, we live under the fragile roof of the sukkah, remembering that it is the divine presence, and not our own efforts, that truly protects us.

This feast reminds us, year after year, that trust in God transcends material security, and that it is He who guards and guides his people, all over the world.

Kokhav for Beth Benei Yeshouroun

B'nai Moshe Orthodox
Jewish Community
Achi, Oji River, Enugu State



Aba, Abia State



Jewish central synagogue,
Uyo, Akwa Ibom.



Sukkah photos from selected Jewish communities in Jewish Nigeria including Oji River, Aba, and Uyo

East Africa



Mori of Baladi Dardaim, Tanzania.
Bayit kneset Shalem Al Shabazi.



Mukono Orthodox Synagogue,
Mukono, Uganda



Kechna Beir Olam Synagogue, Shewa Jewish (balej) community
Ethiopia

Making History in Jewish Football

Maccabi Football Club Nigeria set to become the first black African soccer team to compete in the Israeli Olympics Tournament

By Eben Kislson Cohen

Since its inception, the game of football has had an undeniable historical impact on the societal lives of global communities over centuries. It has evolved so fantastically today that every nation in the world has its own national team, and wealthy individuals and companies own most of the popular football club sides. There is no corner of the world where it has not reached and played on different levels, offering a source of entertainment and relaxation, and of course making the money go around.

On a global stage, just like how the International Olympic Committee (IOC) organises the summer Olympics, the Maccabi World Union hosts the Israeli Olympics known as the Maccabiah, which is the world's largest Jewish athletics completion. The Maccabiah's primary mission, according to the Union, is to facilitate a worldwide gathering of Jewish athletes in Israel and strengthen their connection to Israel's state and the Jewish people.

However, unlike the summer Olympics, where the IOC determines the host country and rotates it every four years, the Israeli Olympics take place only in Israel, usually a year after the general Olympics. This international Jewish multi-sport event is also the second largest sporting event in terms of the number of athletes competing. Since its inception in Palestine in 1932, when 390 athletes from 14 countries participated, the games have expanded to accommodate a staggering 10,000 athletes from 80 countries across 42 distinct sports in their 19th edition, which took place in Jerusalem in 2017.



Maccabi FCN players pose for a photograph before their match on August 4, 2024.

Despite over 3,000 tournaments being recorded in the games so far, no football team from black Jewish communities across Sub-Saharan Africa have yet participated. However, with the Maccabi World Union's desire to accommodate more countries with active sporting enthusiasts, things seem to be going well for a newly formed Nigerian Jewish team that is poised to become the first black African soccer team to compete in the prestigious Israeli tournament.

The establishment of the national youth Shabbat some years ago marked the beginning of Jewish football in Nigeria. Youths from all over the country converge in a synagogue to observe Shabbat, study the Torah, exchange ideas, and strengthen the national Jewish unity. In addition to the important general meeting that occurs the day after Shabbat before the youths depart for their various destinations, the males gather to play football, while the females participate in various other forms of sports. Initially, the football teams would be selected randomly, but with time, as the national youth Shabbat gained traction, it became the hosting state against the visitors.

The national youth Shabbat football matches have become not only a source of entertainment but have played a crucial role in fostering Jewish unity. The excitement surrounding these games has become a highlight of our community calendar; with tales of the matches the youths played dominating discussions across Jewish enclaves in Nigeria. In addition to this occasional national football match, we have witnessed football matches at the state level between different synagogues. A typical example is the frequent match between Tikvat Yisrael Synagogue and Gihon Hebrew Synagogue, both in Abuja. Olam Torah and Ohr Torah communities in Aba, Abia State, have played friendly matches among themselves with the sole aim of solidifying mutual understanding and coexistence.

In 2022, the Beth Harachman Jewish community formed Harachman FC, a formidable football club, in Akwa Ibom, a coastal state in southern Nigeria. The Beth Harachman Jewish community, the club's owner, fielded a group of young chazanin as its earliest players, who actively participated in friendly matches against other local teams in Ekpeke Ukim, the locality where the Jewish community is located, on the outskirts of the state capital, Uyo. And with time, Harachman FC recruited and signed some new players from the surrounding villages who were not Jews, promoting interfaith mutual relationships. In December 2023, they played in a 32-team state tournament in honor of Senator Godswill Akpabio. They defeated two teams in this knockout football game to reach the round of 16 before losing out in the quarterfinal stage.



Harachman FC, during a Sukkot football match against Southern Uruan Feeders on Tuesday, October 22, 2024.

But the latest entrant in the Jewish football space is the Maccabi football club of Nigeria, borne out of the inspiration to fight for a spot in the future Maccabiah. Based in Abuja, the team comprises players from Gihon Hebrew Synagogue and Tikvat Yisrael Synagogue, in addition to key players from other synagogues across the country, ensuring a nationwide reach.

"The choice to name the Abuja-based team Maccabi Football Club of Nigeria was truly inspiring, I'd say. The Maccabi-games is a goal we aspire to, and I have full confidence that the new club's name will inspire us to push ourselves every day until we proudly represent Nigeria in the Jewish Olympics. I understand that this will not be so easy, but I am committed to leveraging my influence to foster collaboration with the Xriso Sporting Club. Together, we can share training facilities and occasionally train alongside each other to keep the team prepared and fit to favorably compete with other teams in our debut outing in Israel."

Shlomo Ben Yaakov, a senior hazan in Gihon Hebrew Synagogue, is currently the team manager of Xriso Sporting Club, an indigenous football club based in Abuja that supports and develops young, talented players from different states in Nigeria who make up the team.

In its latest encounter, Maccabi FCN defeated Mehamizrac FC with a convincing 2-0 victory, a match played on the 4th of August in Abuja at the end of the national youth Shabbat hosted in Gihon Hebrew Synagogue. The team proudly adorned the logo of Kulanu, their international sponsor, on their jersey. Kulanu, a non-profit Jewish organization based in the United States, has been supporting returning, isolated, and emerging Jewish communities in over 33 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and Asia. Kulanu provides funding for various Jewish purposes, such as technologies, education, Jewish materials, and grants for Jewish festivals, and micro-agricultural projects that promote food security. In addition to providing entertainment support for films, music, and short documentaries, Kulanu has expanded its involvement in youth development through sports, specifically in Jewish football. Recently, the organization marked its 30th anniversary since its formation in 1993.

The Maccabi FCN is also lucky to have attracted the interest of another indigenous organization, which is one of its major sponsors. The Initiative for Progressive Judaism Development (IPJD) is a non-profit incorporated trusteeship committed to the sustainable improvement of Jewish lives and the expansion of Jewish communities in order to pave the way for a brighter future. Among the array of Jewish-related activities they support, the organization acknowledges that football is a global sport, and their objective is to organize and train a national Jewish football squad to represent Nigerian Jews in international competition.

The director of the IPJD, Engr. Jator Abido Ben Israel, remained true to their vision by attending to support the newly formed Maccabi FCN as they faced off in their inaugural match against Mehamizrac FC. After the Abuja-based team's impressive win, he awarded Shimon Yaakov ben Avraham the man of the match recognition. In light of the team's impressive performance, he stated that the IPJD management intends to support the team's objective of participating in the Maccabiah games in Israel in 2025.



Shimon receives the award of man-of-the-match.



Oriel Ben Gideon, member of Gihon Hebrew Synagogue.

Another proud indigenous supporter of the Maccabi Football Club is the Avraham Ben Avraham Foundation, a community-driven organisation that focuses on some of the unique needs of Jewish communities in Nigeria and beyond. Motivated by the determination and readiness of the Jewish football team, the organisation is collaborating with them to enhance media outreach and promote Jewish football in Nigeria. The A.B.A. Foundation, as stated by the management, will be working in collaboration with all parties involved, both domestically and internationally, as the collective plan to prepare the Nigerian team for the upcoming Israeli games unfolds.

As the clock ticks down with fewer than 260 days remaining until the next Israeli Olympics, the Nigerian team is eagerly anticipating the possibility of participating in the tournament. The club's official roadmap outlines plans to register as an entity and create a website for accessing real-time progress information. On September 29, 2024, players from Maccabi FCN took part in the reverse tashlich event as part of their recent community service efforts. Alongside the global Jewish community, they engaged in a marine conservation initiative focused on repairing the sea by organising a beach clean-up at Jabi Lake in Abuja. The IPJD, in partnership with Abuja Jewish youth, organised the voluntary exercise to collect and dispose of debris littered around the park by the lake, receiving praise from the public. The concept of reverse tashlich centres on the idea that we pollute water bodies by tossing crumbs of bread into them. Therefore, it is logical to do a reversal action by cleaning waterfront areas to reduce plastic pollution ahead of the High Holidays. It was commendable for the members of the Maccabi FCN to engage in this community service as a team, supporting the initiative and becoming one of the first participants from Nigeria to be part of this global movement.

The Israeli Olympic Games can be a very daunting experience for those who are considered to be the underdog. To achieve success, it is necessary to put in a significant amount of effort in terms of training prior to the beginning of the competition. The Maccabi FCN has arranged a monthly schedule of training sessions and friendly matches with local Abuja teams. One such important arrangement is a proposed friendly match with an assembled team of young Israeli nationals residing in Abuja during the festival of Hanukkah. For the Nigerian team, this match is of utmost significance because it would be their first meeting with a Jewish opponent from another country, serving as a preparatory exercise in a form of simulation for their eventual participation in the Maccabiah.

Without doubt, their fate is dependent on the involvement of an influential global organization such as the Commonwealth Jewish Council, which is a strong partner of the Maccabi World Union who is responsible for organizing the multi-sport Jewish tournament every four years. While no soccer team, except South Africa, from sub-Saharan Africa, has taken part in the football at the Maccabiah games, the CJC has established collaboration with representatives in more than 15 African countries, including Cameroun, Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, and Nigeria, just to mention a few. Therefore, given the opportunity to accommodate more participants in the Maccabiah going forward, the Commonwealth Jewish Council, with its extensive presence across Africa, is better positioned to influence and facilitate the possibility of achieving such a historic inclusion in the games.

Making it to Israel in this 20th edition means a lot for the Nigerian football team, as it would tremendously boost the eternal connection and affinity to the land of Israel for thousands of Igbo Jews and non-Igbo Jews residing in the West African country. Just as the Super Eagles of Nigeria command respect on the world football stage, it would not be surprising if the Jewish counterparts, despite being underdogs, pull off a major surprise. Over the years, people in this area have only witnessed trips to Israel for pilgrimage, tourism, business, education, employment as immigrants, and participation in yeshiva, aliyah, or conversion. The idea of representing the Jewish population in Nigeria as a soccer team in Israel opens up a new chapter in history, serving as a catalyst to inspire more African teams and talented athletes to dream and aspire for Jewish glory in the games.



A group photo with the fans at the end of the friendly match.



FOOD SECURITY GRANT: ENHANCING THE ECONOMIC CAPABILITIES OF A JEWISH COMMUNITY IN MUKONO, CENTRAL UGANDA

An Interview with Sarah Nakintu

By Avraham Ben Avraham

Sarah Nakintu is a highly respected Jewish woman leader in Uganda who has a lot of interest in entrepreneurship and politics. In my numerous visits to Uganda, a country described as the pearl of Africa, I have been to the Jewish community in Mukono, where she is a member. Back in Cote d'Ivoire, during the first ever Pan-African Jewish conference, which gave birth to an alliance known as SAJA (Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance) with Jews from 10 African countries in attendance, Sarah emerged as one of the selected top officers of the alliance board of directors. She also became a member of the economic development working committee. Recently, her community received a grant to help tackle the rising food security challenges.

Could you start by introducing yourself and sharing your role within your Jewish community and other affiliated organizations?

I am Sarah Nakintu, acting vice president of the Sub-Saharan Jewish Alliance and member of Tsyon Beit HaMitzvot Jewish Community in Mukono District in Uganda.

I would also like to mention that I was previously a candidate for the Women Member of Parliament position in Mukono District.

Currently, I am the President of Shalom Women's Development Network (SWODN). I was the first chairperson of the interparty women's platform organization that brought together 10 political parties' women's leagues in Uganda, and in the area of education, I am a member of the executive board of over 10 schools in Mukono.

As the acting vice president of the Sub-Saharan African Jewish Alliance and now acting as the leader of the economic and development working committee of the alliance, what are some of the main challenges for most communities, and what opportunities do you see as well?

I can tell you that both the challenges and opportunities are very much alike. After the alliance's formation, we've talked to various communities and found that we face similar challenges. Limited access to funding to produce some Jewish-related products, which the community usually rely on to earn revenues.

Proofer equipment for the bakery project.

Items like kippot and challah covers are in high demand, especially during Chagim, but most times shipping costs become the main challenge. Even for some other small businesses, most Jewish communities lack the collateral needed to access local credit.

Another challenge is the rise in antisemitism, which has taken a new form since October 7th. Items with Jewish symbols crafted on them have become a red flag for most non-Jewish customers. Just the fact that you are a Jewish seller is enough to turn off most buyers. Recently, I fell victim to this situation after investing a significant amount of money into my art and craft project. The buyer, a white woman, flew into Uganda from the United States, and upon discovering that I was Jewish, she fiercely attacked me in a bloody fight. It was a truly harrowing experience, a true test of the depths of hatred towards Jews. That's how I lost the business and all the money I invested. Right now, whenever we engage in online sales, we exercise caution due to the uncertainty of the buyer's identity. In addition, climate change poses a significant threat to agriculture and food security in many African countries, particularly for those farmers without irrigation systems. Persistent poverty plagues many communities, the free flow of profitable and practical ideas is hindered most times, and a lack of unity and cooperation further impedes equality in growth.

In your final question, you brought up the topic of opportunities. Opportunities abound due to the presence of brilliant and hardworking Jews in various Jewish communities. If people can learn new skills and apply technology to tackle some of the challenges we face, we can achieve more.

We have the opportunity to network through Pan-African conferences such as SAJA, participate in important seminars, and collaborate with long-standing partners like Kulanu, Olam Network, and now the Mark Gelfand Food Security Foundation. Many of our youths are willing to receive mentorship in various vocational aspects; we can learn how to communicate our ideas practically through a successful business plan writeup to appeal to donors and investors, and we can travel across borders to meet each other, strengthen our friendship, and learn from each other firsthand.

Speaking about economic opportunities, your community in Mukono recently received a financial grant from the Mark Gelfand Foundation. Can you share more about how this grant will help address food insecurity and the role agriculture plays in this initiative?

We are grateful for the grant, which will support our bakery project and farmland cultivation. Kulanu initially sponsored our oven, which we used to bake matzot for all the Jewish communities in Uganda. So we're capitalizing and building upon this to establish a complete mini bakery that would operate as a commercial bakery. At the moment, we have successfully executed the first phase of the general grant business plan, which involves purchasing a mixer and a proofer, as well as acquiring two hectares of land for the agricultural part of the project. The next phase, which involves the construction of the bakery work area to house the bakery equipment, is yet to begin until the heavy rainy season subsides, and we have plans to register the bakery with the authorities to enable us to have an operational license to be able to sell portions of the products to the public.

On the newly acquired farmland, we intend to cultivate cassava, matokeh (plantains), pineapple, and other green vegetables. This will not only support our community's Shabbat feeding needs, which are our biggest challenge, but it will also benefit the most elderly and poorer families. If we can install an irrigation system, we will be able to maintain continuous production throughout the year. By cultivating the farmland yearround, we should be able to realize a bountiful harvest, sufficient to feed the community not only during the weekly Shabbat but also during other Jewish gatherings such as festivals and other ceremonies. The grant will boost our productivity and eliminate the need to buy all our food from the market, where high inflation has devalued the Ugandan currency. By farming our own land, we can eventually save any money that we have and direct it into other important areas.



Mixer for mixing baking ingredients.



Eliyahu leads a musical Havdallah service at Tsyon Beit HaMitzvot.

Your photos of challah baking have gone viral several times, whether it is for the weekly Shabbat or even baking of matzah, which obviously is now a good thing to see a new bakery being set up in your community. How do you envision the new bakery project impacting not only the Jewish community in Mukono but also the broader local economy?

Once we fully launch the project, we will create jobs for both youth and women who are currently unemployed. We plan to develop a strategy for saving funds from sales to sustain the project in the future, after the payment of a stipend to the workers. There will be an opportunity to train people interested in learning how to bake different kinds of products. We plan to extend this vocational training to other Jewish communities in Uganda and beyond in the future, utilizing online workshops and video training to accomplish this. This is possible because, for the past two years, We have been able to organize, through my community, the mass baking of matzah for Uganda. Jews from various communities come together to carry out this exercise cheerfully, strengthening the bond we share as Abayudaya.

You mentioned earlier your position in the Shalom Women's Network, so as the president, what are some of the key initiatives you've led to empower women, and how do you see the role of women evolving within Jewish and Ugandan society?

As the founder of the Shalom Woman Network, we participate in a variety of activities, one of which is dedicated to eradicating gender-based violence. I have organized a 3-day training for women and youth leaders from different communities in Uganda to highlight the causes of violence and its effects, as well as how to support our communities. Since then, these leaders have achieved significant progress compared to their previous lack of knowledge and skills. Occasionally, we organized workshops aimed at empowering young people with various skills necessary for employment.

We have successfully amplified the voices of women and marginalized groups, such as those with special needs. The network endeavors to support pregnant mothers in acquiring baby kits and preparing for childbirth.

We also provide sanitary pads to young girls to ensure their continued stay in school. Last December, we organized a Jewish camp for the young children and the youth for a week. It was indeed a wonderful beginning, and the children had lots of things to learn during that short period of gathering.

I've seen you participate in a couple of radio talk shows for various purposes, including political and religious topics. What role does interfaith dialogue play in your work, particularly in promoting understanding and cooperation between different religious groups in Uganda? Secondly, how important is media representation in shaping the public's perception of Jewish communities in sub-Saharan Africa?



Sarah participated in an interfaith radio discussion alongside other speakers.

Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are the 3 main religions in Uganda, of which the Jewish people are the minority, but yet we have found a way to relate with others to balance things up. My frequent participation in radio to promote interfaith was how members of the interfaith council of Uganda brought me fully onboard into religious group discussions, and I have shared meaningful ideas in this space. These interfaith dialogues on radio are essential in promoting tolerance, understanding, and cooperation in the multicultural society we find ourselves in.

Let's look at the significance of media in spreading awareness about Judaism. Historically, in Uganda, I am the first Jewish woman to engage in numerous TV and radio talk shows, and have played critical roles in amplifying our voices that have often been underrepresented in public discourse. I have challenged patriarchal norms and encouraged other women, particularly from marginalized or underrepresented groups or faiths, to engage in public discussions and leadership roles. As an advocate for social justice causes, such as combating gender-based violence and supporting interfaith dialogue, I have shared Jewish values deeply rooted in concepts of justice, charity, and repairing the world, which is "Tikkun Olam". Addressing issues such as gender inequality, racial justice, and environmental sustainability has allowed me to incorporate Jewish ethical teachings into contemporary social debates.

I have greatly motivated the younger generation to pursue careers in journalism, broadcasting, and other fields that require their voices. While on the radio talk show, I advocate for cultural heritage, discussing topics such as Jewish holidays, rituals, cuisine, and music. This not only educates the broader audience but also helps preserve Jewish traditions for future generations. B'ezrat Hashem, I have been able to foster a sense of community and pride in our heritage while making Jewish traditions accessible to a wider audience. To summarize everything, I'd like to stress that radio talk shows offer a forum for me to connect with broader communities, both Jewish and non-Jewish, therefore strengthening communal bonds and promoting collaboration on issues of shared concern. This also helped me to maintain and enhance my leadership roles within my communities by serving as voices for unity, education, and empowerment.



Women group photo after Shabbat inside the shul.



Sarah (in the group photo) represents the Jews of Uganda at a national prayer breakfast held at the State House in Kampala on October 8, 2024.



Sarah with Avraham Ben Avraham during the annual kidbutz event at the Stern Synagogue in Nabugoye.

Finally- Let's go back to SAJA's economic and development working committee, now headed by you. What are your plans and agendas for the committee, which has members from various African countries? What has been achieved so far? What are you currently discussing? What projects do you appear to be prioritizing in each country?

Economic development is crucial for our survival as Jews, which is why we established this working committee in Abidjan. With our members scattered across sub-Saharan Africa, we strive to communicate with each other and others across borders through the internet, sharing ideas and making suggestions on how communities can embark on micro-projects to earn revenue to sustain some of their operations. We are also assisting some Jewish entrepreneurs in promoting their products online to attract potential customers. Currently, we're discussing how to teach making kosher wine locally, which is something my community here in Uganda has been doing for several years, therefore saving



Baking matzah for all Ugandan Jews

a substantial amount of money in the long run that would have been spent importing expensive kosher wine. We're discussing how it would be cost-effective for communities to produce certain items on their own. This is precisely what Mark Gelfand Food Security is working to establish throughout sub-Saharan Africa. He is assisting more communities to become producers, enabling them to feed themselves and sell some of their produce to generate income, rather than struggling and relying solely on their limited financial resources.

Any final words to the grant donor?

Of course, yes, we the entire members of our Jewish community in Mukono, are really grateful for this generous grant, which has given us hope of survival going forward. Where there was once no hope, now we see directions and possibilities. A million thanks to the Mark Gelfand foundation, and to Rabbi Bonita and Molly at Kulanu, as well as to the management of SAJA for giving us this opportunity. I am confident that once we fully set up the two projects, everyone of us can gaze into the future, knowing indeed that there is light at the end of the tunnel.



REVERSE TASHLICH DEBUTS IN WEST AFRICA

Brachot Yeshiva and Maccabi FCN Join the Global Jewish Marine Conservation Exercise to Repair the Sea

By Netzach Ekwunife

Brachot Yeshiva, a primary and secondary school in southern Nigeria, and players of the Maccabi FCN in Abuja joined the rest of the Jewish communities all over the world on Sunday, September 29, 2024, to clean their local environment for the 7th annual Reverse Tashlich. In Abuja, the capital of the country, members from two synagogues and the footballers gathered at the Jabi Recreational Park, situated in the heart of the town, on Sunday morning. They then proceeded to clean up strategic areas surrounding the Lake, the largest water body in the federal capital territory. Equipped with

personal protective materials and work tools, the team embarked on a marine conservation exercise to repair the sea, enjoying the fun of cleaning up plastic wastes and seaweeds for several hours. The team, consisting of approximately 20 individuals who were enthusiastic about the prospect of serving a purpose of global relevance, split into groups. They were dispersed evenly across different locations in the park to enhance speed and efficiency and to prevent clusters of individuals in a particular location so as to cover a larger area in their clean-up exercise. After working for about 3 hours, they proceeded to dispose of the trash.

In 2023, 4000 Jews and allies from 23 countries participated in this global movement, and we anticipate a significant increase in these numbers in the coming years as awareness of this movement expands globally, especially among Jews in Africa.

Reverse Tashlich has been defined as an innovative environmental Jewish ritual that honors traditions while addressing modern crises through cleaning up waterfront locations and combating plastic pollution. We anticipate that the integration of Reverse Tashlich into Jewish life will facilitate individuals in forging a link between their spiritual and ethical principles and environmental conservation.

During an interview at the event with Engr. Yatov Abido, he introduced himself, provided a brief overview of the event and its significance, and explained how he became aware of the global movement.

"I am Yatov Ben Yisrael, also known as Engr. Yatov Abido. I am the executive director of the Initiative for Progressive Jewish Development (IPJD) in Nigeria, an organization saddled with the responsibility of supporting the growth of Judaism and Jewish practice in Nigeria. I am also the Nigerian representative to the Sub-Saharan Jewish Alliance (SAJA). I am here with the Maccabi football club of Nigeria. We are here to perform the reverse tashlich, which is like during the festival of Rosh-Hashanah when we perform tashlich by throwing crumbs of bread into a river, thereby polluting it. In order to repair these water bodies, we've been able to identify with an international organization called Tikkun HaYam. We got the information from them that, as a Jew, we are suppose to manage our environment and support the lives of the creatures in the sea. Scientists have already warned us that the high level of deposits and plastics in the sea today will endanger the lives of animals and creatures in the coming years. On that note, we said it should be part of our responsibility as a mitzvah to clean up the sea and water bodies as we prepare for Rosh Hashanah."

He responded to my question about the funding of the Abuja exercise.

"To make this possible, we contributed individually, but my company, Yatov Consults, supported the IPJD in full, which is my personal contribution to ensure that we can do this to save the creatures in the lake and clean our environment. However, we eagerly anticipate additional support to expand this initiative, as even our Jewish brothers from the Beth Harachaman Jewish Community in Akwa Ibom are also actively participating in the cleanup efforts at the Ibeno Atlantic Ocean beach."



Yatov Ben Israel, Director of IPJD

He continued to highlight the participants in the Abuja exercise.

"The participants came from a variety of Abuja Jewish organizations, including the Maccabi football club, the IPJD's members and volunteers, members of the Gihon Hebrew Synagogue and Tikvat Israel Synagogue in Abuja, and some other local Jews."

Yatov praised the initiative, emphasizing that protecting the environment is a Yidish mitzvah and that cleaning the sea should be part of our lives to help marine animals. He revealed that they plan to host a larger Reverse Tashlich exercise in the coming year, which will spread participation across Nigeria to align with the global mission and vision of the Repair the Sea organization (Tikkun HaYam).

"Next year, we are eager to undertake a large-scale cleaning-up project in the Niger Delta and the riverine states, where we have significant water bodies, to aid in sea restoration (Tikkun HaYam). Our goal is to determine the most effective ways we can contribute to ensuring the cleanliness of our waterways in Nigeria and Africa."

At the end of the interview, he gave a vote of thanks to the people who played a pivotal role in the success of the Reverse Tashlich exercise, stating that he felt privileged to be a part of this global Jewish event that is important yet unpopular in this part of the world.

"We owe a great deal of gratitude to Mr. Mbdreck, the president of SAJA from Zimbabwe, who provided us with information, and to another brother, Avraham Ben Avraham, who assisted us in enrolling. We are deeply grateful to be among the pioneers in Nigeria, having been among the first to perform the Reverse Tashlich, an act that aligns with our upcoming Rosh Hashanah festival. We express our profound gratitude to the Almighty for etching our names in history as one of the pioneers in West Africa, spearheading this initiative to safeguard our rivers and seas and thereby aiding in the eradication of diseases like malaria, cholera, and other ailments stemming from dirty inland waters."



Taking a break during the Reverse Tashlich exercise in Abuja on September 29, 2024.



Players of the Maccabi FCN gather plastics and other garbage around the park near Jabi Lake.



Students of Brachot Yeshiva pose with the garbage collected at Ibeno Beach

Meanwhile, in faraway Akwa Ibom state, a distance of approximately 850km from the Jabi Lake, some members of the Beth Ha'arachman Jewish community, led by Avraham Ben Avraham and Emmanuel YerimYahu the spiritual leader of the community, were also carrying out the reverse Tashlich exercise simultaneously along an Atlantic beachfront in southern Nigeria.

A number of young students from Brachot Yeahiva, a school under the synagogue management, also joined them. They had traveled a distance of approximately two hours to reach the Ibeno beachfront, a popular destination for tourists seeking relaxation, only to subsequently litter the surrounding area with their waste.

Avraham, the chairman of the board of trustees of the Avraham Ben Avraham Foundation, acknowledged that he resonates with the idea of cleaning the sea as a reversal of our actions during the normal Tashlich, which adds dirt to the water bodies. He emphasized that the concept of the reverse Tashlich is a global movement aimed at combating the plastic crisis by taking preventive measures to prevent more plastic waste from entering the sea, a crucial aspect of human



From left: Shlomo, Kesset, Chidi, Otu, and Emmanuel YerimYahu.

survival that is often overlooked. He stated that non-biodegradable plastic particles can end up in fish's stomachs, and consuming these fish can lead to a form of plastic poisoning. In other words, by polluting the sea, we ultimately harm ourselves in the long run.

The team in Akwa Ibom spent over an hour gathering waste and disposing of it properly in the designated area. At the end, they sat down to relax, communicated with their counterparts in Abuja through video call, and then treated themselves to a sumptuous meal of kosher fish and wine before setting out on the return trip, back to the Jewish community, which is located along the airport road, just at the outskirts of Uyo, the state capital.



Picking up trash near the Atlantic Ocean front in southern Nigeria.

Following the call with the Akwa Ibom team, the people in Abuja were filled with excitement and motivation, realizing they were not alone. Shlomo Ben Yaacov Mmaduakor, the captain of the Maccabi FCN, was present for this global marine conservation exercise, which he believes to be a way of balancing nature. During an interview at the Reverse Tashlich event, he explained that by cleaning and removing dirt from the water body, one can reverse the Tashlich ritual, which involves throwing objects into the water body. The majority of the participants at the event shared the idea that this is a way of repairing the world. The Maccabi FCN, since its early preliminary formation some two years ago, is hoping to become the first Nigerian Jewish football club to participate in the Israeli Olympic Games in 2025.

Shlomo, who was instrumental in the event's organization, discussed the venue selection and the difficulties they encountered.

"We chose Jabi Recreational Park for its convenient access to the polluted lake. Due to the surge in fuel prices, we faced significant logistical challenges in bringing people together from various locations. However, after weeks of strategic planning, we successfully achieved our goal today. IPJD was the primary sponsor, providing everything from refreshments to logistics. They also ensured that each participant had personal protective equipment, such as hand gloves and a customized vest with a face cap, to protect them from the sun's heat."



Members of the Beth Ha'arachman Jewish community in Akwa Ibom State.

Casually observing the park and lake, it appeared nothing had been cleaned in months. There were all kinds of rubbish and plastic waste littered around the park. It's likely that the lake itself hasn't undergone cleaning in years. Seaweed and other plant species flourished on the water surface, and plastic waste floated aimlessly, moving whichever direction the wind went. One would agree that the lake and park were in dire need of a thorough clean-up.

Mr. Aliyu, a visitor to the park, approached us to express his appreciation for our efforts. He lamented about the lapses in management of the Jabi Lake Park, which is a popular tourist attraction site.

"This park was designed to be a good tourist attraction, but the lack of maintenance has turned it into a sorry site. What these people who are cleaning this lake are doing is motivational and should inspire people to look after their environment. I envision a future where patriots like them will take it upon themselves to keep the environment clean."

Furthermore, shortly before we set out to leave, Shlomo spoke. He mentioned the park's support and how it assisted the exercise.

"During the process of cleaning, we received support from officials and people at the park. They praised our efforts and offered us the additional equipment and tools to ensure a smooth cleaning process, which proved to be extremely beneficial. Also, they guided us through advice, suggestions, and ideas to make it easier for us. Most importantly, we had fun."

He spoke about the power of synergy and expressed gratitude to every participant, as it was the collective effort of everyone that made the exercise possible. He pointed out that he felt opportune to have participated in the first Reverse Tashlich in Nigeria.

As we exited the park, one of the participants, known as Yochanan Ben Mattitياهو, a member of the Gihon Hebrew Synagogue, stated that the exercise was filled with fun and that it was worth doing. Sharing in the idea that cleaning of water bodies is an act of repairing the world, he said that he is looking forward to having a bigger and better Reverse Tashlich experience in the coming year.



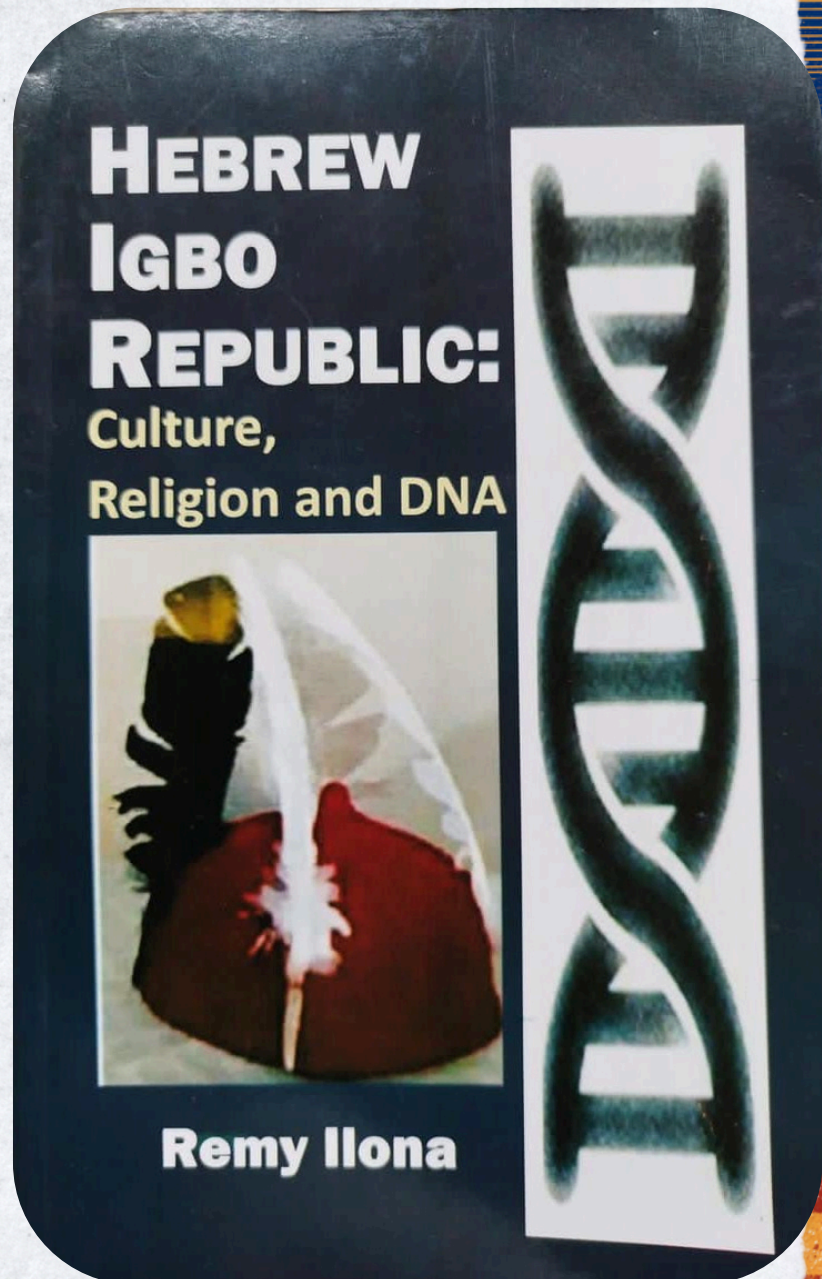
Final meeting point near the lake before proceeding to discharge the waste.

BOOK REVIEW

HEBREW IGBO REPUBLIC: CULTURE, RELIGION, AND DNA

By Israel Ben Avraham

Nze Remy Ilona's book, *Igbo Hebrew Republic*, extensively discusses the religion and culture of the Igbo people of Nigeria, known as Ome-Na-Ana, and draws comparisons with the religion and culture of ancient Israel, as found in what is generally regarded as the Old Testament. In his attempt to demonstrate the similarities between the religion and culture of the Hebrew Igbos and ancient Israel, Nze Remy Ilona passionately showcased through academic research some omenana traditions that ancient Israel followed. This book, which is research-based, is, in my opinion, certainly the only one that has gone so deep in highlighting, comparing, and asserting what I refer to as "veritable evidence of connection" between Igbo culture and religion and ancient Israel's religion and culture.



The book establishes a connection between the word "Ruth" used when she proposed to Boaz and the term commonly used by Igbos to express marriage, explores traditional festivals celebrated by the Igbo people, and presents his DNA results, which, although not perfectly interpreted by the testing company, indicate that the Hebrew Igbo ancestors who migrated to West Africa were a subgroup of Israel. Ruth cried, "Cover me with cloth." Many Hebrew Igbos use the word Ima Ogodo, which translates to covering with cloth, to mean marrying a woman.

The term Igbo Hebrew Republic, as used in the book title, is a description of the geographical location of the Igbo people, an ethnic group primarily located in the southeastern region of Nigeria. The Igbo people's geographical location encompasses several states, the tributaries of the River Niger, and the Coastal Gulf of Guinea. States like Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo State, as well as parts of Delta State, Rivers State (including Ikwere, Etche, and others), Benue State (specifically, the Igbo-speaking communities in the Ado, Okpoku, and Oju local government areas), Kogi State, and Edo State, respectively, have been their homes.

Before proceeding, I would like you to read the article by W. F. Daniel about Semitic tribes in West Africa, which is presented in the final paragraph of this book. The author states that the London Medical Gazette published this article. The article states, "A comparison between the uncivilized and savage tribes of West Africa and the Semitic races, along with their affiliated offshoots, cannot fail in pointing out the prominent similarity that prevails in the manners and customs of both." In none of the Negroe nations are there traces of participation in their usage of oriental sources more obviously marked than in the migratory tribes of Jallofis and Mandingoes, the predatory Fellatahs (Fulanis), and predial Eboes (Igbos) of Delta." The author emphasized that three of these tribes identify as Muslims, in contrast to the Eboes (Igbo), who were then seen as Pagans. This, I can say, proves the belief that Igbo people migrated to their current location from the Middle East (Israel) for them to be identified and grouped with other Semitic tribes because of their culture and tradition, which is Oriental.

The Hebrew Igbo people hold circumcision in such high regard that it is impossible to envision a scenario in which a male Igbo child does not undergo this ritual. Not only is a male Igbo child circumcised, but it also occurs on the eighth day. Despite the fact that no Igbo have been able to tell the origin and reason of the practice outside what Torah presented. The author opined that circumcision did not start with Abraham; he established that among circumcision-practicing tribes in Africa, the Igbo people are the only ethnic group that traditionally circumcise their male children on the 8th day. He listed numerous tribes in Africa that circumcise their male children and one tribe that sees circumcision as abomination. The author also elucidated the reasons for circumcision and the gods to whom

these African tribes perform it. While the Ashanti tribe of Ghana views circumcision as an abomination, the Venda and Lemba tribes of South Africa, as well as the Kikuyu tribe of Kenya, perform it during puberty as a rite of passage into adulthood. He presented the work of a British ethnographer, who believes that the Ewe tribe of Ghana, Togo, and the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria perform circumcision between 7 and 12 years in honor of their gods, Legba and Elegba. Also, the author mentioned John K. Thornton, who quoted a missionary, Oldendorp, to have observed that what distinguished his Igbo interpreter with other tribes of the Niger Delta tribe of Kalabari, Ibibio, Ijaw, and Urhobo was the presence of circumcision or absence of it. Unlike people from other tribes, every Igbo male child undergoes circumcision.



Igbo Jews performing brit milah (circumcision) in Lagos on the 8th-day during the COVID lockdown in September 2020. The baby was named Nashon.

Through the presentation of various works by writers, missionaries, anthropologists, and ethnographers, the author demonstrated that, despite circumcision's presence in Africa, no other tribe, except the Hebrew Igbos, considers it a mandatory practice. They insist on performing it on the 8th day, except in cases of a child's illness, a practice that Ancient Israelites and modern Jews still follow today. This book showed that while other African tribes can circumcise at any time, the Hebrew Igbos must do so on the eighth day. This book undoubtedly clarified the situation and criticized those who equate the Hebrew Igbo people with other African tribes regarding circumcision.

One of the things that are essential to note when it comes to culture and religion is the fact that every nation has a name for its culture and religion. I boldly assert that nations such as Romans, Greeks, Indians, Arabs, and others have names that accurately reflect their accepted culture and religion. In what is today referred to as Africa by colonizers, we have nations name their religion and culture before the coming of the colonial agents who recreated and reoriented various tribes they met in Africa, some by mere imploration and some like Igbo people by brute force, that made those who remained after the carnage they unleashed to accept whatever was presented to them culture and religious wise.

In his attempt to demonstrate that the Igbo people of West Africa adhere to the same culture and religion as ancient Israel, he brought to light a fact that many proponents and opponents of this position have consistently overlooked. He took the path of using name to identify religion and culture and gave name to the religion and culture that Moses received from God and provided to Israel by pointing out the picture Deuteronomy 6:1 painted about Torah. In this portion of the Torah, the religion and culture of Israel were referred to as things to be done in the land. The author provided a scholarly explanation of the term OME-NA-ANA, which refers to the religion and culture of the Igbo people. Omenana, which means "something to be done in the land," when translated into English, is the same phrase used in Deuteronomy 6:1, when the law was given to Israel.

He further asserted that among all Hebrew Israelite families, including Ashkenazi, Sephardic, Mitrach, Yemenite, and Falasha Jews, it is the Hebrew Igbo people who have preserved the most ancient form of Israel's religion and culture, as practiced in ancient Israel. The author posited that the name Ome-Na-Ana conveys the true meaning of Israel's religion and culture more than any other name that people widely refer to Israel's religion and culture to be today.

Explaining further, he stated that just as Torah is tied to the land of Israel, the term Ome-Na-Ana not only conveyed the intent of the religion and culture but also tied the practice to the land. The Igbo ancestors understood, just as ancient Israelites did, that continuous observance of Omenana guarantees the prosperity, peace, and life of the community, as well as the general welfare of the people. He pointed out that in Ozubulu, his home town in the Igbo Hebrew Republic, just like in ancient Israel, deaths, incurable sickness, poverty, suffering, and other painful tribulations will take place as consequences for going against Omenana.

Comparing what marriage is among their neighbors—Yorubas, Fulanis, and Urhobos—he was able to show a clear difference between Hebrew Igbos and their neighbors in Nigeria.



Blessing Uzoamaka and David celebrate their Igbo traditional marriage immediately after the Jewish chuppah on January 3, 2021.

Looking at what marriage is among the Jews; he was able to establish that Hebrew Igbos and Jews draw water from the same source when it comes to marriage. In Yoruba culture, marriage takes place when a man and woman agree to live together. During this period, they fulfill all conjugal obligations, and if a child is born out of their union, the man becomes the child's owner. This practice will be frowned at by every Hebrew Igbo and Jew because, against their world view, which emerged from the same source, if a woman gets pregnant and gives birth while unmarried, the father owns the child, as against what the Yoruba tribe practices. He presented the marriage customs of the Urhobo and Fulanis, highlighting the distinct differences between them and those of the Hebrew Igbos. In the end, he was able to demonstrate that Hebrew Igbos and Jews have a common understanding and practice when it comes to marriage. This he attributed to the fact that Hebrew Igbos and Jews evolved from ancient Israeli culture and religion.

The author delved into the name of God of Israel and compared it with the name Hebrew Igbo people call the God they worship through Omenana, which is Chi Ukwu and Chineke. He broke down the name word-for-word to bring out the meaning embedded in it. Citing the work of a Jewish Rabbi, he went further to uncover a connection between the names Chi Ukwu and Chineke and the true name of God of Israel, as revealed in the 4th line of the Shema.

Every Igbo man recognizes Chi Ukwu and Chineke as the names of the God his ancestors worshipped: Chi Ukwu, which translates to "Great God," and Chineke, which signifies "God who creates." The author posited that these names are linked to the name that God gave to Moses as His name.

He cited a book by Rabbi Wyne Dosyick titled "The Real Name of God," which he, the author, was introduced to by an Igbo Hebrew American ex-serviceman, Chinedu Emelifeonwu. In the book "The Real Name of God," Rabbi Wyne Dosick asserts that the true name of God is ANOCHI. He pointed out that the Hebrew Igbo people retained the second part of the name of God, which is CHI, in their name for God and only added prefixes like Ukwu—great and eke—create to get Chi Ukwu and Chineke. He then drew attention to the 4th line of the Shema prayer, where God's name appears as Anochi, providing clear evidence that the Hebrew Igbos maintained the original name of God that Moses had given them. This, he stated, is strong evidence that not only did Hebrew Igbo people evolve from ancient Israel, but Hebrew Igbos retained the oldest form of Israel's religion and culture. He went on to highlight a remarkable phenomenon: the Hebrew Igbo Republic managed to preserve the original name of God without the need for extensive research, a fact that other Israel families had only discovered through extensive research.

The author also introduced, examined, and established that the Ilo Muo practice among Hebrew Igbos and the peace offering commanded in Leviticus 10:14-15 are one and the same. He pointed out that just as it is in old Israel, the feast is a family feast and also that the priest takes some portion of the sacrifice presented during the peace offering. In variation to what is obtainable in old Israel, the eldest male in the family serves as priest of the family among Hebrew Igbos, as opposed to what is obtainable in Israel, where only Levites and, in extension, the Aronites serve as priests. In defending this variation, the author pointed out that not all the laws are observed as they are given because of peculiarities.

Ilo Muo, a feast that unites family members to offer sacrifices to appease God and pray for peace, holds significant importance for Igbo families. It also brings together all the children, both male and female, born into the family. The author observed that in Omenana, all family members partake in the peace offering, just as they do during Ilo Muo.

He introduced another tradition practiced by the Hebrew Igbo people, which bears resemblance to the Yom Kippur rituals of ancient Israel. Among Hebrew Igbos, there exists a practice known as Igbu Aja. Igbu Aja is an annual festival that coincides with the biblically commanded Yom Kippur. He cited G. T. Basden's report on this specific tradition, highlighting a practice that aligns with the Torah's commandments for Israel. He faulted those who are ignorantly or deliberately playing down credible evidence that proves the religion and cultural connection between Israel, Hebrew Igbos, and Jews—a connection that preceded the missionaries and every western incursion into the African continent.

The author presented the testimony of a near-ninety-year-old pathfinder of Judaism in Nigeria, establishing that various Hebrew Igbo communities celebrate Yom Kippur. In this book, Obadiah Agbai, who is the leader of the Gihon Hebrew Synagogue in Nigeria, gave an account of a festival his community, Item in the current day Abia State, was celebrating in the past, which is similar to Passover. "Mme Mme Oriri Achicha Kpor Nku," which translates as "feast of eating unleavened bread," is the name of the festival. Agbai explained the celebration of the feast, stating that they use cocoyam and season it with bitter leaves (utazi and onugbu). He also said that on the last day of the feast, everyone gathers in the community center, after which they start walking at a brisk pace into the forest. This walk lasts for about an hour, during which the chief priest and elder who are leading the community stop and the chief priest utters some words that he can't remember, after which the whole community starts walking back to the community. The author posited that the rapid walk into the bush is akin to Israel's hasty departure from Egypt.

AFRICAN JEWISH VOICES MAGAZINE FIRST EDITION



The author drew comparisons between the Biblical first fruit and the New Yam festival, which the Hebrew Igbo celebrate, highlighting similarities between the two celebrations. The author emphasized the celebration of the New Yam festival, demonstrating its resemblance to the Feast of First Fruit. The ritual involves harvesting the yam, taking it to the central sanctuary, where the chief priest offers prayers to Chi Ukwu, and cooking the food for the feast, which is then celebrated in the sanctuary for merriment. One could compare this to the celebration of the First Fruits feast in ancient Israel, where the sanctuary hosts the presentation of the year's first harvest to God.

He went further to present another feast that is celebrated by Umuoji people, which is called the Ima Ntu festival. The Igbo word "Ima" means making or building, while the word "Ntu" means booths. This translates to "making or building of booths" in English. People celebrate this feast by constructing booths, living in them for a few days, consuming food and drinks served by women, and then demolishing the booths during the festival's final day. If I am to say so, I will say without doubt that every unbiased mind could easily identify which feast is being celebrated here from the list of Israel's feasts.

Finally, the author delved into science, using the scientific advancement of DNA mapping to demonstrate that Hebrew Igbo and Israel families share a common root. He presented the migration footprint of the first humans on earth. Showing man's movement from current-day East Africa to the Middle East, from where Igbo ancestors migrated back into current-day West Africa. He pointed out that what DNA mapping confirmed is what scholars have accepted as where man originated from and also confirmed that what Hebrew Igbo religion and culture, historians, and many Igbo people believe, which is that Hebrew Igbo people of West Africa are descendants of Biblical Israelites.

Despite his reservations about using only DNA mapping to determine ancestral origins, he said he decided to conduct his own DNA testing. He elaborated that, when superficially interpreted, DNA often does not accurately indicate ancestry; instead, it accurately reveals the movement of individuals from one place to another. He also faulted the DNA-conducting companies for not doing enough work to add minority groups to their database, as they always lump minority groups together in interpreting DNA tests. He pointed out that these practices present misleading information, allowing for misinterpretation and incorrect placement of individuals in ancestral charts. He drew attention to the fact that DNA mapping companies include "Nigeria DNA" in their databases, despite Nigeria being home to over 250 ethnic groups. He pointed out that Nigeria, being a British creation, saw the amalgamation of many ethnic groups to form what is called Nigeria today, and therefore nothing can be considered Nigerian DNA.

In presenting the result of his DNA, he mentioned names of other Hebrew Igbo whose DNA test result is the same as his—Charleston Okafor, Emeka Maduwesi, and Chinedu Ibegbunam Emelife. All live in the United State. The book detailed how the DNA results of the author and those of other Hebrew Igbo who have conducted their DNA show both East African and Middle Eastern connections.

Agreeing with a well-known American anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, on DNA being a double edge as it creates and also solves problems, he highlights the limitations in using DNA to determine ancestry, especially when used by amateur scientists. He went on to explain that DNA only gives information on covered groups and subgroups, leaving out minority groups or lumping them up in groups they shouldn't belong to. He emphasized that DNA primarily validates the migration patterns of individuals rather than their ancestry. He argued that if one looked at his DNA result, which is only about 1.2 percent Middle Eastern, 5.9 percent East African, and 92.9 percent Nigerian, one would be misled when determining his true ancestry. He pointed out that there is nothing like Nigerian DNA owing to the fact that Nigeria is an amalgamation of many nations, of which Hebrew Igbo is one. Therefore, there is no DNA sample that can be identified as Nigerian.

The author presented the outcome of his discussion with the DNA testing company "MyHeritage," which ended by clearing up the confusion created by the presence of 92.9 percent Nigerian DNA in his result. The company representative believes that his 92.9 percent Nigerian DNA is more Middle Eastern, despite first assuming that the 1.2 percent Middle Eastern was because of penetration of Arabs in West Africa. He concluded by citing W. F. Daniel's article in the London Medical Gazette, which compares the Semitic races and other tribes in Africa. Daniel asserts that the three Semitic races—the Jolofi and Mandingoes, the Fellatahs (Fulanis), and the Eboes (Hebrew Igbo) of Delta—have what he considers to be oriental or Middle Eastern culture.

The scholarly and research-based presentation of the book provides valuable insights into Hebrew Igbo culture and religion, allowing readers to draw comparisons with the religious practices of Abraham, Moses, and other Israelites

SUKKOT GREETINGS FROM ACROSS AFRICA

SHOUT-OUTS OF CHAG SAMEACH AND SHANA TOVA FROM MEMBERS



BY SAJA MEDIA & PUBLICITY TEAM

As we celebrate the feast of Sukkot this new year of 5785 I Rosh Yahudereck Justice Nwede, of former and called Har Shalom Synagogue but now called and addressed (Beit Cheasad Synagogue Aba Abia State) wish and pray, that may The Holy One Blessed Be He, inscribed our name and that of every Jew all over the world In the Book Of Life and happiness, and may our year be as sweet as honey and may Israel be victorious

Chag Sameach
Yahuderech Nweden.

Beit Chessad Synagogue

I would like to extend a special Sukkot greeting to Professor William Miles of Northeastern University in Boston, Massachusetts, and to all the members of Temple Emanu-El in Rhodes Island. In this joyous festival of gathering and gratitude, I want to express my heartfelt appreciation for your remarkable work in promoting Jewish culture and understanding across diverse communities. Your efforts to educate and bridge cultural gaps have reached and positively impacted the Jewish community here in Nigeria. Thank you, Professor Miles, for your dedication and for being a source of warmth, knowledge, and connection.

Chag Sameach!

Barukh Ben Abraham
Ohr Hakadosh Kehilat, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

As we celebrate Sukkot this year (5785), may the enemies of the children of Yisrael be eliminated in all four corners of the world, and may Israel become victorious and let peace eventually prevail.

Chag Sukkot Sameach to Jews in all the SAJA countries and to our brothers and sisters in Eretz Yisrael and everyone else around the world.

Yehudah Amir Kahalani.

**Mori of Baladi Dardaim,
Tanzania.
Bayit kneset Shalem Al Shabazi.**

"As we gather under the sukkah to celebrate the festival of Sukkot, may this special time remind us of the beauty of simplicity, the blessings of nature, and the importance of community. Let the joy of this season fill our hearts, and may we find peace, gratitude, and renewal in the embrace of family and friends. Wishing everyone celebrating in Africa and around the world a meaningful and joyous Sukkot, filled with love, light, and endless blessings.

Chag Sameach
Gadi Azariah.

**Jewish Central Synagogue,
Uyo, Akwa Ibom,
Southern Nigeria**

We are grateful to Hashem for allowing us to reach this new year 5785, and our gratitude continues during this holiday of Sukkot, where we have the opportunity to build the sukkah after Yom Kippur. Although affected by the international reality on the security issue of our people since October 7, 2023 and the existential challenges of daily life in our modest community here at Beth Adams David from Douala, Cameroon. We ask for the benevolence of Hashem to bring into play the thirteen attributes of mercy so that all of Am Israel may be inscribed, confirmed, and sealed in the book of life, blessing, and good news.

Balthazar Ambomo
Ndouma

**Beth Adams David Douala,
Cameroon**

We at Yerubabel TV want to express our heartfelt gratitude to all our followers for your unwavering support! Your engagement and loyalty inspire us to continue sharing impactful content.

Thank you for being part of our community! Keep watching, sharing, and spreading the love! Chag Sameach Kol Yisrael, may we all be inscribed in the book of life and prosperity in this new year of 5785.

May the pleasantness of Adonai, our Elohim, be upon us; may He establish our handiwork for us; our handiwork may He establish.

Yerubabal Gideon

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1993 to 2024

Thank you, Kulanu. You have been a beacon of hope, support, and connection to returning, isolated, and emerging Jewish communities across Africa and beyond.

Your unwavering commitment has brought light to places where Jewish identity was once a flicker, reigniting the flame of tradition and belonging.