

Be'chol Lashon Update 9/24/04

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Author James McBride Speaking in Philadelphia

Tomlinson Theater

Wednesday, Sept. 22, at 7:30 p.m.

James McBride is the author of the 2004 One Book, One Philadelphia selection *The Color of Water*, will showcase his literary and musical talents at September 22 at 7:30pm. McBride's visit begins the School of Social Administration's new Beverly Gail Barnes Kelch Memorial Lecture Series. The event, jointly sponsored by the School of Social Administration and the College of Education, is free, but attendees are encouraged to make a donation to the Kelch lecture fund.

To attend the lecture, make a reservation in advance with Robin First at 204-1198 or robin.first@temple.edu.

The Shofar

By Gaby Wenig

The Jewish Journal

September 17, 2004

Davi Cheng had some trepidation when she went to Hillel for the first time. She tried to feel comfortable, but she couldn't understand the language of the services and the liturgical rituals were confusing. Then she spied something unfamiliar on a bookshelf that made her feel right at home: a shofar. "I really wanted to go over there and pick it up and blow it," said Cheng, who converted to Judaism six years ago.

In the ensuing years, the shofar became a personal religious motif for Cheng. She had a rabbi blow a shofar while she immersed in the mikvah for her conversion. She studied its laws by learning ancient texts, its sounds by listening to CDs and ended up becoming the shofar blower for her congregation, Beth

Chayim Chadashim. When she designed the stained-glass windows for her temple, she featured the shofar prominently. "The shofar was always something that I was drawn to, and I can't give you the reason why," Cheng said. "It's primal."

Ironically it is this inarticulateness that perhaps describes best the essence of the shofar experience. It also goes a long way in explaining why the shofar has weathered all the morphings of the Jewish tradition to remain the same instrument that it was in ancient times, and to become, in many senses, one of the great unifiers of the Jewish people. Go into any shul on Rosh Hashanah in any part of the world, and the one thing every service will have in common is the blowing of the shofar. It is an indispensable part of the liturgy, and its deep symbolic value and meaning belies its simple rustic origin. And yet, for all its meaning, for all its kabalistic secrets and for all its historical significance, at its core, the shofar is, as Cheng said, primal. Each blast sings the longings of the soul and it transcends our contrived communal labels.

Unlike, say, phylacteries, a shofar is a religious item that requires little religious obligation or expertise. While the shofar itself needs to come from a kosher animal (but not a cow, so as not to remind God of the sin of the golden calf) we are obliged only to hear its blast. Increasingly, the passive experience of the hearing the shofar is giving way to a more active one. In many shuls it is lay people, not rabbis, who blow the shofar for the High Holiday services.

This month, more than 55 schools in Southern California had Chabad's mobile shofar factory come and transform raw rams' horns into blowable shofars with their students. Chabad even set up the shofar factories in 20 Albertsons supermarkets. On the consumer side, a shofar is becoming a popular bar or bat mitzvah gift, so much so that Judaica store owners report that the current "trend" in shofars is rough-hewn, unvarnished horns. And manufacturers are responding to the demand by producing "easy-blow" and "scentless" shofars that have larger mouthpieces and no animal smell.

"The shofar is a universal symbol of the coming of the New Year, and that makes it a fascinating thing for people," said Rabbi Berel Cohen, West Coast Chabad Lubavitch youth program director. In fact, the shofar ritual is so widespread that it has spilled over into the Christian community. Thousands of evangelical and charismatic churches in the United States are blowing the shofar as part of their services and selling shofars in their gift shops — showing the enduring popularity of the most oft-mentioned instrument in the Tanach.

The shofar was blown at most of the significant events in ancient Jewish history. When the Jews received the Torah on Mount Sinai, and the mountain was engulfed in flames, a mighty shofar sounded and the nation "trembled" (Exodus

19:19). Its blast was used to announce the new moon, and to sanctify the Jubilee year, the 50th year in the calendar cycle in which all debts were forgiven, slaves were freed and land in Israel reverted back to its original owner. When Joshua encircled the city of Jericho, seven priests blew seven shofars, and the wall of the city came tumbling down. Judges like Gideon and Ehud, son of Geira, would blow the shofar as a battle cry, before slaying Israel's enemies. After the judges died out, the shofar was blown when kings were anointed. In the future, when the Messiah comes, Elijah the Prophet will blow the shofar to herald both his arrival and the resurrection of the dead.

Today, we no longer use the shofar to signify God's presence on a flaming mountain, or to bring down the walls of a city, but the biblical command of blowing the shofar on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur remains. On those days, the shofar is a one-note instrument that plays a symphony of meaning. As Rosh Hashanah is the anniversary of the creation of the world, we blow the shofar to proclaim God's sovereignty over the world and us, to redeclare Him as our king. The shofar is also meant to trigger the forces that will cause us to have a good year. It is the sound that should inspire us to repent, and it is also the sound that will provoke God to act mercifully when he is inscribing us in the Book of Life.

Maimonides writes of the shofar as a spiritual alarm clock that should awaken "sleepers from their sleep, slumberers from their slumber," and prompt everyone to repent. It puts us in God's good graces, because as a ram's horn, the Talmud says it reminds God of the binding of Isaac (the Torah portion that is read in synagogues on the second day of Rosh Hashanah), when Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son at God's command, until the last minute when God relieved him of the obligation and Abraham sacrificed a ram instead. The blowing of the shofar is meant to remind God of our similar eagerness to do what He wants, to "bind" us to Him. The shofar is bent, commentators say, because we too should "bend our will" to God's.

According to kabbalah, the blowing of the shofar causes a great esoteric tumult. The Zohar says that the sounds of the shofar are strong enough to "break the powers of wrath," and when they ascend to the heavens, "judgment departs" and "mercy is awakened." The blasts are also meant to confound Satan. According to rabbinic tradition, on Rosh Hashanah, Satan is up in heaven just waiting to prosecute the Jewish people with lists of their misdeeds, but when he hears the second and third set of blasts of the shofar, he gets all confused and falls down in his prosecutorial duties.

"The shofar is really the clarion call of a Jew that allows us to access Hashem at the deepest level," said Rabbi Binyomin Lisbon, who blows the shofar at Bais Bezalel on Pico Boulevard. "Its language transcends words. The shofar represent the inner voice that we cannot access so easily during the year, because we are

so busy." Like many other shofar blowers in the city, Lisbon practices his blasts by blowing the shofar every day during the month of Elul, when it is customary to blow the shofar in anticipation of Rosh Hashanah.

There are three main blasts of the shofar: tekiah, a long, drawn out complete sound; shevarim, three shorter sounds of equal length; and the teruah, nine short staccato sounds. There is also the tekiah gedolah, which is a protracted tekiah. "The tekiahs are like bookends for what is in between," said Robert Smith, the shofar blower at B'nai David-Judea. "The tekiah at the front and the tekiah at the back have to be same length as what is in the middle." "Your lips have to be tight to blow," said Brent Kaplan, a 14-year-old French horn player who blows the shofar for the family minyan at Temple Emmanuel in Beverly Hills. "You have to use a lot more air and push it up from your chest rather than just your mouth, and you buzz your lips to get the sound."

For shofar blowers like Smith and Kaplan, the challenge of Rosh Hashanah is making sure preserving enough lungpower and strengthening their lip muscles to make it through the hundred obligatory blasts of the shofar during the Musaf service. "The shofar blower is not supposed to talk from the time he makes the first blessing to the end of the last blast, and I do that," Smith said. "I really try to shut everyone out and just concentrate on the shofar blowing. It makes it an intense experience. But I am exhausted after I finish. I feel completely spent."

For other shofar blowers, the experience is not so much about getting the sounds out, but about remembering the reasons for the sounds. "The first time I blow it I am thinking "let's do it right," and I am paying attention to the task, but then when things are going smoothly I am thinking about how I want to reconnect my soul to God," said Dr. Simcha Goldman, a psychologist who blows the shofar at The Jewish Learning Exchange. "In the Orthodox version of repentance, you don't confess to specific sins — it's more about the need to enhance and repair one's relationship with God. On Rosh Hashanah you have know who you are dealing with."

Goldman says it is up to the listener to extract the deeper meaning in the blasts. "The listener should listen with appropriate concentration," he said. "It's intended to elicit a thinking response from the person blowing it and the person listening to it." But all agree that the shofar's plaintive wail distinguishes it from all other instruments.

"When someone hears a French horn, they may not think about much," said Rabbi Jonathan Aaron, associate rabbi at Temple Emmanuel who plays the French horn in addition to being the temple's shofar blower. "But when you hear the shofar it is dripping with the tradition of Judaism. There is something about a shofar that completely penetrates."

One of a Special People

By Gershom Sizomu

The Jewish Journal of Los Angeles

September 17, 2004

An Excerpt from “I Am Jewish: Personal Reflections Inspired by the Last Words of Daniel Pearl.”

“I am Jewish,” were the words Wall Street Journal correspondent Daniel Pearl spoke to his terrorist captors shortly before they murdered him. To honor Pearl’s life and work, his parents Ruth and Judea asked Jews from all walks of life to reflect on what these words mean in their own lives. Many of these pieces can serve as powerful sources of inspiration and reflection during these Days of Awe. Following are excerpts from “I Am Jewish: Personal Reflections Inspired by the Last Words of Daniel Pearl.” I am the spiritual leader of the Abayudaya (Jews) in Uganda, Africa. Our number is small, but we are a strong, spiritual and deeply religious Jewish community. There are more than 600 of us, although our numbers have dwindled from several thousand.

Born in 1969, I am 34 years old. My wife, Tzipporah, and I have brought our two young children with us on my 5-year journey through rabbinical school here in Los Angeles. We are far from our home. In 1919, Shimei (Semei) Kakungulu, the founder of our community, was a military general. After reading the Bible, he abandoned his military service, broke away from the Imperial British East African Company, where he served as a local governor of the eastern region, and rejected ongoing missionary efforts still prevalent in our country.

Shimei circumcised himself, his children, and the males of our tribe. He started strict observance of Shabbat every Saturday. More than 3,000 of his followers — our previous generation — celebrated Jewish festivals, observed fasts and began complete adherence to kashrut, as written in the Five Books of Moses. When I was only 2 years old, Iddi Amin Dada, legendary for his cruelty and corruption, grabbed political power and the presidency at gunpoint. Between 1971 and 1979, Amin ordered us to stop our religious observance and warned us against calling ourselves Jews. He gave us three alternatives: convert to Islam or Christianity, become unaffiliated, or face public execution.

While many of our people succumbed to the first alternative and converted, my family and several other families continued to observe Shabbat and the other mitzvot in secret. Most often, we held services in bedrooms, where we would worship in whispers to our God. In 1989 at the age of 20, I was arrested with three fellow Jews. We were caught mobilizing our youth to learn about Judaism and the Hebrew language, and we were also rebuilding the foundation of our

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main synagogue, which had been destroyed during Amin's regime. We suffered in the hands of local Christian and Muslim government administrators, who were not at all interested in the existence of a Jewish community.

To be Jewish in Uganda we must withstand many levels of intimidation, oppression and abuse. We face restricted access to social services owned or managed by Christians and Muslims. But Uganda is not our only challenge. I do not look Jewish in the eyes of the international Jewish community and I am frequently asked, "How did you become Jewish?" and "Who converted you?" A beit din (rabbinical court) of Conservative rabbis performed "mass conversions" for our community members to bring us officially into the Jewish world family in February 2002.

When I'm weak from my Yom Kippur fast, I realize I am a fragile being, but my God lives forever and ever. I look forward to every Shabbat, which brings meaning, joy, comfort and spiritual restoration into my life for 26 hours. Communal Pesach seders and celebrations of every holiday from Shavuot and Sukkot to bar and bat mitzvot connect me at once to the past, present and future of the Jewish people.

I will forever walk in the path of Torah and identify with the holy traditions of Judaism passed down from one generation to another. I will work hard to ensure that Judaism continues for the sake of maintaining an even stronger bond between me and my God, who is most high. He is the creator of space and all its mysteries, world architect, the source of life, and a permanent force behind nature and cosmic order. Although I have faced life-threatening dangers during my 34 years as a Jew in Uganda, I am also one of a special people — the Jewish people — who have resisted many centuries of hatred and oppression and continue to say shalom to the world.

Gershon Sizomu, leader of the Abayudaya (Jews) of Uganda, received his bachelor's degree at the Islamic University in Uganda and is currently studying at Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies of the University of Judaism.

Crypto-Jews Come Out of the Closet

By Assaf Patrick

Ha'aretz Newspaper

September 5, 2004

The conversion process normally requires converts to immerse themselves in a mikveh (ritual bath) and then say a blessing. But when Nuria Guasch-Vidal, principal of an elementary school in Barcelona, underwent her immersion, the mikveh attendant exempted her from reciting the blessing. That moment, she says, is engraved in her consciousness as the moment when she returned to the

bosom of Judaism as a descendant of the Bnei Anusim - Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity during the Spanish Inquisition - rather than as an ordinary convert.

Guasch-Vidal was part of a maiden delegation of 19 Bnei Anusim that arrived in Israel about 10 days ago to show solidarity with the country. Amishav, the association that organized the trip, has been working in urban centers of Spain and Portugal for the last two years to try to return the Bnei Anusim (better known by the derogatory Spanish term "Marranos," which means "swine") to the Jewish people. The Jewish Agency does not work with descendants of the Crypto-Jews, on the grounds that they are not eligible to immigrate under the Law of Return.

The delegation members, with Amishav's encouragement, are all active in doing public relations work for Israel. As part of this effort, the organization initiated a megillah (scroll) of the Bnei Anusim, on which members of the group have declared their support for Israel and its "battle for survival." They delivered the megilla, signed by hundreds of Bnei Anusim, to Minister for Diaspora Affairs Natan Sharansky last Tuesday.

The Foreign Ministry, incidently, claims that Amishav's activity in Spain and Portugal is viewed by those governments purely as a social-cultural activity. Beyond the stated purpose of their visit, the Bnei Anusim see being here as another chapter in the process of forging a new identity that they have been undergoing in recent years. Thus, for instance, Miguel Segura, a columnist for a local paper in Majorca, has researched the history of the Crypto-Jews there and says that he is constantly trying to advance his research and promote public discussion of this issue. "The process of forging my identity does not include the adoption of elements of Jewish tradition and faith," he says. "I did buy Jewish ritual objects for my house and put up a mezuzah, but my return to the Jewish people is via the solidarity I feel with Israel."

In the context of the research he did in the archives of the Inquisition in Majorca, Segura discovered that he is descended from a family of converts to Christianity who were tried by the Inquisition in the 17th century. In Majorca, unlike in the rest of Spain, most of the Jews had already converted to Christianity by the start of the 15th century. "Descendants of 15th-century converts find it hard to discover their identity today," he says. "But among descendants of later converts, there are 15 family names that are known to be descendants of Anusim, and all received the derogatory nickname `Chuetas.'"

In 1994, Segura published the story of how he became a proud Chueta, in a book called "Memories of a Chueta." After the book was published, he said, the Catholic Church in Majorca began to harass him. The local priest issued a formal ban on his wife's store, and descendants of other Chuetas, who seek to hide their

identity, also came out against him. The book helped other anusim to come out of the closet, he says, but out of some 20,000 descendants of this population in Majorca, only a few dozen have thus far begun searching for their true identity. Segura's children respect his decision to define himself as a Chueta, but he says that they have no desire to look into the matter themselves. Two years ago, Amishav off sent four rabbis - to Barcelona and Palma de Majorca in Spain, and Oporto and Lisbon in Portugal - as part of its efforts to bring the Bnei Anusim closer to the Jewish people. The rabbis organized seminars at which they taught classes in Jewish history, culture and tradition.

Fear of the Church

Amishav's director, Michael Freund, says that judging by the inquiries streaming into the organization's offices and the approaches to the rabbis in Spain and Portugal, thousands of people are showing signs of interest in their past. "Over the last few years, as democracy has become entrenched in Spain and Portugal, people have felt freer to explore their Jewish identity," he says. "The return of the bnei anusim to the framework of the Jewish world can help to solve the demographic crisis created by assimilation. Thousands of bnei anusim also constitute a huge potential reservoir for the expected demographic battle in Israel."

But Prof. Moshe Orfali, head of the department of Jewish history at Bar-Ilan University, has trouble seeing the visit by the Bnei Anusim as part of a "wave of return" to Judaism. "We are talking about a few individuals who really connect to Judaism and Israel," he says. "Most of those who express interest have families, property and comfortable lives on the Iberian peninsula." Orfali also believes that activity among the Bnei Anusim is limited by fear of damaging relations with the Catholic Church, which is liable to claim that it constitutes "stealing souls."

Ever since the expulsion from Spain in 1492, there have been groups of anusim that returned to their Jewish roots. The first was at the end of the 16th century, when third-generation Crypto-Jews from Spain went to various European cities, reconverted and set up Jewish communities in Amsterdam, Livorno and Hamburg. According to Orfali, the ambivalent feelings that accompanied the anusim poisoned their lives: They felt rejected by both the Jewish community and the Christian community. The current process of drawing nearer to Judaism stems, in Orfali's view, from a search for belonging and from feelings of alienation. "I attribute part of the explanation to disappointment with the Catholic Church, which did not give them the feeling of belonging that they had expected, and therefore they began their Jewish search," he says. "On the other hand, some of them see this as a sort of quick trip to find themselves, like our young people who travel to India."

Organized activity by the Bnei Anusim takes place mainly via Amishav's centers

in Spain and Portugal, but over the last year, forums have also been established on the Internet. Guasch-Vidal, 51, who is also descended from the Chuetas of Majorca, relates that she corresponds on these forums with Bnei Anusim from Spain, Portugal and Brazil, and encourages new surfers to explore their past and their identity. Vidal discovered that she was the descendant of anusim 15 years ago. Her grandfather, who was on his deathbed, refused to observe the Christian custom of summoning a priest to hear his confession. Vidal's eyes fill with tears when she relates his last request to her: to explore her Jewish roots. Oddly, it was her husband, who comes from a Protestant home, who initially displayed interest in Jewish tradition. As a teacher of history, she focused for the first few years on historical and archival research. Later, she says, she became frightened by the religious aspect of her search. Only three years ago did she dare visit the Barcelona synagogue for the first time. Despite the difficulties, Vidal and her husband continued with the conversion process, which ended two years ago at the Miriam Institute, run by Amishav.

In Vidal's case as well, her children are not joining her in her return to Judaism. Vidal admits that this saddens her. "When I see a father wrap his son in a tallit [prayer shawl] at the synagogue on Shabbat, my heart contracts," she says. "I am truly sorry that I did not begin the conversion process when my children were younger.

The Ethiopian Experience

By Shoshana Zucker

The Jerusalem Post

August 29, 2004

Ethiopian immigrants and the Israeli educational system have been trying to get adjusted to each other. Fidel, an Ethiopian self-help organization is helping. Any immigrants find their first encounter with the Israeli educational system to be something of a shock. But just imagine what it would be like if you came from a country where there are no kindergartens and no compulsory education at all; where some children never go to school at all, some for a few years and only a few complete high school. Or where, once having registered a child to school, parents have no further involvement.

What would it be like if no one in the school spoke or understood even a few words of your language? If you imagine the confusion that such a parent might feel, you are approaching the experience of immigrants from Ethiopia. Since Operation Moses in 1984, Ethiopian immigrants and the Israeli educational system have been trying to get adjusted to each other. The process has not been easy but the Ethiopian community is not sitting back and waiting for someone else to solve its problems. One of the leading Ethiopian "self-help" organizations is Fidel: ("Aleph Bet" in Amharic) the Association for Education and Social

Integration of Ethiopian Jews in Israel.

Based in Hod Hasharon, Fidel was founded in 1996 to facilitate the successful absorption of Ethiopian immigrant families and improve the education that their children receive, enabling them to pursue a wider range of career possibilities, without abandoning their traditions and cultural heritage. Fidel's flagship project is the training and supervision of Educational-Social Mediators who work in schools with large immigrant populations. All of the mediators are themselves immigrants from Ethiopia. They work on three sides of a triangle facilitating communication, interpreting cultural norms and troubleshooting problems for Ethiopians parents, Israel schools and the children who are both Ethiopian and Israel.

Many Israeli are unaware of it, but immigration from Ethiopia is continuing and most absorption centers are filled. In order to make room for future immigrants, The Jewish Agency is working to help families move into permanent housing, but after 20 years of experience, it is now clear that four walls, a roof and mortgage are far from enough to guarantee successful absorption. In order to provide much needed help, the Agency approached Fidel with the aim of helping the organization form parents groups in approximately 20 centers, in order to prepare the parents for their role in their children's education.

This is how they work. After explaining how to contend with the bureaucratic process of registration, group leaders discuss the structure of the system and, most importantly what is expected from parents and children. In Ethiopia, a parent who inquired about a child's progress insulted the educator's honor by implying a lack of trust. In Israel, that same distance is perceived, not only by the teacher but also by the children who are influenced by their Israeli peers, as an appalling lack of concern. A central message is "Even you lack the formal education to actually help your child with his homework, showing an interest will make a tremendous difference." Yet parental involvement can go beyond homework help.

Ethiopian parents from the Kiryat Moshe neighborhood of Rehovot, for example, are sorely dissatisfied with the education that their children are receiving and especially with the city's integration plan that disperses their children to 13 different schools. In their search for a better way, they turned to Fidel and the New York-based Center for Education Innovation - Public Education Association (CEI-PEA) which has more than 20 years of successful experience in organizing and running community-based, public schools that strive for excellence, in difficult or immigrant neighborhoods.

Well-known educational innovator, Colman Genn, a leader of CEI-PEA, toured Rehovot, met with community leaders and accepted the challenge of

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transplanting their successful model to Kiryat Moshe. A few short weeks later, Genn passed away suddenly but his dedication to the belief that quality public education is essential to the health of a democratic society lives on. Fidel and the parents of Kiryat Moshe are determined that, with professional guidance and financial support of CEI-PEA, an excellent neighborhood school will open its doors, perhaps as soon as September, 2005.

An Absorbing Matter

By Gail Lichtman

Jerusalem Post

September 9, 2004

Jerusalem's Ethiopian population is on the rise. So are its members, who say the system is stacked against them

The controversial, graphic remarks made by Mevaseret Zion council head Carmi Gillon at the end of last month, concerning supposed vandalism by Ethiopian children living in the town's absorption center, hit a raw nerve in a community that has been fighting an uphill battle for acceptance and integration into Israeli society. Today, some 90,000 Ethiopian Jews live in Israel, including nearly 25,000 who are Israeli-born. They came in two main waves: 8,000 in Operation Moses in 1984-5 and 14,000 in Operation Solomon in May 1991, plus various smaller aliyahs from 1991, onward. Approximately 4,000 Ethiopian Jews live in the Greater Jerusalem area. This includes 1,300 at the Mevaseret Absorption Center; about 1,200 in Beit Shemesh; some 1,200 in the city proper; 100 in Ma'aleh Adumim; and 100 in Kiryat Arba.

Inside the city, the community is concentrated in Talpiot/Baka along Hebron and Bethlehem Roads; Kiryat Hayovel/Kiryat Menachem along Nurit Street; East Talpiot; Katamon Heth and Tet; Neve Ya'akov/Pisgat Ze'ev; and Ramot. Even though thousands of Ethiopian olim found their first home in Jerusalem area absorption centers in the 1980s and 1990s, for years there was barely an Ethiopian community in the city. Only in the last three or four years has the community begun to grow, with new olim from the Givat Hamatos caravan site and the Mevaseret Absorption Center taking up permanent residence in the capital.

"There is something rather ironic in this," says Dr. Shalva Weil, an anthropologist and senior researcher at the National Council of Jewish Women's Research Institute for Innovation in Education at the Hebrew University. "Jerusalem has always been absolutely central in the prayers and minds of Ethiopian Jewry. For 3,000 years, they dreamt of Jerusalem. The most important festival of the Ethiopian community, "The Sigd," takes place in Jerusalem and their memorial for those who died on the way to Sudan in the 1980s, is here in the city. "During

Operation Moses, I remember Ethiopian olim saying that they had come to Jerusalem even if they actually were living in Ashdod. The whole of Israel is Jerusalem to them. And yet few actually settled in the city."

Weil says this was not a fluke, but rather due to a deliberate policy of the municipality. "I sat on various committees during the 1980s and 1990s that discussed whether to settle Ethiopian olim in Jerusalem," she claims. "The city said it couldn't take Ethiopians on the pretext that there was not enough industry to employ them. After Operation Solomon, several big hotels were populated by Ethiopian olim, yet the city got rid of nearly all of them. "The same was true for the majority of olim at Givat Hamatos. Only a handful remained in Jerusalem. The municipality was never really keen on having Ethiopians in the city."

Weil believes the change of heart that has taken place over the last few years has been motivated by the city's shifting demographics. "The Jewish population of Jerusalem declines in percentage and suddenly the city wants Ethiopian olim," she points out. Despite the change in municipal policy, the city has not developed the range of services the community would like to see. "Programs for the Ethiopian community are far less developed in Jerusalem than in other localities," claims Nurit Tizazu of the Israel Association of Ethiopian Jewry. "Maybe it's because there were not many Ethiopians in the city for so long. "Nevertheless, there is no Ethiopian synagogue in Jerusalem and no Ethiopian social club. Also, the community would really like more activities designed especially for it."

Community leader Avraham Neguise, head of South Wing to Zion and a Jerusalem resident for 20 years, is more critical of the municipality. "The city is simply not doing what needs to be done for the Ethiopian community," he insists. "It ignores its Ethiopian residents. This upsets and angers us. Other cities have social clubs. But here in Jerusalem, there is no club and no programs for the elderly and youth in our community. "Beit Shemesh has set up a wonderful program for the elderly in the Ethiopian community. But Jerusalem has no such thing. We have our own traditions and culture. This cannot be erased. Yet we have no social club where we can come together to celebrate."

Neguise points out that most Ethiopian parents cannot afford to pay for after school activities offered by community centers. "Our children end up not being included in informal education," he continues. "Some, because they have no social framework, wander around and are exposed to unacceptable values. I don't think the city has to wait for the situation to deteriorate even further before acting to provide a framework for our youth." The city, says Neguise, should have a special coordinator for the Ethiopian community, someone who understands its culture and customs. "Jerusalem should be a model for other cities, with respect to immigrant absorption. We have always maintained that we

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were making aliyah to Jerusalem. The city has to encourage olim to settle here, but instead of being a model, the city is just the opposite."

Asher Rahamim, who made aliyah from Ethiopia 22 years ago and has been living in Jerusalem with his wife and children for the last six years, notes that the community has been trying to build an Ethiopian cultural center in Jerusalem for years. "We have received [numerous] promises but the center is still not a reality. The same holds true for the memorial we want to build for those who fell trying to reach this country. For years, we have had to meet near Kibbutz Ramat Rachel, in the heat and under very difficult physical conditions. Only recently did the Knesset decide to make this a state ceremony and hold it on Mount Herzl. I am very happy about this, but why did it take so long?" The larger problem facing the Ethiopian community in Jerusalem and Israel, notes Rahamin, is discrimination and racism, which is why "the Carmi Gillon remarks cut so deep."

"You don't know what it feels like to call about a job and get an enthusiastic reception on the telephone and then to come to the interview and see the employer's whole demeanor change the minute you walk through the door. Suddenly, you are no longer really what he is looking for," relates 26-year-old Aviva Marsha, a Hebrew University graduate who arrived to Israel at age three. "There is racism in this country and there are people in Israel who only look at the color of my skin and nothing else. This is the sad truth. I want to be judged on my own individual merits or demerits. It hurts when I am not. People say that if you are educated, things will be easier. But even with a university degree in hand, there are still barriers." Tizazu, who as a young child spent four years (1983-7) in the Kiryat Gat Absorption Center, feels that while there is racism out there, it is important to know when to say it and when not. "If I shout racism every time, then I am only strengthening stereotypes and people will stop listening to me after a while. Also, not every case of discrimination is racism. Yes, there are ignorant people in Israeli society and there are those who treat people who are different, dreadfully. But I believe a person has to think twice before using the word."

On a more optimistic note, Rahamim has great faith in the Ethiopian community's future. "From where I live in Talpiot/Baka, I see a community making tremendous efforts to integrate. I am impressed by our unity and our organization. We help one another and take care of our families. Yes, there are problems and I don't feel that the authorities prepared enough for our absorption. The new olim have tremendous difficulties with Hebrew and I don't see a willingness on the part of the municipality to really understand our difficulties. "On the other hand, I see the great potential of the Ethiopian community, the desire for involvement and to invest in absorption in order to make a better life in Israel. But these efforts cannot be one- sided. We need to have a partner on the other side to work with."

Jerusalem Municipality spokesman Gidi Schmerling's response to the allegations were not received by press time.

A Congregation's Pride

Now in its eighth year, the Ethiopians for Engineers Program at the Jerusalem College of Technology - Machon Lev (JCT) can count its successes. Designed to promote science and technology studies throughout the Ethiopian population in Israel in the framework of the Israel Defense Forces Academic Reserves, the program now has 18 graduates with degrees in engineering and accounting, serving in the IDF, many as officers. Another 15 are in the final stages of completing their degrees and are awaiting induction. An additional 60 students are currently studying at the JCT.

JCT is a men's college that combines Torah studies with four-year degree programs in science and technology. The five-year Ethiopians for Engineers Program includes one year of preparatory studies and four years of degree studies. "The goal of this program is to give Ethiopian students a fair chance to become engineers," explains David Cassel, director of the Ethiopians for Engineers Program. "Ethiopians come to Israel from a different culture.

"They need a bit of a push to get started. Their potential is high, but language difficulties and a different mentality represent barriers. Our program is not just a preparatory program. We accompany our students throughout their academic studies at JCT. For us, success means completing the entire course of study and getting the degree." Towards that end, students receive full tuition scholarships, plus living stipends throughout their studies. They also receive academic support in the form of one-on-one tutoring and extra lessons.

"In addition," continues Cassel, "we are there for them to help with personal and family problems, as well as to counsel them concerning academic choices. We are like parents and sometimes this can be even more important than academic support." Following graduation, Cassel and staff continue to stay in touch. "At least once a week, we call to find out how our grads are doing. If there are problems in the army, we try to help.

"Many of our students come from families in very difficult financial straits and the army is often not aware of this. The main thing is that we don't push our students out the door after graduation and say, 'Manage on your own.'" Gershon Brihon, who recently married, finished his studies in computers and teaching and is now awaiting enlistment. Born in Ethiopia, he made aliyah to Israel at the age of 11 in 1991.

"I first heard about this program while I was in high school in Kfar Haroeh," relates Brihon. "I really hadn't considered studying computers. I thought it would

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be too difficult. But the preparatory program and the support I received - financial, academic and emotional - made it all possible. I am now going into the air force to work with computers for six years; three as a conscript and three in the professional army."

"What we are doing here is really for the benefit of the entire Ethiopian community," Cassel insists. "It is a national mission to change a not-so-rosy reality. And while we cannot solve every individual problem, we can create something for the next generation, so they will be better able to cope with life in Israel. The greatest form of charity is not a handout, but giving a person the ability to stand on his own two feet and fend for himself. I feel that is what we are doing here."

Absorption Jerusalem-Style

Over the last 20 years, thousands of Ethiopian olim have found their first home in the Jerusalem area. The Mevaseret Zion Absorption Center, which today has 360 apartments housing some 1,300 Ethiopian olim, opened its doors 35 years ago. For many years, it served Western olim. But during Operation Moses, in 1984-5, it also became home to several Ethiopian families. In 1999, according to Michael Jankelowitz, Jewish Agency liaison to the foreign press and media, the center was about to be phased out, in keeping with the move to direct absorption, when it was decided to reopen it for Ethiopian Jews from Quara.

Since then, the center has been used exclusively by Ethiopian olim. Staying an average of two years, approximately 5,000 Ethiopian olim have passed through its gates in the last five years. Following the mass influx of Ethiopian immigrants who were brought to Israel in Operation Solomon in May 1991, three Jerusalem hotels were converted overnight, into absorption centers. The Diplomat Hotel in Talpiot took in about 1,300 olim, the Shalom Hotel in Beit Vegan 470 and the President Hotel in Talbiyah accommodated 159.

Following a violent brawl in the summer of 1991 between Ethiopian and Russian olim at the Diplomat Hotel, the Jewish Agency decided to move the Ethiopians out. The other hotels were phased out towards the end of 1993 and in the first months of 1994. In September 1992, Givat Hamatos was officially inaugurated as housing for both Ethiopian and Russian olim. The 634-caravan site opened with 280 Ethiopian olim in residence. The site continued to house Ethiopian newcomers for over a decade, and is currently inactive.

A Home for Jews in China

**Harbin welcomes back 'smart, rich' former residents, hoping for prosperous ties. The visitors, now elderly, are drawn by nostalgia.
By Mark Magnier**

Los Angeles Times
September 22, 2004
Sent By Davi Cheng

A Note From Davi:

Here is an article on today's LA times about Harbin where there used to be a Jewish community. It's pretty interesting that my mother grew up in Harbin, she and my grandmother used to tell us about their Russian friends – I wouldn't be surprised that they were Jewish!

-Davi

Esther and Paul Agran look over Harbin's rather dowdy Xinyang Square, see the mud and the snarled traffic, then count the buildings from the corner. "One, two, three - that's it!" says Esther, 80. "That's the building where we had our wedding reception! It was a beautiful building. I think it rubbed off - we've been together 56 years." A half-century after most of the Jewish community fled Harbin, pushed out by an increasingly unfriendly Communist government wary of "imperialist capitalists," former residents are venturing back for a nostalgic look. Many were born and lived their early lives in this once-booming city in China's northeast. Now, after years of not being welcomed, they are returning to a city that is eager to see them. Harbin recently announced a \$3.2-million renovation of its main synagogue, and it is stepping up efforts to preserve other historically significant buildings and sprucing up the Jewish cemetery, Asia's largest.

For the Chinese, it's less a warm and fuzzy embrace of the old days than a fairly blatant bid to spur the struggling local economy. Last month, at an international conference on "Jewish History and Culture in Harbin" that was attended by nearly 100 former residents and their families, officials gushed about the "always smart" and "always good with money" Jews who might help return Harbin to its former glory. "We haven't heard such compliments since the days of Moses," says Yaacov Liberman, 81, a Harbin native now living in San Diego. Liberman was on his first trip back since his family left China in 1948.

Although most people don't tend to associate Jews with China, Harbin was an enclave of relative tolerance in the first half of the 20th century, as chaos, war and revolution raged in a troubled world. Jews, mainly from Russia, came to see it as a sanctuary and a land of opportunity. The first Jew reportedly arrived in Harbin around 1899, leading what would eventually be three waves of immigration, says Li Shuxiao, vice director of Jewish research at the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Sciences. The first group, in the early 20th century, came in search of opportunity after the opening of the Russia-China railroad. The second fled the 1917 Russian Revolution. A third sought to escape a Russia-China border conflict in 1929. The peak was around 1920, when the local Jewish population reached 20,000.

"Most Russian Jews came to China without money and worked hard," says Pan Guang, a history professor at the Institute of European and Asian Studies in Shanghai. "It paid off, and they became solidly middle-class." Many of those now returning for a visit to Harbin, once known as the "little Paris of the East," recall a privileged life with Chinese and Russian maids, a whirl of social events and winters crossing the Songhua River on Russian *telhai*, sleds pushed by an attendant. "It was 30 below zero," recalls Hannah Muller, who left China for Israel in 1949 and hadn't been back since. "It was wonderful. We were all wrapped up in bearskins."

Harbin wasn't always enthusiastic about having them come back. For much of the last decade, officials feared that the returnees would demand reparations for the factories, houses and personal effects that were expropriated after Mao Tse-tung came to power in 1949. But relations picked up after that didn't happen. Fifty-seven people reportedly still have property claims not covered by bilateral treaties, which, theoretically, they could pursue. But most of those in their 70s and 80s who have recently returned say they can't be bothered. "What's past is past," says Harbin-born Bernard Darel, 75, an import-export businessman now living in Tel Aviv whose family's button factory and apartment were taken over by the Communists in 1949. "It's a long time ago, a long way to Tipperary."

For most of the prosperous returnees, who were bantering in Russian, English and Hebrew, the real draw was the chance to catch up with long-lost friends and relive memories of what many see as a golden era. For Esther and Paul Agran, Harbin is more than a hometown - it's the birthplace of their lifelong romance. Esther was popular and good-looking, from a wealthy family that owned a cosmetics factory just behind the synagogue. "In school she was unreachable," Paul recalls. "I didn't think I had a chance."

One cold November day, however, she came to his uncle's fur shop, and their eyes met. In a few months, they were married in a gala wedding with 400 guests. "She had great legs in those days," says Paul, 82, looking at a black-and-white photo. "Hey, she still has great legs today." On one rainy evening during the group's weeklong stay, Jack Lieberman weaves across Harbin's torn-up Tongjiang Street past head-high piles of sand and dirt and into a hulking, 70-year-old building housing a rail car manufacturer. "What are you doing? This is a business!" a rattled security guard barks as Lieberman leads a stream of visitors past him.

It is anything but that to the group of foreigners from Israel, the U.S., Canada, Australia and other faraway places. They try to ignore the chipped green paint and harsh lights as they remake the interior in their minds. "This was our synagogue," Lieberman says. "The men sat there. The women were up in the

balcony there. The ark would have been up there, at the end and to the right," he says, referring to the place where the temple's Torah was kept. "It was a really beautiful place." As he reminisces, Teddy Kaufman, an 80-year-old Harbin-born Israeli and an impetus to bringing the group together, walks by. "Were these pictures originally here?" someone asks Kaufman, pointing at a dusty mural of bears cavorting in the wild. "There are no pictures in a synagogue," Kaufman responds emphatically, "especially none of bears."

Amid the grime and exposed wiring are hints of the building's former splendor. A once-grand chandelier still hangs in the entryway, its graceful, cut-crystal arcs now brown with smoke and stains. Worked into the window grilles and chipped floor are images of the Star of David. "This was the second synagogue in town," says Paul Conway, 58, now a resident of Australia. "That's because Jews always have to say, 'Oh, that other synagogue, I wouldn't be caught dead there.' " Across the street is a former mosque, a testament to a time when, at least in Harbin, the two communities coexisted peacefully.

"My father was Russian and Tatar, a Muslim, and my mother was Jewish," says Mara Moustafine, 50, who was 4 when the family immigrated to Australia in 1959, one of the last to leave. "That's the kind of city it was." Harbin managed to prosper through much of the early 20th century under ever-changing authority. Czarist Russia, Nationalist China, imperial Japan, Soviet Russia and Communist China exerted control over this strategic, resource-rich area in the midst of the three countries. In general, most of the governments were relatively tolerant, even encouraging, of the Jewish enclave into the 1940s. That changed after the Communists came to power.

"Rapid changes in China made it difficult to continue living here," says Xu Xin, a professor of Jewish studies at Nanjing University. "There was a huge exodus through the early 1950s." For David Udovitch, 84, it came down to soup and labor unions. The former owner of a paint factory in Harbin recalls returning home from work in 1953 and learning that a union representative had stopped by, looked in the family's soup pot and asked why they were eating meat when workers hadn't had any in months. "That's when I knew it was time to leave," he says, standing near his mother's grave in the Jewish cemetery.

A few hundred Jews, mostly those too old to leave or lacking overseas sponsors, lingered for a decade, with the last one, an elderly woman, reportedly dying in the mid-1960s. Many are in the graveyard, moved to the outskirts of town in 1958. For the local government, the cemetery and the memories it holds are a potential gold mine, starting with tourism, it hopes, then spreading to trade and investment. Many who left formed social groups in their new homes to help one another. Over the years, most retained strong emotional ties to China even though their lives in Harbin were often quite insulated from Chinese society.

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"We were kosher, so I never even tried Chinese food until I was 17," says Leana Leibovitch, 81, who looked for her old house but learned that it had been demolished sometime after her 1948 departure for Australia. "Now, of course, I love it."

Kaufman, since the early 1970s the leader of the Tel Aviv-based Assn. of Former Residents of China, took the lead in arranging the rapprochement. When he approached Harbin's leaders in 1992 about building links, he recalls, they didn't even know what a synagogue was, let alone that there once were two of them in the city. "For them, history started with the Communist revolution in 1949," he says. "They'd thrown away the pages" of history. He got their attention on a return trip two years later by pointing out that Harbin lagged far behind Shanghai and Beijing, where foreigners were welcomed with more open arms and minds.

A trip to Israel by local officials a few years later - and the promise of Israeli aid for reconstruction to keep Jewish history alive - made them even more receptive. "They're quite open about it - getting the rich Jews to invest," says Moustafine, author of "Secrets and Spies: The Harbin File," a book about her family's experiences.

"My view is, if we can preserve the buildings and get China to open up the archives while former residents are still alive, it's all for the good." Now the government is on board from the top of Heilongjiang province on down, with Gov. Zhang Zuoyi welcoming returnees with a call to invest and set up joint ventures.

"Sure, it's public relations. Everyone understands that," Kaufman says. "The mention of rich Jews isn't meant as an insult. Many people in Asia think all Jews are smart and rich - and if you're rich, you must be a Jew." There are limited signs that the Harbin strategy is paying dividends. "I need to buy four or five containers of blankets, a few containers of diapers and I'm interested in buying some coal," Tel Aviv resident Darel, sporting a lapel pin with entwined Chinese and Israeli flags, tells his Chinese hosts. "I don't need to do business here," he adds later. "In a lot of ways, it's easier in Guangzhou. But my memories are very good, and I feel like doing it because it's the old hometown."

Magnier was recently on assignment in Harbin. Lijin Yin in The Times' Beijing Bureau contributed to this report.

No More Deadlines for Sudan

By Ruth W. Messinger

Executive Director of the American World Service

The August 30th deadline given by the United Nations Security Council to the Sudanese government to disarm the *Janjaweed* militia that has killed and forcibly displaced more than one million people from Darfur has, as expected, come and

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gone with little fanfare. The world powers seem much too comfortable talking but not acting.

Having returned from Darfur on August 25, I can assure you that there are not any visible serious attempts by the Khartoum government to address the UN demands; in fact, I would contend that the government continues to support the removal, by whatever means possible, of the African tribal farmers from the Darfur region.

There is a continuing and systematic program in Darfur of expulsion, rape and murderous violence, of determined ethnic cleansing. It is built on top of a long standing battle over land and was dramatically fueled in 2003 when the government, armed the *Janjaweed* to help quell rebel actions in Darfur. It is now being carried out by the *Janjaweed*, directly aided by the government, trying to rid the area of their enemies, the African Muslim farmers who lived there, and claim it for themselves. There is a vast majority of these enemies are, of course, civilians, not rebels: they are women, the elderly, and children.

I met many of these people and listened to their chilling and all-too-similar stories. The government bombed their villages; and then *Janjaweed* men on camels rode in, often yelling and shooting wildly. They plundered the farm animals that were the lifeblood of these communities. They stole, they raped and they killed. They burned villages to the ground. People I spoke with lost cattle, saw parents and children killed, were raped and were driven out of their homes.

And, in at least some areas, the same men who destroyed these villages are still visible just outside the camps to which many of the displaced have moved. Some have been selected by the government as “police” to provide “security” for the camps. Women are still disappearing from the camps when they venture out to collect firewood to sell to buy food.

The people who had lived in the villages fled—in terror, with few possessions, on donkeys if they had them, on foot if they did not, carrying children, supporting the elderly, looking for safety. Some were on the road or in hiding for months. They came gradually to camps being set up to receive them—now probably 140 camps scattered throughout Darfur (a region the size of Texas). They are living in tent cities packed with tens of thousands of families fighting hunger, illness, displacement, boredom, and depression. They are wounded and frightened, have been left with no sense of a workable future, and are desperate about the circumstances of their lives.

Adults who were independent have no means of support. Parents are certain it will never be safe to return to their homes, but their children cannot wait to go back to the lives they knew and loved; their body language and affect signal

depression. Schooling is available only a few hours a day and, as one of the teachers said, “How can we help children deal with trauma when we are traumatized ourselves?” There are no activities for children or adults at the camps, threats of growing food shortages, and constant health dangers.

To be in the camps, to meet the victims of this displacement, to hear their stories is to feel overwhelmed by what people can do to each other, to cry at the most visible evidence of these violations of basic human rights, at the realization that some of the children in the medical tents will die from malnutrition and diarrhea.

It is also to marvel at people’s resilience, to wonder how people who have experienced terror, lack the resources for their survival, have been robbed of their vision of the future are nevertheless making do, trying to care for each other, struggling to protect their loved ones and thanking strangers for their help.

There is an amazing handful of non-governmental organizations from Europe and the United States, only some of whom operated in Sudan before, working in some of the camps, patching together funding from governments and private donors. They are putting up tent shelters as fast as they can, registering families (often now just women and children because the men were killed or have wandered from the camps to look for work) and providing clean water, latrines, schools, and health services.

Unfortunately, the situation can only get worse. The populations coming into the camps keep growing, it is estimated that only 50% of those displaced have had access to aid, and there is already not enough food. Apparently the United Nations World Food Program cannot keep pace with demand, and not enough funds have been provided. to pay for the food they need.. Since a planting season has been missed, it will be necessary to feed all of the displaced persons for at least the next year, but the supplies for this are not now available. Medical staff know that there are already too many cases of dehydration, malnutrition and deadly diarrhea, that living in close quarters like this breeds its own set of sanitation, physical and mental health problems, that mortality rates could rise suddenly.

Confronted with these realities of a grimmer and grimmer future I felt determined to respond, to mobilize more people to make a difference. There can be no more missed deadlines. Additional humanitarian aid is desperately needed—not only more food and clean water but teachers and recreation personnel, social workers and community health advocates. Sudan must be forced, first, to improve access to the camps for humanitarian aid workers and supplies, and it must then be sanctioned unless and until it stops its ongoing support for the *Janjaweed* militia and their ethnic cleansing campaign. The world powers should fund the African Union to send in a monitoring and peacekeeping force. Its first task could be to secure the roads, stop banditry and allow supplies to be shipped to the

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camps over land rather than by air. The United Nations Security Council should then deploy international monitors and peacekeeping forces. Every effort must be exerted to restore safety to Darfur

Failure to act properly now will result in endless, preventable and meaningless human suffering. Three quarters of a million children are waiting to see if the world cares enough to intervene; we cannot disappoint them.

Ruth W. Messinger is the president and executive director of American Jewish World Service, an international development and emergency relief organization.