

Thank you all so much for coming here tonight to share in our journey and for allowing us to show you how your donations have helped this Jewish community who live in such a remote and isolated part of the world.

I would like to share with you some of the history of the Abayudaya of Uganda. Abayudaya is Luganda for people of Judah, or Children of Israel.

They are not one of the lost tribes of Israel and they are not genetically or historically related to other ethnic Jews. They are one of the newer Jewish communities in the world.

The Abuyadaya's Jewish journey started with an outside influence. Back in the 1880s, Christian missionaries were working their way through Africa, and in eastern Uganda they converted a tribe headed by Semei Kakungulu.

Over time, however, the chief felt more and more drawn to the teachings of the "Old Testament." It resonated with his soul. He wanted to follow its rules. He wanted to follow all the rules of Moses, including circumcision.

In 1922 Kukangulu wrote a book of rules and prayers for his followers in Luganda, the local language. He passed away in 1928 from tetanus.

His followers have had an amazing journey over the last 100 years. They once numbered as many as 3,000, but were persecuted almost out of existence by Idi Amin, who outlawed Jewish rituals and destroyed synagogues. A core group remained and underwent a revival in the 1980's. Many in the community of 400 observant Jews in rural

Uganda finally had their Jewish status confirmed by a beth din of Conservative rabbis who visited there.

[Gershom Sizomu](#), the spiritual leader of the Abayudaya completed his studies as a Conservative rabbi at the [Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies](#) at the American Jewish University in Los Angeles. He completed his studies in Israel, where his daughter, the first Abayudaya Sabra, was born. This month, Rabbi Gershom is running for parliament and in 2016 he hopes to win the election as the first Jewish President of Uganda!

There are currently five shuls in the region and the dedication that the Abayudaya have to Judaism is incredibly inspiring. They are a people without running water or electricity. They are subsistence farmers who struggle to grow yams, beans, papaya and mango to feed themselves and their families. Cooking in this region along the equator without air conditioning is usually done at night, however on Friday you can witness the Abuyadaya cooking in the middle of the day in preparation for Shabbat.

The Abuyadaya slaughter their own chickens and do the kashering themselves. Volunteers from the community clean up around the synagogue to prepare it for services. The buzz before Shabbat is palpable and as the sun sets on Nabagoye Hill the most amazing rendition of Lecha Dodi fills the air. The traditional words are set to a haunting melody with an African rhythm and harmony.

On Saturday morning the Abuyadaya gather in their five synagogues. They read Torah from scrolls donated by congregations in the states.

We saw and celebrated the diversity of these people. We visited the two Ugandan schools where rural Jewish, Muslim and Christian children study together in peace. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim students study side-by-side, but only the Jewish students are required to study Hebrew and Judaism.

In a world increasingly divided by religion, this is a wonderful model to observe. They have also created a kosher, organic, fair-trade, multicultural coffee co-op and they sell Judaica made by the women of the community.

Once impoverished and looked down upon by their Christian and Muslim neighbors, relations have improved significantly and they are now viewed with respect and admiration and are increasingly influential members of Ugandan society. Some have gone on to university and even to medical school.

The Talmud teaches us that all Israel is responsible for one another. The Abuyadaya are our fellow Jews.

The scale of what they need is so different than the scale of what we need. We spend millions building synagogues and schools. It costs us about \$10,000 per year to educate a child at our local day schools. In Uganda, it costs about \$100. Some of the children are orphans, and many are far from home.

Their needs go beyond education. Nutrition, disease and basic shelter are always a concern. A few examples of where charitable money is used, is in feeding 400 primary and high school children breakfast every day. Through our slide presentation, you will clearly see what their many needs are.

Abayudaya children lack basic health care and clean drinking water; we met Aaron (the principal of Hadassah Primary School, who you will meet in the video) and his wife Naomi who, are one of the many unfortunate parents who have lost their babies to malaria and dehydration due to the lack of clean water. Charitable donations could dig clean water wells and save Jewish children's lives. We saw first hand, how far our money could go.

It was an absolutely inspiring journey across the world and one that allowed us to see that all Jews are our brothers, whether they live Vancouver, Jerusalem or Mbale, Uganda. Our hope is to continue to do good deeds for all those in need, regardless of location, faith or colour....