



Points East

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The Pied Piper of the “Lost Jews” Diaspora: Two Views

Who is like Moses? Michael Freund

By Matthew Fishbane

Excerpted from *Tablet Magazine*, www.tablet.org,
February 19, 2015

Shavei Israel, which Michael Freund founded in 2002 and which employs a dozen people full time and operates on a seven-figure budget, is dedicated to the discovery and recognition of “lost Jews” or “newly found Jews,” which include alleged descendants of the lost tribes of Israel, crypto-Jews, hidden Jews, and self-proclaimants. The non-profit works to reverse the 2,000-year-old inward turn of the Jewish people, who have historically thought of themselves as separate and insular. Shavei has “emissaries,” paid or partially paid employees, in India, China, Russia, Poland, Spain, Portugal, Sicily, Colombia, El Salvador, and Chile.

From the central office in Jerusalem, Shavei is “actively in touch with” two dozen other communities around the world, from Ecuador to Zimbabwe to Kyrgyzstan to Indonesia to Japan to Suriname to Lithuania. Freund’s organization insists that there are Jews everywhere: You just need to know how to find them.

One of Shavei’s many ambitious goals is to put this global diversity, and the potential demographic explosion it represents, “higher on the agenda of world Jewry,” in Freund’s words. This is challenging precisely for the nebulous and heterodox nature of Judaism, which unlike other Abrahamic monotheisms has no patriarchate. Because the people Freund is interested in are at best *no longer* Jewish according to the more Orthodox of the interpretations of written and oral Jewish law, the idea of their return to the fold touches on a range of sensitive issues: Who should be allowed to join, or rejoin, a “chosen” people, and by what methods, and under whose authority? Underneath it all, there is a foundational angst: Who is a Jew?

...By finding living peoples with claims to Jewish lineage or identification, Freund is taking what could be a Talmudic parlor game and trying to force a nation to refine its boundaries: in or out, with or separate, diverse or homogeneous, growing or shrinking. Freund holds that contemporary Jews have a historical, moral, and religious responsibility toward their brothers and sisters, “lost to our people for so long.”

...That Freund sees in millions of future Jews—fashioned out of past Jews—as a “strategic asset” is a reflection of a current of right-leaning political thinking in Israel that is both expansion-

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Boosting Israel’s Jewish Majority, One ‘lost tribe’ at a Time

By Judy Maltz

Excerpted from *Haaretz*, www.haaretz.com,
February 19, 2015

In October 2012, three months before Israel’s last election, the Likud-led government headed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu took an unprecedented decision: It voted to allow a large group of individuals from northeastern India – not considered Jewish by law – to immigrate to Israel and undergo conversion upon arrival. Exactly a year later, the next government formed by Netanyahu voted to bring in an even larger group...

Operation Menashe, as it has been called, has been overwhelmingly portrayed in the local media as an inspiring story of a “lost tribe’s” return.

Yet an investigation by Haaretz reveals that this operation – spearheaded by an individual who views Israel’s Arab minority as a demographic threat and advocates using unconventional means to boost the country’s Jewish population – has been fraught with questionable government decisions, an ambiguous rabbinical ruling and potential conflict of interest. Moreover, the parties responsible for ensuring that these new immigrants are integrated smoothly into Israeli society seem to have dropped the ball, according to community insiders, creating a disenfranchised and disillusioned community.

The organization leading this effort, Shavei Israel, was founded and is run by Michael Freund, an American immigrant who served as an aide to Netanyahu during his first term in office in the late 1990s.

The rabbinical ruling on which it relied, reportedly issued in 2005 by former Sephardi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar, was said to have determined that the Bnei Menashe were “seed of Israel” – a term broadly used to describe individuals who would not be considered Jewish according to religious law (halakha), but who have proven Jewish ancestry and roots and can, therefore, immigrate to Israel.

But a government document obtained by Haaretz offers a surprising revelation: No such ruling was explicitly made. This document, prepared by the Interior Ministry, states categorically that Rabbi Shlomo Amar ruled that the Bnei Menashe are not “seed of Israel,” according to the accepted halakhic

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SJI MEMBERSHIP

<u>Country</u>	<u>Total</u>
United States	147
Canada	33
China	19
Israel	16
England	5
Australia	4
Germany	1
Japan	2
South Africa	1
Cyprus	1
Indonesia	1
Switzerland	1
Taiwan	1

TOTAL: 232

FROM THE EDITOR

As we go to press, there are many topics to fret about: China's proposed law restricting foreign NGOs and their work in China, rumors about Kaifeng being closed to Jewish tourist groups, the SJI exhibit in Kaifeng's Millennium Park also being inaccessible, the arrival of more Bnei Menashe immigrants in Israel, and disturbing revelations about the work of Shavei Israel.

Although neither of our lead articles reference Kaifeng, readers of these pages know that Shavei Israel operates there, sometimes in cooperation with us (the Sino-Judaic Institute) but usually on its own, and sometimes in opposition to SJI.

Our differences are both ideological and pragmatic. While SJI works to revive Jewish culture in Kaifeng in a manner that is respectful of traditional Chinese-Jewish norms, Shavei tries to impose Ashkenazi Israeli Orthodox norms on the Jewish descendents there. And where Shavei's ultimate goal is the immigration of Kaifeng Jews to Israel, SJI seeks to empower members of the community to choose whether to stay or go—although I believe the Board is more committed to the former than the latter. Thirdly, although Shavei seeks to change Israel demographically vis-à-vis the Palestinians by bringing in these "lost Jews" and settling them in the West Bank, SJI would prefer them to live in Israel proper, pending a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. (Actually SJI has not adopted a formal position on this latter issue, but it is my sense of the Board based on conversations at our meetings.) Lastly, whereas Shavei continues to work with Christian evangelical Zionist groups as a means to accomplish its ends; SJI will have nothing to do with them, fearing their true agenda.

For several years now, SJI and Shavei have run competing programs in Kaifeng but even in the best of times, our representatives there complained about Shavei's attempts to shut them out by denying them access to those Kaifeng Jews who attended its school—this at a time when we foreign Jews should be modeling Klal Yisrael (the unity of the Jewish people) not feeding into the notorious factionalism of the Kaifeng Jews. Here, in the one area where we might have been able to work cooperatively, it seems that Shavei was unwilling. I don't like to denigrate the sincere work of another Jewish organization working for the overall good of the Jewish people—and I truly believe that Shavei is trying to do just that—but I am bothered by how it acts in Kaifeng and I am upset by what I read about what it is seeking to do in Israel and the Palestinian Territories.

But don't take my word for it, read the two lead articles and decide for yourself. And please, keep your fingers crossed and/or say a prayer that things in China don't turn down a repressive path again.

Anson Laytner

Points East

Anson Laytner, Publisher

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Letters to the Editor and articles for *Points East* may be sent to:

Preferred Form:
e-mail: Laytner@msn.com

or to: Rabbi Anson Laytner
 1823 East Prospect St.
 Seattle, WA 98112-3307

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Sino-Judaic Institute
c/o Rabbi Arnold Mark Belzer
34 Washington Avenue
Savannah, GA 31405 U.S.A.

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Who is Like Moses?

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ist and optimistic. Though he states firmly that he does not believe in religious coercion, or trying to convince non-Jews to become Jewish, Freund cultivates ties with anyone who can claim verifiable historical connections to the Jewish people. "The more affinity that they have for Israel and the Jewish people," Freund explains, "the more likely they are to sympathize with Israel and Jewish causes"... "And at the end of the day," he adds, "a certain percentage of them will choose to come back and rejoin the Jewish people, so it will strengthen us demographically."

The foundation on which the demographic-strengthening part of Freund's plan rests is Israel's Law of Return... Freund... is not willing, he says, to put people's dreams on hold while the Jewish world debates these points. By applying his fervent spiritual drive—and considerable earthly fortune—to answering the fundamental questions of Jewishness in challengingly concrete terms, Freund is pushing the modern Jewish state, and by extension the Jewish people, to shatter their self-identity... The implications of his work—to Israel, to international relations, to modern Jewry—are enormous, and for some, terrifying and convulsive. If he succeeds, the face of the Jewish people will be transformed forever.

In talking about his work, Freund, who is 46, likes to credit his father's mother, Miriam Freund-Rosenthal, who served for years as president of the American women's Zionist organization Hadassah... Freund remembers his grandmother's stories about her work in youth *aliyah*... to bring young migrants to Israel... Whenever he gets the chance, Freund tells interviewers that his grandmother, holder of a doctorate in history from NYU, used to challenge him to wake up every morning, look in the mirror, and ask himself, "What am I going to do for the Jewish people today?"

...Religious Zionism profits from Freund's efforts, and more so now that the market definition of "Jew" is being exploded. And when Freund gets most animated—as when he says of his work that he's "taking back what's ours, reclaiming the people whose ancestors were taken from us, or left us, or were forced to leave us"—there is an echo of an uncompromising man...

Like his father and his younger sister, Rebecca, and their younger brother, John, Freund attended Ramaz, the Modern Orthodox prep school on New York's Upper East Side. ..Conversation at the Friends' dinner table often revolved around Israel, its politics, and Zionism...

Freund went on to Princeton, where he studied international relations and started an AIPAC affiliate called PIPAC (Princeton Israel Public Affairs Committee). After graduation, he spent a year in Israel, reading at a yeshiva in the mornings, and working in the afternoons at *The Jerusalem Post* for David Bar-Ilan, the illustrious concert pianist and Zionist icon who was then editorial-page editor and would go on to be the chief spokesman for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in his first term.

The following year, through a Princeton contact, Freund returned to New York as a speechwriter and aide at the Israeli Mission to the United Nations, under Prime Ministers Yitzhak Shamir and Yitzhak Rabin. These were heady times to be crafting speeches about Israel: Rabin signed the Oslo Accords with PLO leader Yasser Arafat in September of 1993. But a month before, in August, dismayed at what he saw as a dangerous capitulation of Israeli sovereignty, Freund had left his position to pursue a business degree at Wharton...

The year before, he had married Sarah Green, the Swiss-born, Brooklyn-raised daughter of Pincus "Pinky" Green—lieutenant to Marc Rich, the once-fugitive capitalist who was pardoned, along with Green, by President Bill Clinton in 2001... Sarah Green was a Yeshiva University grad who was getting a Master's at Columbia, and together they worked to finish up their degrees quickly, so that in 1995 they could move to Israel, with their firstborn son.

The young couple arrived at the Jerusalem home Sarah Green's parents kept, and, with the orientation of established *aliyah* organizations that benefit U.S. citizens, lived there for a year. Freund took a job at Peace Watch, a right-wing monitoring group formed after the Oslo Accords by a pair of committed annexationists, including a former spokesman for the "Council of Jewish Settlements in Judea, Samaria, and Gaza." Peace Watch's reports helped factions of the Israeli right thwart Oslo as a political partnership; they were a favorite campaign tool of Netanyahu, who was elected in June of 1996.

When Peace Watch shut down, Freund moved to the foreign-currency trading room of the Sapanut Bank in Tel Aviv... [Then] Bar-Ilan called Freund and asked him to join the government of the newly elected prime minister as deputy at the communications office. Freund had met Netanyahu before, while at Columbia, where after Oslo Freund had on his own initiative put together PLO quote sheets and sent them out by fax or dial-up Internet to whoever would read them. Some of these pamphlets made their way to Netanyahu, which led to a call and a meeting in a hotel room in New York, where the rising Likud star dazzled the Princeton grad with his grasp of political theory. So, when the chance came to work for Bibi, Freund jumped...

When Netanyahu lost the 1999 election to Ehud Barak, Freund moved to the PR firm Ruder Finn in Jerusalem. It had none of the luster, let alone the "meaning and purpose," he craved. His attention drifted to the stray seeds of the Jewish people: Freund had met with some members of the Bnei Menashe community, a small number of whom had been living in Israel since the 1980s, and then began looking into their claims more seriously and working on their requests. Eventually, he quit the PR agency, after asking himself, "Why don't I just do what I love?"

...To achieve his goals, Freund spends a considerable amount of his own money. In both India and Israel, Freund declined to provide the specifics of his budgeting, but he admits he is the single largest funder of Shavei's operations. He receives no salary and pays for all of his travel out of pocket. ("I'm blessed to be able to do it," he says.) The most recent nonprofit filings for Shavei are from 2012, the first year of the renewed campaign to bring Bnei Menashe to Israel after a 5-year hiatus on *aliyot*. Some major donors are redacted, but the file specifies that 70 percent of 2011 donations, and 42 percent of those from 2012, are from a single board member—presumably Freund. The largest donation to the 2012 budget is in the amount of NIS 2.1 million, or roughly \$550,000, which is close to 42 percent of the total income. It's not unlikely this was Freund's contribution that year—and that now that the Menashe *aliyah* is in full swing, his current charity could be double that.

...Money aside, Freund is committed to the goals of Shavei and pragmatic about it, willing to work with whoever can help his

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charges find the Jewish fulfillment they seek...Zionism's goals are never achieved in a straight line, he notes. He understands that at this moment in Israeli statehood, the Orthodox rabbinate is the only authority with the power to sanction conversions, which means that it determines Israel's immigration policy. That means ...Freund needs to comply with whatever the Orthodox rabbinate requires of him. "I work within the system," he says. "I don't fight it. If I have to hold my nose in order to do good, then I do."

...The same principle seems to be behind his embrace of the support of Christian Zionists, many of whom have been active in the field of *aliyah* for years, in a dubious confluence of spiritual and political matters. Christian Zionists watch Freund's progress with interest as he blazes a path to Israeli citizenship for people for whom the Law of Return is not an immediately apparent gateway to Zion. Shavei's latest nonprofit filing in Israel lists significant donations from a number of prominent Christian Zionist groups, including Netherlands-based Christians Voor Israel; BFP International, a nonprofit partner of Bridge for Peace (described on their website as "Christians supporting Israel and building relationships between Christians and Jews in Israel and around the world"); and UK-based Ebenezer Operation Exodus, which sees itself as an "instrument of the Lord" for helping Jewish people make *aliyah*. More recently, Freund participated in a rally at Teddy Stadium in Jerusalem—organized by a Christian leader from Singapore, a hub of Asia-Pacific missionary work... By contrast, the Jewish Federations of North America and the United Jewish Appeal have so far declined to join the effort.

...Freund had no preference for Orthodox conversion, except that it is and was at the time the only path to citizenship under the Law of Return: He'd be happy to allow the Bnei Menashe and other supplicants to convert as they pleased, he says, so long as the government could provide some other path to their ultimate goal of residing in Israel as citizens. The second point was equally Kafkaesque: It took the Bnei Menashe the better part of a year to complete their conversions in Israel, during which time they were not Israeli citizens. Because they received no government support, the only places Freund could place them, he says, were communities in Judea and Samaria and Gaza, where religious settlers of the Gush Emunim school

were willing to take on the burden of absorption out of ideological conviction...

In this, Freund owes much to his predecessor, mentor, and former partner Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail, an Israeli romantic who named the Bnei Menashe. Avichail represents a modern incarnation of an important branch of historical ten-tribe-ism in which the theological implications of both the losing and the finding of the tribes supersede any mundane concerns. In this view, the Bible and the prophecies related to the Ten Tribes provide "facts" as well as messianic signs that need to be both interpreted and audaciously acted upon. The prophecies point to a "final redemption" after at least three things are achieved: the restoration of the destroyed Temple in Jerusalem, the unity of the land of Israel, and the ingathering of the people of Israel, including the lost tribes.

In modern Israel, this is reflected in the political philosophy of religious Zionism, a theocratic idea that tries to balance belief and patriotism. Religious Zionists from the Gush Emunim school of thought, out of which Avichail grew, believe the secular modern state has accidentally helped hasten the fulfillment of the biblical prophecies by virtue of its very existence. Settling the West Bank and, formerly, Gaza, is a step toward "repopulating" lands that Holy Scriptures describes as once belonging to Jews. Ingathering of the Lost Tribes is another such step. To end the exile, Avichail was determined to track down the tribes in the form of their descendants and to bring them "first back to Judaism," as he wrote, "and then to the Jewish People and to the Land of Israel."

In 1975, Avichail presented his amateur scholarly research and biblical sources for the scattering of the Lost Tribes to his influential teacher Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook (1891–1982) at Kook's Merkaz HaRav Yeshiva...After Avichail had spoken on his text-based discoveries about the Pathans of Afghanistan, Kashmiri Jews, the Karen, Shinlung, Chiang-min, and the Beta Israel of Ethiopia—with evidence for these and other remnants of the exiled Ten Tribes in Japan, the Caucasus, and elsewhere—Kook had said, "Talking is nice, but it's not enough. You must act."...

Over the next 30 years, he embarked on a series of insane adventures: to Pakistan, Kashmir, Szechuan, Thailand, India, Burma, Japan, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Portugal, Sicily, Majorca, Peru, and Mexico,

to put his theories to the test. He found the [Bnei] Menashe, studied their traditions and beliefs, and began to bring a few of them to Israel. His travels often revealed what he hoped to find, and this in turn made him ever more obsessed. He made it his life's work: Avichail founded a tiny organization...and named it "Amishav," my people has returned.

In 1997, Freund asked Avichail, whom he had read about in news clippings, to meet him at the prime minister's office. Over the following two years, Freund became more and more involved with Amishav as Avichail's advocate in the halls of power. Up until that point, the amiable but scattered Avichail had worked out of his living room. Freund, the government official and Wharton MBA, began to establish more of an organizational structure. He rented an office for Amishav, hired a minimal staff, and began making trips of his own, starting with a visit to *anusim* in Barcelona and Madrid...

Avichail is now in a nursing home in Jerusalem. He suffers from advanced Alzheimer's. His wife Rivka...says Freund was the first representative of the Israeli government Avichail ever met who took his pursuits seriously. Freund delivered on promises to help get immigration quotas for the first Menashe. But he and Avichail soon began to recognize differences in what they hoped to achieve, and how they hoped to go about it.

The idea of the great redemption that had begun with the resettling of the land of Israel and the ingathering of the Lost Tribes became in Freund's hands more like a bureaucratic maneuver, a "process" with "belief systems" within a "political reality"—as if what God needed was not an eccentric visionary, but a dependable, deep-pocketed accountant. Avichail insisted on staying focused on representatives of the Lost Tribes. After his experiences with the *anusim*, Freund wanted to expand Amishav's brief to the descendants of Jews, known and unknown. Why limit the work to biblical migrations when in the course of Jewish and world history so many other cataclysmic disruptive forces had caused wounds that had not healed? Why bring only some lost Jews home? Freund wanted to bring in funding from whoever wanted to provide it. Avichail refused to take money from Christian Zionists, fearful, his wife says, of their real goals. When Freund branched off and created Shavei, the split was very hard on both men...

Boosting Israel's ...

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definition of the term, and have no proven Jewish ancestry. Amar confirmed to Haaretz that this was indeed his ruling.

Yet at the time, Amar's 2005 ruling was hailed in the press as "historic," with Freund describing it in one news report as "the breakthrough we have been waiting for."

However, the government, led at the time by Ariel Sharon, did not support the mass immigration of the Bnei Menashe. It was only after Netanyahu returned to the Prime Minister's Office for his second term, in 2009, that Freund found a government receptive to his cause and willing to take action.

Almost three years ago, Shavei Israel succeeded in convincing the government to resume immigration of the Bnei Menashe after a hiatus of five years – and on a much larger scale than ever before. The move required special government permission, because the Bnei Menashe don't qualify as Jews under the Law of Return and are, therefore, not eligible for automatic citizenship.

Both that decision and the decision to transfer responsibility for the welfare of the immigrants to a private organization during their initial absorption period – rather than the Jewish Agency and the Immigrant Absorption Ministry, which ordinarily handle such matters – represent major deviations from long-standing government policy and practice. In fact, Shavei Israel was able to secure 7 million shekels (about \$1.8 million) in government funding for this purpose without going through the usual government tender requirement.

Freund, who is also a commentator for The Jerusalem Post, has urged the government in his columns to take a more "creative" approach to immigration, as he terms it, to guarantee that the Jews maintain their majority in the country.

"The fact is that there are plenty of people out there in the big wide world who would like to move to Israel," he wrote in a September 2001 column. "The problem is that most of them are not Jewish. While many are no doubt motivated by economic reasons, there are countless others who are sincere in their desire to be Jews, and it is incumbent upon Israel to at least explore the possibilities that such

populations present."

Referring specifically to the tribes of northeastern India, he wrote in the same column, "For a country struggling to find potential new sources of immigration, groups such as the Bnei Menashe and others like them might very well provide the answer."

'Seed of Israel' or not?

The Bnei Menashe, whose connections to the ancient Israelites have long been challenged by social scientists, had been immigrating to Israel in trickles for close to 20 years before the government headed by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in 2006-2009 closed the country's gates to them. Two cabinet decisions taken in the past few years have allowed for the resumption of this immigration.

In October 2012, the cabinet approved a request from then-Interior Minister Eli Yishai to grant temporary residency visas to 274 members of the community so that they could undergo conversion in Israel. Exactly a year later, it approved a request submitted by his successor, Gideon Sa'ar, for another 899 visas to be allocated over a two-year period.

The background material provided to the cabinet ministers by the Interior Ministry ahead of the October 2013 vote states explicitly, "According to the ruling of Rabbi Amar, they [Bnei Menashe] do not comply with the halakhic definition of 'seed of Israel.' In other words, it is not possible to prove that the community is historically part of the People of Israel."

Narrowly defined, "seed of Israel" is a halakhic term that applies to anyone either born to a non-Jewish mother and a Jewish father, or having at least one Jewish grandparent. A Jew, according to halakha, is anyone born to a Jewish mother. The Chief Rabbinate of Israel allows for an expedited conversion process in the case of those defined as "seed of Israel." Several hundred thousands of immigrants from the Former Soviet Union were allowed into Israel under the Law of Return during the 1990s on that basis.

The term also has a broader definition that applies to anyone with demonstrated Jewish ancestry dating back several generations. It was this interpretation that provided the basis for the government decision to allow thousands of Falashmura – descendants of Ethiopian Jews forced to

convert to Christianity in past centuries – to immigrate to Israel in recent years.

In response to a request from Haaretz for clarification, Rabbi Amar, who currently serves as the chief Sephardic rabbi of Jerusalem, confirmed in writing through an aide that while serving as Sephardic chief rabbi, he had indeed ruled that the Bnei Menashe were not "seed of Israel."

At the same time, he said, their high level of observance of Jewish law and custom demonstrated their "strong affinity to the Jewish people." There was no doubt, therefore, according to Rabbi Amar, that "their forefathers were among the exiles of Israel, for as our sages say, their end attests to their beginning."

The reason they could not be declared "seed of Israel," he wrote, was that their ancestors had lived in isolation for so many years.

Yet leaders of Shavei Israel, which had been aggressively lobbying the government and the rabbinical authorities to recognize the Bnei Menashe as part of the Jewish people, have tended to avoid this nuance, presenting Amar's ruling in far more definitive terms.

In 2010, Freund told the Knesset Committee for Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora Affairs that his organization had approached Rabbi Amar in 2004, with a request that he rule on the status of the Bnei Menashe and that a year later, the former chief rabbi ruled that the Bnei Menashe were indeed "seed of Israel."

Before that committee meeting, the Knesset Research and Information Center prepared a special background report on the Bnei Menashe. The report opens by noting that in 2005, Rabbi Amar recognized the Bnei Menashe as "seed of Israel." The source of this piece of information, according to a footnote in the report, is none other than Michael Freund.

In a column he published in The Jerusalem Post in June 2011, Freund reported on a briefing he delivered to the Ministerial Committee on Immigration and Absorption, headed at the time by Foreign Minister Avigdor

Lieberman, on the status of the Bnei Menashe. "And rest assured, I told the ministers, the Bnei Menashe are our lost brethren," he wrote. "In March 2005, Sephardic Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar recognized them as Zera Yisrael, or the 'seed of Israel,' and said they should be brought to the Jewish state." It was this same ministerial committee that eventually took a decision in principle to reopen Israel's gates to the Bnei Menashe, after they were closed by the previous government.

Asked to address the discrepancy concerning Rabbi Amar's ruling, Freund said in a written response, issued through his lawyers, that neither he nor any member of his organization had misrepresented it, citing a letter he had received from the former chief rabbi's bureau dated July 4, 2011. [That would be more than six years after the ruling was initially reported on – JM.] The letter notes that Freund had asked the former chief rabbi whether the Bnei Menashe could "conceptually and ideologically" be considered "seed of Israel," and that Rabbi Amar's response to this question was affirmative. However, the letter notes that the Bnei Menashe most certainly do not fit the halakhic definition of "seed of Israel." "Don't forget that halakhically, the term seed of Israel means the son of a Jewish father and non-Jewish mother, and beyond any doubt the Bnei Menashe do not fit this halakhic definition" it quotes Rabbi Amar saying.

In their response to Haaretz's queries, Freund's lawyers also said that in addressing the Knesset committee, he "did not pretend to present a halakhic stand on the matter and did not make a presentation as if there were a halakhic stand on the matter." They also noted in their response that Rabbi Amar, in numerous instances, had expressed his great appreciation for Shavei Israel and its activities among the Bnei Menashe.

A rabbi with many hats

Among those who also helped spread the word that Rabbi Amar had deemed the Bnei Menashe "seed of Israel" was Rabbi Eliyahu Birnbaum, a judge on the Chief Rabbinate conversion courts. He also happens to work for Shavei Israel. [He also accompanied Freund on a trip to Kaifeng, AL] Birnbaum is cited as the source of various stories that appeared in the press about Rabbi Amar's ruling in 2005. In an article he published in November 2007 in Makor Rishon, a Hebrew-language publication that caters to the Orthodox

population, Birnbaum wrote, "The Israeli Chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar recognized the Jewish roots of the Bnei Menashe and their being seed of Israel."

...Birnbaum is also the rabbi and educational director of Shavei Israel. His wife, Rabbanit Renana Birnbaum, is also on staff at Shavei Israel, serving as director of Machon Miriam, the organization's Spanish- and Portuguese-language conversion school in Israel...

Asked to explain why he reported that Rabbi Amar had ruled that the Bnei Menashe were "seed of Israel," Birnbaum wrote: "I reported the conclusions regarding the Bnei Menashe in the way they were reported to me, to the best of my understanding."

In response to a question about why he himself had not set the record straight, Rabbi Amar responded, "We are not responsible for what they write, and it is not our job to speak in their names or to correct them."

Birnbaum was also asked about what could potentially be viewed as a possible conflict of interest in working both for the Chief Rabbinate and an organization that lobbies the government and Chief Rabbinate to recognize "lost Jews" like the Bnei Menashe. He responded that, in his view, there was no conflict because "there is no connection between my role as a rabbinic judge and decisions of principle taken by the Chief Rabbinate."

Also questioned about Birnbaum's possible conflict of interest, Freund responded through his lawyers that the Shavei Israel rabbi receives no salary for his work and provides help "out of a sense of mission and pure Zionism." They also noted that Birnbaum sits on the rabbinical conversion court for minors, "and to the best of our client's knowledge does not sit on the rabbinical court engaged in converting the Bnei Menashe." They said he had provided full disclosure about his activities to all the relevant parties.

An unusual government decision

As a rule, the Interior Ministry does not allow groups into Israel for the purpose of conversion, out of fear that some might exploit this opportunity to reap economic benefit. Under the Law of Return, Jews who immigrate to Israel are entitled to automatic citizenship and a sizable package of benefits.

This is likely the first and only time the government has allowed and even provided finance for the mass immigration of a large community whose members do not qualify as Jews under the Law of Return, nor do they have proven Jewish ancestry according to the broader definition of "seed of Israel."

So why did the Interior Ministry appear to bend the rule in the case of the Bnei Menashe? Spokeswoman Sabine Hadad issued the following response: "The person who made the recommendation was Rabbi Amar. The interior minister submitted the request because immigration comes under our jurisdiction, but I promise you that the person responsible is Rabbi Amar."

Asked whether the Interior Ministry has any criteria of its own for determining which groups are permitted to immigrate to Israel, she answered, "It's the Prime Minister's Office that coordinates all this."

The Prime Minister's Office referred all questions on the matter back to the Interior Ministry.

The background material provided to the ministers before they voted in October 2013 included a section of explanation from the Interior Ministry, in which it is clearly stated that, according to Rabbi Amar's ruling, the Bnei Menashe are not "seed of Israel" and have no proven Jewish ancestry. While it is not clear whether any of the ministers read this material, what is certain is that they went ahead and approved plans to bring 899 members of the community to Israel nonetheless.??

To understand the extent to which the government deviated from long-standing policy in the case of the Bnei Menashe, it's worth drawing a comparison with the Falashmura.

In the case of the Falashmura, the government ruled that only those members of the community who could prove they were descendants of Jews forced to convert would be eligible to immigrate to Israel. The Bnei Menashe, however, are unable to prove this kind of Jewish lineage. The Falashmura were required to undergo conversion upon arriving in Israel, as the Bnei Menashe are.

In the case of the Falashmura, it was a private organization – NACOEJ (North

American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry) – that received authorization from the government to compile lists of candidates for immigration among the group. But it was the Interior Ministry that ultimately determined whether those on the list were eligible to immigrate.

In the case of the Bnei Menashe, however, it is representatives of Shavei Israel and the Chief Rabbinate that make that decision, according to a spokeswoman from the Immigrant Absorption Ministry. Although Shavei Israel is the only organization with representatives on the ground in northeastern India preparing the Bnei Menashe for aliyah, Freund denied that it had anything to do with compiling these lists. “The organization does not and never had the authority to determine eligibility for immigration to Israel,” he said, insisting that it was the government of Israel that determined eligibility. The Interior Ministry maintained, however, in response to a question from Haaretz, that in the case of the Bnei Menashe, it does not determine eligibility.

In the case of the Falashmura, it was the Jewish Agency that was charged with the logistics of bringing the immigrants to Israel and held responsible for their welfare as soon as they arrived. In the case of the Bnei Menashe, both these functions are filled by Shavei Israel, which also pays for the flights of the immigrants. According to the government decision taken in 2013, Shavei Israel is only officially responsible for the welfare of the Bnei Menashe for a period of roughly three months in Israel, until they pass their conversion tests and obtain new immigrant status. After that period, they are effectively left to their own devices and do not receive extra support from the Jewish Agency, as do other immigrant groups deemed to have special needs.

Exemption from government tender

Because the Bnei Menashe do not qualify as Jews under the Law of Return, when they first arrive in Israel they are not eligible for the usual package of benefits provided to new immigrants.

Recognizing their need for basic assistance during this interim period, the cabinet, in its most recent decision of October 2013, agreed to allocate 7 million shekels to help ease the transition.

This funding, according to the decision, would be contracted out to a service provider through a tender issued by the Immigrant Absorption Ministry.

But Shavei Israel was awarded the contract, after the treasury agreed that it be exempted from the tender. An Immigrant Absorption Ministry spokeswoman explained, “The ministry published its intention [on the appropriate treasury website page], and no responses were heard from other organizations that may have thought they could provide such a service.” She defended the request for a tender exemption, saying, “Shavei Israel has for years been the only organization that tends to the needs of the Bnei Menashe, starting from when they are in India.” She also noted that Shavei Israel had agreed to put up matching funds of 7 million shekels.

In response, Freund’s lawyers said their client was awarded the contract without a tender because it was the only organization that had agreed to enter into a joint venture with the State of Israel in this operation by offering matching funds. “It should be clarified and stressed,” they said, “that before entering into a contract with the organization, the tender committee and the treasury published several announcements to the public regarding the future contract, in which they requested offers from other parties interested in entering into a joint venture with the State of Israel for the purpose of absorbing the Bnei Menashe.”

Yet Micha Gross, the director of Amishav, another organization with considerable experience working with the Bnei Menashe, told Haaretz that he was not aware that the Immigrant Absorption Ministry had considered publishing a tender and that “of course” he would have submitted a bid had he known.

Returning a ‘Lost Tribe’

The Bnei Menashe can be traced to three different tribes that originally migrated from Burma (now Myanmar) and now reside in two northeastern Indian border states – Manipur and Mizoram...It was Rabbi Eliyahu Avichail, the founder of Amishav, who “discovered” them more than 30 years ago, and he gave them the name they are known by today. An Orthodox rabbi, Avichail’s great passion in life was finding “lost Jews,” and he would travel the globe in search of them. In his travels, he observed that some of the tra-

ditions of these Indian tribes, such as the observance of three annual festivals and certain life-cycle practices, bore similarities to Jewish rituals, and that some of their folklore appeared to be based on biblical stories. He subsequently began converting them. Most of the Bnei Menashe he brought to Israel were moved to the West Bank and the Gush Katif settlement bloc in the Gaza Strip (before it was evacuated in 2005).

Freund, a former New Yorker with a similar passion for “lost Jews,” joined Avichail’s organization after he left the Prime Minister’s Office in 1999. Not long thereafter, the two had a fall out and Avichail left the organization. Freund subsequently founded Shavei Israel.

Although Shavei Israel reaches out to “lost Jews” around the world, most of its efforts are focused on the Bnei Menashe.

The organization’s single largest source of funding is Freund himself, who, according to its 2013 financial report, contributed from his own pocket close to half of the organization’s 7.8 million shekel budget. The rest of its funding comes mainly from Christian evangelical groups, most prominently Bridges for Peace and the International Christian Embassy Jerusalem.

Thinking ‘more creatively’

Freund, who began his career in Israel working as a press adviser to Netanyahu during his first term as prime minister, is married to the daughter of Pincus (“Pinky”) Green, a billionaire commodities trader who, together with his former partner, the late Marc Rich, received a presidential pardon from Bill Clinton in 2001 after being indicted in the United States on charges of tax evasion. Green serves as one of Shavei Israel’s funders. Freund lives in Ra’anana, north of Tel Aviv, with his family.

Politically, Freund belongs to the ideological right. In his Jerusalem Post columns, he has condemned the government for evacuating Gaza, lashed out against those who support a Palestinian state and praised the settler movement.

In his September 2001 column for The Jerusalem Post, he also spelled out his motivations for working with so-called “lost Jews”: “It seems fair to say that, aside from the danger posed by non-conventional weapons in the hands of Israel’s neighbors, the issue of demography might very well be the greatest threat to the future of

Israel as a Jewish state," he wrote. "As the percentage of Jews continues to decline, it will grow increasingly difficult for Israel, as a democracy, to ignore mounting calls by its Arab minority for cultural autonomy and perhaps even self-rule. And if the day were to come when Arab Israelis could elect more representatives to the Knesset than Jewish Israelis, the Jewish identity of the State would be in grave doubt."

In the piece, Freund noted that the pool of potential immigrants from the Soviet Union was drying up, and there was little reason to expect a wave of mass immigration from the West. "While Israel must certainly continue to promote immigration, both as a means of achieving personal Zionist and Jewish fulfillment and as a national responsibility," he wrote, "it must also begin to think more creatively about how to address the ongoing erosion in the country's Jewish demographic profile."

The recent Bnei Menashe arrivals have not been dispatched to settlements in the West Bank but rather to locations in northern Israel, among them mixed Jewish-Arab towns like Acre and Upper Nazareth, where right wingers tend to perceive an "Arab threat" to the local Jewish population. Through his lawyers, Freund noted that the Bnei Menashe are settled in locations "in accordance with an organized plan of the Immigrant Absorption Ministry." The ministry, in response, said it had no such plan. "We let them go wherever they want with our blessing," it said.

Before Freund found a government willing to embrace his plans to resettle large numbers of the Bnei Menashe in Israel, it seemed he would often use his column in The Jerusalem Post to settle scores with members of previous governments who did not.

In 2006, for example, when the late Ze'ev Boim of the centrist Kadima party, then serving as immigrant absorption minister, blocked a group of Bnei Menashe from coming to Israel, Freund called the decision "illegal" and "immoral," and threatened to sue him.

A year later, Freund's target was Interior Minister Meir Sheerit, who imposed a complete ban on Bnei Menashe immigration. In his column, Freund labeled Sheerit's move "post-Zionism of the ugliest sort, tinged by prejudice and sheer ignorance," and delivered the following warning: "I'd like to put Mr. Sheerit and his colleagues on notice. The Divine process of Israel's return to Zion

is far greater than any single person or even government, and no human power can stand in its way"...

Freund was last year's recipient of the Moskowitz Prize for Zionism (also known as the "Lion of Zion Award"), established by the American billionaire and right-wing activist Irving Moskowitz, who contributes heavily to the settler movement.

The director of the Moskowitz Prize committee, political strategist Ruth Jaffe Lieberman, also serves on the board of Shavei Israel. Asked if there might be a conflict of interest in her filling these two functions, she responded, "During the talks about Michael Freund, I removed myself from the discussions. And I didn't cast a vote."

'No money for food'

Freund maintains that the Bnei Menashe have integrated remarkably well into Israeli society, despite coming from a remote part of the world and having been raised in a very different culture. As he wrote in a piece published on the Shavei Israel website, "They live observant lifestyles, volunteer for combat units in the Israel Defense Forces, and work hard to support themselves and their families. Only 4-5 percent are reliant on social welfare benefits, which is half the national average."

But interviews with members of the community and people familiar with their plight reveal a different picture. It is a picture of a community that has seemingly fallen through the cracks and been left largely to fend for itself, they say. Members of the Bnei Menashe community say they fear that if they speak out, it could affect the chances of their relatives being placed on the lists of those deemed eligible for immigration to Israel. And that, along with Shavei Israel's successful public relations campaign, may explain why most Israelis are likely unaware of their true predicament.

More than 2,500 Bnei Menashe live in Israel today. According to insiders and others familiar with the community, poverty and alcoholism are widespread among these immigrants, and their children tend to lag behind in school.

Because they are not eligible for immigrant benefits when they arrive in Israel, most of the adults immediately look for work and, therefore, have no time to learn Hebrew.

The Knesset Research and Information

Center report published in December 2010 cites a study by researchers at the Emek Yezreel College, which found that most Bnei Menashe find employment quickly, but only in minimum wage and under minimum wage jobs. The study also found that the Bnei Menashe tended to keep to themselves and not mix with other sectors of Israeli society.

Since immigration resumed two years ago, Shavei Israel has been providing the new arrivals with housing at its own privately run absorption centers, while they study for their conversion exams. It also gives them limited financial assistance during this period. After they complete the process, the converts are handed over to Garinim Torani'im – groups of young Orthodox families who try to affect religious and social change in disadvantaged communities.

On a recent visit to such a group in Upper Nazareth, members of the Garin Torani were observed scurrying about, trying to find space at the local school for the 14 new Bnei Menashe children who had just arrived in town. For lack of a better alternative, the children were put into a windowless shack in the courtyard that also serves as a shelter. A young bearded teacher was using space in one of the administrative offices to teach a few of the newcomers basic Hebrew and Torah...

It is not only the newcomers who are struggling. "It would not be an understatement to say we are the weakest and most miserable community in Israel," said Isaac Thangjom, a member of the Bnei Menashe who immigrated to Israel in 1997 independently.

Four years ago, when the Knesset Committee for Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora Affairs visited Kiryat Arba in the West Bank, its members heard from the mayor and his aides about the many problems facing the Bnei Menashe community. More than 700 of them resided there at the time – one of their largest bases in the country.

According to the official protocol of that visit, the mayor reported on cases of two and three Bnei Menashe families living in one small apartment, while aides noted that schools and nurseries in Kiryat Arba were being stretched to the limits and could not provide Bnei Menashe children with the special help they needed learning a new language.

To quote an activist in the Bnei Menashe Council, who today lives in Nitzan after being evacuated from Gush Katif nine years ago (and who asked that his name not be published), "Our people are in a bad way, but they are very afraid to complain."

Responding through his lawyers, Freund said, "Every immigrant experiences difficulties coming to a new country, and it doesn't matter if the immigrants come from Manhattan, Marseilles or Manipur."

Shavei Israel, he added, was in daily contact with social workers and municipal officials, and, to the best of the organization's knowledge, most of the Bnei Menashe experienced a successful absorption in Israel – "among other things, thanks to the personal support, spiritual guidance and economic assistance of the organization."

In their response, the lawyers also noted that Shavei Israel had no legal responsibility to support the Bnei Menashe after they received their immigrant status. Despite that, it did provide certain members of the community with academic scholarships and job training courses. In addition, it dispatches support staff to several towns to assist with absorption.

Amishav's director, Gross, said the reason the Bnei Menashe have not spoken up about their living conditions is that they apparently fear it could affect their chances of being reunited with their relatives. "One of the things that's important to the Bnei Menashe is that relatives of theirs who are still in India can come here," he noted.

Shavei Israel is now campaigning to bring the 7,000 remaining Bnei Menashe to Israel, along with thousands of other so-called "lost Jews."

"Mr. Freund believes with all his heart that these Bnei Menashe deserve to come to Israel, and he will therefore continue to work toward that, including financing this activity – without any intent to profit or gain personal benefit," his lawyers said.

[For more information on Christian Zionists' work, see "Bringing God's Chosen People Home: A study of Christian Zionist strategies used to support and assist the State of Israel," by Silje Belghaug Knarud, unpublished Master's Degree Thesis in History of Religion, Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages, University of Oslo, Autumn 2014. AL]

In the Field

China Considers Foreign NGO Restrictions

China will soon be considering a draft law that is aimed at controlling the activities of foreign nongovernmental organizations and their Chinese partners. Together with two other recently published draft laws, they potentially constitute the most expansive articulation yet of President Xi Jinping's vision of national security. According to the New York Times (May 30, 2015), analysts say the laws are aimed at giving the security forces and courts greater leeway in muzzleing Chinese civil society and corraling the influence of Western institutions and ideas, which Mr. Xi views as a threat.

The foreign NGO law, which could be passed as early as this summer, proposes that such organizations be registered and regulated by the Public Security Ministry and would apply to all nonprofit groups, including schools and artistic organizations. Even those groups with no China operations but who want to hold an event there would have to register with the police. All foreign NGOs would have to find an official sponsor, which could lead them to drop or curtail activities that might be considered politically suspect by officials. Conceivably this would apply to SJI's work in Kaifeng and elsewhere.

Shanghai pushes WWII Jewish neighborhood for UNESCO register

Shanghai is applying to have the neighborhood that sheltered Jewish refugees during WWII added to the UNESCO Memory of the World Register. The Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum is working with the Hongkou district government to complete the application. As part of the application, the city completed the collecting of the refugee list, data bank, literary, video and audio material.

Shanghai also has announced plans to rebuild a cafe where Jewish refugees gathered during their time in the city. The Wiener Café Restaurant, opened in 1939, will be rebuilt using its original blueprints opposite the Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum. It was demolished in 2009 to expand the city subway system. (Other reports state that the café being rebuilt is

The 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Shanghai Ghetto and the end of World War II to be commemorated

The People's Republic of China (PRC) and the World Jewish Congress (WJC) will host, for the first time, an event commemorating the 70th anniversary of the liberation of the Shanghai Ghetto and the end of World War II.

The event was announced following a recent meeting in London between WJC CEO Robert Singer and PRC Minister of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office Qiu Yuanpin.

"We will commemorate, for the first time, part of the Holocaust that tends to get less attention," said Ronald S. Lauder, president of the WJC. "This historic event also marks another step towards strengthening the bonds between the Chinese and Jewish people."

Lauder will chair the event, which will take place in September and include 100 WJC representatives from Jewish communities around the world, representatives of the People's Republic of China, and survivors of the Shanghai Ghetto.

"It is our shared duty to promote the mutual understanding, friendship, exchange and cooperation between the overseas Chinese and Jewish people," said Qiu Yuanpin. "Both Chinese and Jewish nations have suffered at the hands of Fascist forces, but, ultimately, achieved final victory after unyielding struggle. We hope to commemorate this historic moment."

And what's Harbin? Chopped liver?

Dr. Alfonz Lengyel, Founder of the Sino-American Field School of Archaeology, in an email to SJI Board member Dr. Beverly Friend, points out that amidst all the hoopla connected with this year's Jewish commemoration of the liberation of Shanghai, Harbin deserves recognition too. He writes: "It is documented in the publication of the Jewish Institute of the Heilongjiang Academy of Social Science's Harbin Branch that Harbin was liberated from the Japanese by the Soviet forces on 8/21/1945... It should be also commemorated."

Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum Hosts First Wedding

The Shanghai Jewish Refugees Museum has hosted its first wedding, a special moment for an Australian Jew and his Chinese bride.

The couple chose to hold Wednesday night's ceremony in the 90-year-old synagogue that forms part of the museum.

"Usually, our services do not include weddings. But for Jews who want to commemorate the past and request a wedding here, we won't reject them," said Chen Jian, curator of the Jewish Refugees Museum.

The wedding was attended by more than 70 foreigners, many of them relatives of the roughly 20,000 Jews who fled to Shanghai during the war.

International Colloquium "Law & Society: The Jews of Shanghai"

Speakers from this event, which ran June 2-3, included many SJI members and friends: Pan Guang; Zhang Qianhong; Nancy Steinhardt; Maisie J. Meyer; Liliane Willens; Dan Ben-Canaan; Steve Hochstadt; Manli Ho; Chen Jian; Jonathan Goldstein; Xu Xin; Arnon Perlman; Maurice Ohana; Wang Shu-ming; Dvir Bar-Gal and former refugees Lotte Marcus (by Skype), Evelyn Pike Rubin and Lily Klebanoff Blake.

New to Shanghai: Kehilat Shanghai

Kehilat Shanghai is an organization of Liberal, Reform, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and unaffiliated Jews who, together with their families and significant others, are invested in creating and sustaining communal spaces for the celebration of Judaism and Jewish and Israeli culture in a Progressive spirit. The community is comprised of singles, families, interfaith couples, seasoned entrepreneurs, young professionals, teachers, students, artists, and others.

Kehilat Shanghai is affiliated and strongly supported by the WUPJ (World Union of Progressive Judaism) and its regional arms: The UPJ (The Union of Progressive Judaism) in Australia and the UJC (United Jewish Congregation) in Hong Kong.

Contact info:
<http://www.kehilatshanghai.org/>
 Tel: 1 5601 9261 45
info@kehilatshanghai.org

Recently the Jewish community of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (Associação Religiosa Israelita do Rio de Janeiro) donated a Torah to it and Kehilat Shanghai sent a delegate, Ms. Jeanine Buzali, to receive the Torah in person.

Funds are still being sought to pay for expenses associated with this donation. If you would like to support this effort with a contribution, contact Dan Krassenstein at Daniel.Krassenstein@outlook.com and he will send you an array of options (USD, RMB, check, PayPal, etc.) on how to do so.

Meet the Makuya: Japanese Zionists

By Aviva and Shmuel Bar-am
 Excerpted from *The Times of Israel*, May 30, 2015

...The Makuya movement was born in May of 1948, the same month and year in which Israel declared its independence. But the Makuya don't believe in coincidence. In fact, they consider the establishment of the modern State of Israel and the reunification of Jerusalem 19 years later to be the fulfillment of biblical prophecies, miraculous works of God.

Often called New Zionism, the Makuya movement was founded by a successful Japanese businessman, the late Professor Abraham Ikuro Teshima. Professor Teshima was a deeply religious Christian who had early on become disenchanted with the established Church and its western trappings. But he hadn't yet heard the Divine voice. That would come later, a few years after World War II.

Following the Japanese defeat, Teshima tried to help his starving countrymen by producing bread out of seaweed. But it tasted awful, and the factories closed down. Then an American army camp near his home decided to expand. Teshima heard the news from his son, who reported with sorrow that the Americans were planning to close his elementary school and take over the property on which it stood.

Teshima immediately organized a large protest that greatly angered the Americans. When a friend warned Teshima of his imminent arrest, he went into hiding in the wilderness. It was while he was in the volcanic Aso Mountains that he had a personal encounter with God, and heard a phrase from the book of Amos: "I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."

Now he understood that the Japanese famine was not physical, but spiritual. He real-

ized that the Japanese had to return to the basics, to the source – to God. When he was able to safely return home, he closed his business and began teaching the Bible. He had only a handful of students in the beginning. But it was a start, and soon afterwards he founded the Makuya.

Teshima maintained that in order to grasp the spirit of the Bible, it was essential to reach a deeper understanding of the Jewish faith, its people, language and history. Unfortunately, his burning desire to visit Israel was delayed for many years, until Japan and Israel established diplomatic relations in 1961.

As luck would have it, however, in 1954 Teshima met his first Israeli – while riding on a Japanese train. He thought the people next to him might be speaking Hebrew and when he inquired, in English, he learned that they were from Israel. One of them was Professor Israel Slomnitzki, on a mission from the Israeli Agriculture Ministry. The two struck up an immediate friendship, corresponded for years, and in 1961 Slomnitzki invited Teshima to visit his homeland.

Once here, Teshima was unhappy that so many of Israel's holy sites were covered up with churches. But he was delighted to meet pioneers, thrilled at their effort to create a viable state, and convinced that the soul of Judaism was alive and well. So taken was Teshima with the Jewish State that he returned a number of times, bringing some of his disciples along.

Soon Makuya members had begun studying Hebrew at the ulpan in Kibbutz Hefziba. Many ulpan graduates have gone on to schools of higher learning in Israel: to date 1,060 students have attended classes or graduated from Bar Ilan University and the Hebrew University, the Technion, and the universities in Haifa and Beersheba. They learn archeology, Bible and Jewish thought as well as music and other subjects, and their mastery of Hebrew is amazing.

And the Makuya movement is growing fast. They prefer not to give an exact number, citing David's sinful census of his fighting men (2 Shmuel: 24:2). But over 300,000 Japanese subscribe to the Makuya newsletter. Thousands of Makuya have already been on pilgrimages to Israel, with thousands more planning to come. Four students (out of the 35 currently in Israel) live at the Jerusalem Makuya Center, along with its new director Asher Seito Kimura, his wife Tzofiya and their children. Each Makuya member has a Hebrew name, taken, or given to him or her upon arrival in Israel. They chat easily about

their faith, which is based heavily on the Old Testament and doesn't contain even a hint of proselytism. But none of the Makuya will discuss politics. They will talk with feeling, however, about their position on Israel. Every Makuya, they say proudly, identifies with — and wholeheartedly supports — the State of Israel...

Although gravely ill, [Teshima] organized a large pro-Israel demonstration in downtown Tokyo [during the 1973 Yom Kippur War]. It extended over two kilometers and more than 3,000 men, women and children sang joyful Hebrew songs as they danced in the streets. Teshima, who had put his heart and soul into the demonstration, insisted on participating despite the bitter winter cold. He died three weeks later, at the age of 63.

No leader has taken Teshima's place, but the Makuya follow in his path. They planted several forests in Teshima's honor, and every few years, Makuya members come to Israel in large numbers to celebrate Independence Day.

Makuya, in Hebrew, translates as "tent of meeting" — the Hebrew "ohel moed" or the place where man encounters God. Teshima taught that you can find God anywhere, and that it is not necessary to pray in a church. Therefore Makuya worship in houses where they also read the Bible, and study its lessons.

Like Teshima himself, a Makuya minister is called a teacher, and he is well versed in the Bible and other sources. Often he has a regular job and leads his congregation only on the weekends. The Makuya object to institutionalized Christianity and there is no central Makuya religious authority, although a committee of district representatives meets every few months to discuss the movement. Baptism is spiritual - a coming of age ceremony when boys and girls reach the age of 13 and accept adult responsibilities. It takes place on Mount Aso, where Teshima had his encounter with the Lord.

Asher, who completed archeological studies here in 2005, is responsible for those Japanese students and foreign workers in Israel who belong to the Makuya movement (not all of the Japanese in Israel are Makuya, he reminded me). He also receives guests and delegations from Japan, organizes cultural evenings for Israelis and trips for Makuya members, and leads prayers on the Sabbath...

Aviva Bar-Am is the author of seven English-language guides to Israel. Shmuel Bar-Am is a licensed tour guide who provides private, customized tours in Israel for individuals, families and small groups.

China's Interest in Israeli-Palestinian Peace

By Christina Lin

Excerpted from her blog in *The Times of Israel*, May 29, 2015

...In many ways, China may be a more constructive broker for Mideast peace than the west.

Firstly, throughout its history, the Middle Kingdom has understood the need for buffer zones and border security. The ultimate security fence is the Great Wall of China that was built to defend against invasion by northern nomads and inner Asian barbarians. Construction began as early as the Warring States Period (476 BC – 221 BC) and continued to extend in subsequent Chinese dynasties including the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

Chinese consciousness regarding the importance of defensive security fences and walls is also reflected in their strategic concepts, such as naming China's underground nuclear missile tunnels the "underground Great Wall" and cyber defense as "online Great Wall." As such, China may better appreciate Israel's needs for a border security fence and strategic buffer zone to defend against Hamas, ISIS, other terrorists' attacks, and have insights on how to assist in drawing realistic borders towards a sustainable two state solution...

Secondly, similar to Israel, China is also facing radicalization of its neighboring Muslim states and domestic Muslim population. With radical Islam spilling across Chinese border from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and linkage with international jihadi groups in Pakistan's tribal areas, Beijing is facing increasing terrorist attacks in its restive Muslim province of Xinjiang and fear of homegrown radicalization of its population...

Thirdly, unlike France and other European countries, China wants both the Israeli and Palestinian sides to negotiate a peace agreement rather than to internationalize the issue at the UN due to potential blowback on Xinjiang.

According to former US National Defense University fellow Martin Wayne, he argued in his book *China's War on Terrorism* (2008) that Beijing does not want to internationalize Xinjiang's problems for fear that it may become a Kosovo where international forces intervene to assert human rights norms. Indeed in 2009 when Turkey's Erdogan tried to

internationalize Beijing's crackdown in Xinjiang by referring it to the UN, China blocked it.

Finally, Islamists deem Chinese and Israeli land as occupied Muslim territories...

In addition to sharing threats of terrorism with the region, China also has shared interests in maintaining regional stability and security. While US no longer needs energy from the Middle East, China is increasing its energy demand and also rapidly pouring investments into the region as well as negotiating free trade agreements (FTAs) with the GCC and Israel.

Last year, for the first time, Israel's imports from China exceeded that of the US. Statistics released this week by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics showed that Israel imported \$8.1 billion in goods and services from China in 2014, compared to \$7.4 billion in from the US during the year.

Moreover, Israel is a key node in China's Silk Road Economic Belt and an alternative trade route to the Suez Canal via the Med-Red rail. Not only is China investing in infrastructure projects such as seaports and railways, it is also investing in Israeli technologies.

Thus China has direct economic stakes in maintaining stability in Israel and Palestinian territories. Beijing is also well placed to help develop the Palestinian economy, unmatched in its ability to inject immense sums of aid and investment into unstable regions such as Africa and elsewhere, with Chinese companies less risk averse than western counterparts in conflict zones.

Perhaps the time has come for US and EU to move over and make room for the new shareholder in the Mideast peace process. And once ISIS and radical Islam are in retreat, that would be the right time for the great powers to resume the peace talks.

Dr. Christina Lin is a Fellow at the Center for Transatlantic Relations at SAIS-Johns Hopkins University. She is the author of "The New Silk Road: China's Energy Strategy in the Greater Middle East" (The Washington Institute for Near East Policy), and a former director for China policy at the U.S. Department of Defense.

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中國-猶太學院

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The Sino-Judaic Institute is a non-denominational, non-profit, and non-political organization, founded on June 27, 1985, in Palo Alto, California, by an international group of scholars and lay persons, to promote friendship and understanding between the Chinese and Jewish peoples and to encourage and develop their cooperation in matters of mutual historical and cultural interest. Its objectives are:

- 1) The study of the ancient Jewish community of Kaifeng and assisting its descendents as appropriate.
- 2) The study of Jewish life in Shanghai, Harbin, Tianjin and elsewhere in the 19th and 20th centuries.
- 3) The support of Jewish studies programs in China.
- 4) The study of cultural intersections between Chinese and Jews, for example adoptions, literature, diasporas, etc.
- 5) The study of Sino-Israeli relations.
- 6) To cooperate with other groups whose interests lie in Sinitic and Judaic matters.

Membership in the Institute is open and we cordially invite you to join in supporting our endeavor. Our annual dues structure is as follows:

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