

FROM THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

After more than 150 years at the “ends of the earth,” Jewish people are now making *aliyah*—the return to Israel—from the jungles of Peru. In the mid-1800s, Jewish men from Morocco joined other immigrants to South America, seeking their fortunes in the rubber trade that was flourishing at that time in the Amazon jungle. Many of them settled close to the Atlantic Ocean in northeastern Brazil, but others pressed further into the jungle, going up the Amazon River and forming communities in the heart of the jungle in both Brazil and Peru. One of these communities was in the city of Iquitos, Peru, officially the 3rd most remote city in the world!

In the city of Iquitos their descendants have kept their Jewish identity and today celebrate Biblical feasts including Passover. They keep their Jewishness as well through their surnames, including typical Jewish names such as Cohen and Levy.

Just over 18 months ago, the community obtained a Torah scroll with special meaning. It was used by German Jews before the Second World War and was restored after the Holocaust so it could again be used in synagogue worship. When the Iquitos’ Jewish community received the scroll, they went to the regional airport as the plane carrying the Torah landed. They received the scroll with joy, dancing and praising God as they took the Torah to its new home at their synagogue in Iquitos.

Young people in the community are also committed to maintaining their Jewish identity. They download Israeli music and Hebrew lessons from YouTube. At a Jewish Agency expo in May 2012, they performed Israeli dances they had learned from the Internet.

Many members of the Jewish community in Iquitos have decided that Israel, not the Amazon, should be their home. Some have already moved to Israel. In October this year, about 20 families (c80 people) plan to make aliyah, with more to follow later.

After they arrive in Israel, these newcomers will settle in the city of Ramla, not far from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Ezra is committed to helping with household items on arrival. Each person will arrive with only one suitcase and will go to empty flats. We are bringing in some humanitarian aid and buying many household items for them locally.

If you would like to support this project, please go to the support pages and see how you can give. We have committed to support this community as they take their first steps in the Promised Land and we need your help so that we can bless these children of God.

