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## STRANDED IN KANO

I [**David Ben-Dor**] doubt if you know where Kano is. You can look it up on the map of Nigeria in West Africa.<sup>1</sup> I was there in 1963. During the Fall. But who in that climate of eternal heat, on the border of the Sahara Desert, knows whether it is fall or spring? Only the vultures are circling above, settling on the low, thatched roofs, waiting to come down into the courtyard for a morsel of abandoned meat.

The plane leaves only in three days. And I still have to make my rounds in the market of this Moslem town, where everybody but me prostrates himself whenever one of their chieftains rides past in flowing robes on a coal black horse.

The sun is hidden by clouds of sand blowing in from the Sahara, restricting vision to a few yards. It is still early in the afternoon and suddenly I remember:

G-d in heaven! It is *Yom Kippur*. How on earth did I get stuck in this forsaken place? Why couldn't I have waited for another week to make my tour to sell those tires? I had completely forgotten. There I was, at the colonial rest house, watching the fan on the ceiling turn round and round; thinking about atonement....

I got up, walked into the British manager's office, and asked him, "Mr. Walker, could you please tell me if there are any Jews in Kano?"

"Jews?"

"Yes, sir, Jews."

"Well, now let me see. There is Mr. Rokei'ach, but he doesn't want anybody to know that he's Jewish. Then there is Mr. Sidki, but for some reason his store is closed today."

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<sup>1</sup> **Kano** is located near the northern border of Nigeria. It is the capital of Kano State and the second largest city in Nigeria after Lagos, with a population of over 4 million.

"Really? Where does Mr. Sidki live?"

"He lives above his store."

"Could you tell me where his store is?"

"Of course, sir. Walk down the main street and you will find the house on the second corner to your right. It is the only two-story house on the street. You can't miss it."

I started walking. The sand blew into my face. I hardly saw the people in the street, but I finally reached the house. The shutters of the store were rolled down. Everything was closed and quiet. I started banging on the shutters with my fist, and suddenly a window on the first floor was opened.

"Who's there?" a man asked from above.

"*Shalom aleichem*," I said.

"*Aleichem shalom, baruch haba*. Come up the stairs behind the building. We are all waiting for you."

I didn't understand. They were all waiting for me? I never had met the man. Until an hour ago I didn't know that there were Jews in Kano. What made him say that? Slowly, lost in thought, I climbed the stairs.

When they opened the door, I beheld nine men with *tallitot* (prayer shawls) on their shoulders, all greeting me in Hebrew, "*baruch haba*", welcome.

Now I knew why they had all been waiting for me. I was the tenth man to complete the *minyan*, the prayer quorum.

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Source: Supplemented by Yerachmiel Tilles from the first-hand report by David Ben-Dor in "*B'Or HaTorah Journal: Science, Art and Modern Life in the Light of Torah*," as posted on Chabad.org for *Yom Kippur 2015*.