



## **ALONI CHALLENGES AMERICAN JEWS TO REVISE THEIR VISIONS OF ISRAEL**

By Deborah Kalb

WASHINGTON, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- Enamored of the dangers faced by Israelis, some American Jews are unwilling to envision the possibility of Middle East peace, according to Israeli Cabinet member Shulamit Aloni.

"You (American Jews) are in love with the danger we live in," the outspoken Aloni said in an interview Thursday during a 10-day visit to the United States.

"Some American Jews are in love with the excitement of danger and war," she said. "They admired our generals and colonels. I love them too, but would rather they be in parades than at war."

The controversial Aloni heads the left-of-center Meretz bloc, an important junior coalition partner of the Rabin government.

She serves as minister of communications, arts, science and technology in the Rabin government.

Originally, she was Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's education minister. Aloni was removed after her frequent outbursts upset the Orthodox community, especially the Shas party, also a member of Rabin's coalition.

Aloni advocated negotiating with the Palestine Liberation Organization long before the Israeli government ever contemplated such a step.

In an interview with the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, Aloni repeatedly stressed that American Jews should seek Jewish continuity through culture.

"Common efforts of developing modern Jewish thinking, writing and creativity is a new way, and an important one, for Jewish continuity, more than another war," she said.

She urged American Jews to channel their energies into developing Israeli cultural centers and Hebrew studies programs here, and into translating the works of modern Israeli writers.

"Unfortunately, too many American Jews are ready to risk another war," she said. "They are not prepared to gear their minds toward peace."

### **'Look For Other Heroes'**

"Maybe they are in love with our heroes," she continued. "I would advise them to look for other heroes," such as Israeli writers and artists.

"Jews in this country are preaching Jewish values, which are easier to develop during peace, not by occupying other people," she commented.

Aloni said she believes there will be a Palestinian state, in some sort of federation or confederation with Jordan.

"But the question is not if it will be a separate state," she added. "The question is will (the Palestinians) gain sovereignty as human beings."

The most important element of last September's Israeli-PLO signing ceremony was "mutual recognition," she said.

Once both sides recognize each other, she said, one side "cannot continue to ignore the rights of the other people for sovereignty."

Aloni spoke positively of President Clinton's approach to the Middle East peace process.

"He is not interfering, he is not pressing, but he gives the best help a friendly president can give," she said of Clinton.

She also commented that Clinton's meeting last weekend with Syrian President Hafez Assad provided a "very important opening" in the peace process.

Here in Washington, she visited the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum Wednesday, but her plans to meet with U.S. officials Thursday were cut short by the shutdown of the federal government due to inclement weather and a power shortage.

She was planning to meet with officials of Americans for Peace Now and other American Jewish leaders during her visit to United States.

## **ISRAELIS LEADERS VEXED AT ASSAD FOR USING CLINTON AS 'SPOKESMAN'**

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- Yitzhak Rabin and Ezer Weizman are not satisfied with the promises Syrian President Hafez Assad made last Sunday to President Clinton.

Both had critical words Thursday for the Syrian leader.

President Weizman, speaking to settlers in the West Bank, said Assad had "made Clinton his spokesman" and had let the American president articulate positions the Israelis want to hear from Assad himself.

Although Clinton gave assurances that Syria is ready for a full peace and normalized relations with the Jewish state, Weizman said he wants to hear those words from Assad's own lips.

He said Assad should have directly addressed Israel's security concerns and should seek Israel's confidence as the late Egyptian President Anwar Sadat did, coming to Jerusalem and addressing the Knesset.

Supporting a move favored by the settlers, Weizman praised Prime Minister Rabin's decision to call for a national referendum on any major withdrawal from the Golan Heights, Syria's requirement for a peace agreement.

Rabin, addressing a Labor Party meeting in Tel Aviv, said 1994 must see a peace breakthrough between Israel and Syria if the region is not to return to a dangerous political impasse.

Rabin spoke of his disappointment with Assad's performance in Geneva and said the referendum on the Golan would give the Syrian leader the opportunity to persuade Israel that he is a worthy peace partner.

Although Rabin insisted his government has a clear mandate to negotiate territorial compromises in exchange for peace, he nonetheless appeared to think that a complete withdrawal from the Golan -- particularly at a time when Israel is making territorial concessions to the Palestinians -- is best put to a national vote.

Rabin, who is both prime minister and defense minister, said a referendum is preferable to early elections. In general elections, he said, many issues and many parties come to the fore, not just the land-for-peace question on the Golan.

The ongoing but rocky Israeli-Palestinian negotiations being held at the Sinai border town of Taba adjourned Thursday, after the two sides

drew up a paper enumerating points of agreement and disagreement over security issues, which have held up implementation of the self-rule accord.

The Taba talks were scheduled to resume Monday.

In the interim, both Foreign Minister Shimon Peres and Palestine Liberation Organization Chairman Yasser Arafat received the Taba document Thursday night.

The two will have the opportunity to discuss it when they meet Saturday in Oslo, where they will both attend the funeral for the Norwegian Foreign Minister Johan Holst, who died last week after suffering a stroke.

Holst was instrumental in organizing at least 13 rounds of the secret talks in the Norwegian capital between Israel and the PLO that resulted in the self-rule accord. He personally hosted the two sides in his own home.

### **CHRISTOPHER DENIES U.S. ANGST OVER ISRAELI BALLOT ON THE GOLAN**

By Larry Yudelson

NEW YORK, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- Secretary of State Warren Christopher has denied reports that the American government is upset at Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's promise to hold a referendum before any Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights.

Christopher said such a referendum is an internal Israeli matter, according to two participants in a conference call with Christopher and representatives of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

The conference call Wednesday followed President Bill Clinton's meeting with Syrian President Hafez Assad on Sunday. Christopher characterized Assad's positions as progress, according to the sources.

Regarding the Israeli soldiers missing in action and believed to be held in Lebanon or Syria, Christopher reportedly said Assad "may see this as a humanitarian issue" and be forthcoming.

Assad is thought to have influence over some factions in Lebanon, where he stationed tens of thousands of troops.

### **YESHIVA STUDENTS NEAR JERICHO WILL PASSIVELY RESIST EVACUATION**

By Cynthia Mann

JERUSALEM, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- Students at a yeshiva at the ancient synagogue north of Jericho said this week they would offer passive resistance to any effort by the army to evacuate the site.

The Israeli military issued orders Wednesday to vacate the yeshiva immediately for renovations that reportedly were requested by the yeshiva authorities.

But officials with the yeshiva say they suspect the military's real purpose for the evacuation is to shutter the yeshiva, which opened four years ago at the seventh-century Shalom al Yisrael synagogue near Jericho. Fifteen students study there daily.

Rabbi Mordechai Rabinovich, the head of the yeshiva, said the authorities were using the renovations as an excuse to close the institution because they do not want responsibility for its security after Palestinian autonomy is established in the Jericho area.

To prove his point, Rabinovich cited military orders to move everything out of the yeshiva, including all books and the Torah ark.

"We believe that, for some reason, the government does not feel capable of meeting the challenge of securing a Jewish place of worship under the autonomy," he told Israel Radio.

He warned that military troops would have to carry the students out in order to evacuate the school.

A few dozen people came to the yeshiva Thursday to demonstrate their support for the students, and the leader of a group called the Haredi Committee vowed to hold protests against an evacuation.

Meanwhile, efforts to reach a compromise were being made by yeshiva administrators, settlement leaders, National Religious Party Knesset member Hanan Porat and Deputy Defense Minister Mordechai Gur.

### **ARABS ARE GETTING THROUGH PEACE WHAT THEY LOST IN WAR, SHARON SAYS**

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) -- Warning that the Arabs are about to achieve through peace what they failed to accomplish in war, Ariel Sharon drew large crowds during a recent three-day swing of Southern California.

During his appearances here, the hard-line former defense minister of Israel harshly criticized the present Israeli government, which has signed a peace accord with the Palestine Liberation Organization.

He also attempted to raise money for Jewish settlements in the territories and downplayed his own plans for the future.

The veteran general and Likud stalwart told reporters, "The Arabs have learned that while the Jews can't be defeated in war, they fall apart by peace. When Jews hear the word 'peace,' they melt."

Sharon charged that since the signing last September of the self-rule accord between Israel and the PLO, all concessions had come from the Israeli side; and that of 15 Palestinian terrorist organizations, only one -- PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat's mainstream Al Fatah group -- had accepted the accord.

Sharon's visit to Los Angeles and Orange counties was part of two-week tour he made of 10 North American cities, sponsored by the Yesha Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza.

During his cross-country tour, which included numerous private meetings with potential donors, Sharon hopes to raise between \$2 million and \$3 million, according to Yechiel Leiter, executive director of Yesha's foreign desk.

During a news conference here, the feisty 66-year-old Sharon saved his bitterest denunciations for the government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, which he charged had all but abandoned the settlers.

Likening the settlers in the territories to the pioneers who established the first Jewish towns in Palestine, Sharon said that "160,000 Jews (in the settlements) are being boycotted by the Jewish government in Jerusalem."

The actions of the Rabin government necessitated his current trip, Sharon said.

"I never thought I would have to go around the world knocking on doors and asking people to donate money for ambulances, more kindergartens and supplementary education (for the settlers), because these are not being provided by the government," he said.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:**

**PLANS FOR YESHIVA ON MOUNT OF OLIVES  
CREATE STORM OF CONTROVERSY IN ISRAEL**

By Michele Chabin

JERUSALEM (JTA) -- From afar, the Mount of Olives seems timelessly tranquil. At dusk, the setting sun casts a golden hue on the white stone houses nestled on the mountainside. Boys herd flocks of goats across empty tracts of land and into the picturesque villages of eastern Jerusalem.

But in reality, life on the Mount of Olives is not so calm. Though much of the violence related to the past six years of the Palestinian uprising has diminished over time, tensions between local Arab and Jewish residents in the area are approaching the boiling point.

At the center of the conflict is the Beit Orot Yeshiva. Established three and a half years ago by Rabbi Benny Elon, the yeshiva now wants to expand its facilities to an adjacent plot of land. The lot belongs to Irving Moskowitz, an American Jew who purchased the land in 1985.

The problem is that the municipality of Jerusalem promised local villagers years ago that a secondary school would be built on the site.

To establish their claim to the disputed lot, the yeshiva students constructed a dozen sukkahs on the site just after the Sukkot holiday. After complaints from their Arab neighbors -- and threats from then Mayor Teddy Kollek -- they dismantled the structures.

Although the new mayor, Ehud Olmert, has proclaimed support for the yeshiva and other such projects in eastern Jerusalem, he was forced to order the yeshiva to remove several newly erected mobile homes from the lot for legal reasons.

After a much-publicized standoff last week, the yeshiva complied with the order and dismantled the caravans on Monday night.

Although the land in question measures just a couple of acres all told, the issues it raises are much, much larger.

For Rabbi Elon and many other Israelis, Beit Orot and its expansion plans are an open declaration of Israel's sovereignty over eastern Jerusalem, and the rights of Jews to live there.

**A Thorn In Their Sides**

For many Arabs, the yeshiva's presence on the mountain is a thorn in their sides -- what one teen-ager called "another example of Zionist imperialism. This encroachment into east Jerusalem must be stopped at all costs, or people will be killed."

Referring to the ancient Jewish cemetery on the Mount of Olives, Elon said, "The Jewish presence here must be more than just tombs and burial sites," he said. "This is the only capital of Israel, in the only Jewish state."

While Kollek has long maintained that Jerusalem is and must remain the undivided capital of Jerusalem, he consistently blocked Jews' attempts to settle in Arab villages on the grounds that it inflamed tensions in this already volatile city.

He also refuted the yeshiva's right to build on the adjacent lot for technical reasons.

"Many years ago, before the yeshiva moved in, the area was designated for an Arab girls school," Kollek said.

"The yeshiva knew this before moving in. They were told that they would have only limited space," he said.

"Since moving in, they have tried everything to take possession of the land. There are more

than enough places all around Jerusalem to build new yeshivot," Kollek added.

In response, Elon said, "Kollek did many good things for Jerusalem, but he has an obsession against us. It is discrimination that the only lot on this mountain that is registered to a Jew has been earmarked for other purposes."

Elon insisted that "the building plan doesn't even mention the word 'Arab.' The site allows for two types of structures: a school or a building for public services. We fall under the second."

But it will be Olmert who will ultimately determine the yeshiva's future.

Elected on a platform stressing "every Jew's right to live anywhere in the capital," Olmert must walk a very fine line, alienating neither Jews nor Arabs during his first decisive months in office.

Ruth Yaffi, Olmert's spokeswoman, described the mayor's stand this way: "Olmert continues the support of the establishment of the yeshiva in the Beit Orot neighborhood."

She continued, "The land belongs to private citizens who support the establishment of the yeshiva in this area. He has asked the city engineer to locate an alternative site for the girls school."

**JEWISH GROUPS CREATE FUNDS  
TO AID CALIFORNIA QUAKE VICTIMS**

By Alexandra J. Wall

NEW YORK, Jan. 20 (JTA) -- Jewish organizations have been deluged with telephone calls from around the country, with callers questioning how they can help the victims of the earthquake that devastated the Los Angeles area Monday.

As a result, Jews have a broad choice of groups to which they can donate disaster relief.

"The response has been very positive, but it is still early to tell how much money we will collect," said Jean Bowdish, administrative assistant for the Social Action Commission of the Union of Hebrew American Congregations.

The UAHC has notified all of its congregations to publicize the plight of the quake victims at Shabbat services.

Donations can be sent to UAHC Commission on Social Action, 838 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10021.

The Conservative movement's disaster relief fund is centered at United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, 155 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10010.

Relief funds can also be sent to the Union of American Orthodox Congregations, Emergency Earthquake Campaign, 333 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001.

The American Jewish World Service, judging from the volume of calls, expects to collect more than \$50,000.

The organization, which in the past collected donations to help victims of an earthquake in India, reported that response is greater now, perhaps because many people have friends or relatives in the Los Angeles area.

AJWS' address is 15 W. 26th St., New York, N.Y. 10010.

The Council of Jewish Federations has also set up a relief fund: CJF Earthquake Emergency Fund, 730 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10003.

B'nai B'rith International is collecting contributions, which can be sent to the B'nai B'rith Disaster Relief Fund at 1640 Rhode Island Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

**BEHIND THE HEADLINES:****LONG HISTORY OF INDIAN JEWS DWINDLES, BUT JEWISH, ISRAELI ISSUES ARE POPULAR**  
By Tom Tugend

NEW DELHI, India (JTA) -- Jewish travelers are rarely more welcome than at the 400-year-old Pardesi Synagogue in Cochin, a port city near the southwestern tip of India.

"By the grace of God, foreign Jews show up so we can have a minyan," said Jackie Cohen, the 77-year-old caretaker of the Sephardic synagogue standing at the end of Jew Town Road.

Five decades ago, there were five synagogues and 2,500 Jews in Cochin. Today, the community numbers seven families with 22 members who have not eaten any meat since the last kosher butcher departed 15 years ago.

The first Jews in India were seamen sent by King Solomon to find timber for his Temple in Jerusalem, Cohen asserted. Pedantic historians might disagree, but there is ample proof that Jews settled on India's west coast, south of Bombay, at least 1,000 years ago.

"Ten to 15 years from now," predicted Cohen somberly, "there will be no more Jews in Cochin and we'll turn this synagogue over to the Indian government as a museum."

The modern watershed year in the millennium-long history of Indian Jewry was 1948, when the establishment of Israel heralded to the subcontinent's deeply religious Jews the promised return to Jerusalem.

A year earlier, the blood-drenched birth of an independent India, and fear of a socialist government, had propelled the country's Jewish merchant princes to depart for Britain and other English-speaking nations.

Within a few years, nine-tenths of India's Jews had left, reducing the Jewish population from roughly 50,000 in 1947 to 5,000 now.

This mass migration was unique in Jewish history because it was not rooted in persecution or discrimination by a hostile majority.

Indeed, during well over 100 interviews with Jews in Bombay, Calcutta, New Delhi and Cochin, not one could recall a single personal instance of anti-Semitism in India's history.

**The Poorer Went To Israel**

The three main strata of India's former Jewish society, which emulated India's caste system, joined in the exodus.

But the poorer went mostly to Israel, while the wealthiest Jews, who identified most closely with the British colonial regime, opted mainly for London; Sydney, Australia; and Canada.

At the apex of the Jewish "caste" system were the so-called Baghdadis, Jews whose ancestors came from Iraq, Iran and Syria in the 19th century.

Led by the fabled Sassoon clan, the "Rothschilds of the East," they quickly made fortunes in cotton, jute or tobacco-processing -- and in the opium trade with China.

The Sassoons endowed Jewish hospitals, schools, synagogues and old-age homes, which still bear their name although now are largely filled with Hindus and Muslims.

A step below were the "white Jews" of Cochin, whose ancestors were thought to have come from Spain and Portugal after the 1492 expulsion.

The bulk of India's Jews, then as now, consisted of the Bene Israel, who tended to be

small businessmen, artisans, clerks -- as well as excellent soldiers and officers in the British colonial army -- who claim descent from Jews fleeing the Land of Israel after the destruction of either the First or Second Temple.

On the bottom rung were the generally poor "black Jews" of Cochin, whose ancestors may have come from southern Arabia.

Until the 1948 exodus, each of these sub-communities maintained its own synagogues and rigid social boundaries, but shrinking numbers of Jews have led to desegregation by default.

"If we were to discriminate now, there wouldn't be anybody left," said one prominent Baghdadi in Bombay.

While the last official census was taken in 1981 and all population figures in this teeming subcontinent of close to 900 million people are suspect, it is estimated that about 4,000 Jews live in Bombay, where they work mainly in business, the professions or in government service.

Although there is no single full-time rabbi in Bombay, nor or in all of India for that matter, three good-sized synagogues and a half-dozen smaller ones still operate.

Each Passover, two emissaries from the Chabad Lubavitch movement in New York come to conduct services.

**Those Who Remain Feel Comfortable**

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee maintains an active welfare program for the aged and indigent in a community that, historically accustomed to the charitable munificence of its wealthiest families, has evolved no real structure to care for its own.

The Bombay Zionist Confederation meets three or four times a year while ORT (Organization for Rehabilitation through Training) still operates separate schools for boys and girls, though few Jewish students remain.

During the last two decades, the Jewish population of India has largely stabilized. Those remaining usually have relatives in Israel but feel substantially comfortable, both economically and psychologically, in India.

Calcutta, the world's most densely populated city, once had between 5,000 and 6,000 Jews, including small colonies of Jewish refugees from Germany, and later from Shanghai and Singapore.

In New Delhi's only synagogue, the tiny Judah Hyam Prayer Hall, a recently affixed plaque marks a reverse in the customary flow of Diaspora-Israel giving.

It notes, "Air Conditioning for the Synagogue was donated by the Israel Business Delegation during the Visit of His Excellency Shimon Peres -- 17 May 1993."

The establishment of an Israeli Embassy in late 1992 has given the permanent community of some 40 Jews a badly needed shot in the arm.

On the first night of Chanukah, Ambassador Ephraim Doweck and most of his 40-person staff were on hand to light the outdoor menorah, joined by a throng of young Israeli backpackers.

During the evening's euphoria, Gulu Ezekiel, a local journalist, boasted that the congregation had solemnized a wedding the previous week, with the bride a Hindu convert.

Ezekiel also noted that the daughter of a U.S. Embassy official was to celebrate her Bat Mitzvah a month later.

To the customary announcement, the Bat Mitzvah's parents added the heartfelt plea, "We need a minyan by 9:30 a.m."