

**REFORM GROUP OVERWHELMINGLY REJECTS MEMBERSHIP FOR HUMANIST CONGREGATION**By Caren Benjamin
Washington Jewish Week

WASHINGTON (JTA) -- In a decision that its leaders see as simply a reaffirmation of long-standing beliefs, the Reform movement voted overwhelmingly this week not to admit as a member a congregation that calls itself "humanistic" and deletes all references to God in its services.

Beth Adam, a small, 14-year-old congregation in Cincinnati applied for membership in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the umbrella group of the Reform movement, in 1991.

The following year, the UAHC's Midwest regional New Congregations Committee and the Midwest regional board discussed the application and decided against admitting Beth Adam. The matter then went to the group's national board, which met in Washington over the weekend for its semi-annual session.

The final vote, 115 against admittance, 13 for and 4 abstentions, did not come as much of a surprise to Rabbi Eric Yoffie, vice president of the 860-congregation UAHC.

Yoffie had expected the vote to be closer, but he also thought the congregation would "make a better case, show greater flexibility to their approach."

The congregation's presentation before the board, Yoffie explained, made a case for its having a "questioning" or skeptical approach. That is not, however, what it sounded like to him. Instead, he said, the presentation made them sound like they were "a kind of Orthodoxy."

'A Fundamental Rejection Of God'

Rather than questioning the nature of God, congregation members "systematically reject" all notions of God and "then said you could question it," Yoffie said.

The clincher for him was a story presented by the congregation in which a 13-year-old girl wanted to say the Shema -- Judaism's touchstone prayer of God's oneness -- at her bat mitzvah and was talked out of it after discussion with the rabbi. "Their starting point is not a questioning but a fundamental rejection of God," Yoffie said.

Speaking in favor of the application, Beth Adam's Rabbi Robert Barr said that "Beth Adam does not seek to stifle its members in their religious quest. Rather, we seek to provide support and encouragement for their religious growth."

The congregation's past president, James Cummins, said, "Many of our members have a concept of God. But no specific or particular God concept is imposed on any member out of respect for the individual and that individual's efforts to tie expression to his or her deeply held religious beliefs.

"All of our liturgy seeks to be compatible with our philosophy and to protect each member's personal religious journey."

Reform Judaism traditionally has accepted

belief in a personal God, explained Melvin Merians, chair of the UAHC board.

"People's search for God has always been welcome in Reform Judaism," said Merians. "As a result, many Reform Jews feel very strongly about their own different interpretation of God. But the fact that Judaism, and Reform Judaism has always been God-centered has been reaffirmed by this debate."

In this way, the debate, though difficult, may actually have led to greater cohesion within the movement, rather than opening it up for division, according to participants.

A few days before the debate Rabbi Alfred Gottschalk, president of Hebrew Union College, said he "could live with it," if the congregation were admitted to the union.

"We don't believe in pariahs," Gottschalk said. "We don't like to exclude Jews. We've lost too many already."

Still, he expressed some discomfort with the idea of opening the movement up to a congregation that "says we will not say the Shema when Jews have died for the right to say it."

No one in the debate, however, "questioned whether they (Beth Adam members) were Jews or a part of the Jewish community," Yoffie said. Rather, the focus was on the role of congregations as opposed to individuals.

"An institution like a congregation has to allow for the search for God in its liturgy," Merians said. "There has to be a chance for congregants to reach for God through prayer together with the rest of the members of the congregation."

The end result, Yoffie said, "was an affirmation by our leadership that God is fundamental to who we are and that belief in God is the foundation in which our movement exists and must be built.

"Institutions have to begin with a commitment of faith. Individuals can accept it or not, but the institutions do not have that freedom," said Yoffie.

CHRISTIAN COALITION LAUNCHES CAMPAIGN TO SCUTTLE EEOC GUIDELINES ON RELIGION
By Matthew Dorf

WASHINGTON, June 14 (JTA) -- Victims of religious harassment in the workplace could have a harder time redressing their grievances if a coalition of conservative organizations and senators succeeds in throwing out a set of guidelines issued by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

The EEOC guidelines on religion, which were issued for the first time last year and are subject to a period of public comment prior to official enactment, have come under attack by conservative Christian groups such as Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition.

The conservatives, backed by a group of at least 21 senators, contend that the guidelines would create a religion-free workplace rather than shield employees from harassment.

In a letter to acting EEOC chair Tony

Gallegos, the senators, led by Sens. Richard Shelby (D-Ala.) and Don Nickles (R-Okla.), urged the EEOC to remove religion as a category protected against harassment and discrimination.

Many Jewish organizations and Christian groups have joined forces to combat the push from the right in an effort to maintain religion as a protected category -- along with sex, race and national origin.

Businesses use EEOC guidelines to set policies for hiring, firing and general workplace rules in an effort to prevent discrimination lawsuits.

In addition, nearly every employee who accuses an employer of discrimination must file a complaint with the EEOC before pursuing a lawsuit.

In its guidelines on religion, EEOC defined harassment as "verbal or physical conduct" that shows hostility toward an individual because of his or her religion.

Opponents of the guidelines say the language is such that it would discourage any discussion of religion, including an invitation to a Bible supper or a church function.

While some Jewish groups have said the EEOC language is problematic, they contend that the guidelines are necessary in order to avoid outright discrimination.

"Religious harassment is a real problem and a serious problem," said Abba Cohen, Washington director of Agudath Israel, an Orthodox group.

According to Cohen, observant Jews are often harassed with questions concerning their style of dress or their refusal to work on Shabbat.

'What Kind Of Signal Would That Send?'

"We are profoundly concerned about the issue of free religious expression, but the answer is not to take religion out of the dialogue and to hurt religious workers," Cohen said. "The answer is to protect all Americans rights."

EEOC first published its guidelines defining religious harassment last year.

The guidelines drew little response until the Rev. Jerry Falwell, the fundamentalist Christian leader, sent a "Dear Christian Friend" fundraising letter in March.

In his letter, Falwell claimed that workers could be "fired for saying a prayer over lunch," "keeping a Bible on your desk" or "wearing a cross."

At a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on the subject last week, Sen. Howard Metzenbaum (D-Ohio), called Falwell's assertions "absurd and ridiculous."

"It is simply unacceptable to exclude religious harassment from the EEOC guidelines," Metzenbaum said.

"What kind of signal would that send? That we abhor racial or sexual slurs, but that religious slurs are somehow less abhorrent, or even acceptable?" the senator asked.

American Jewish Congress counsel Mark Stern accused the religious groups of turning the debate over the EEOC guidelines on religion into "Armageddon."

At a news conference preceding the Senate hearing, Stern said, "Evangelical and deeply religious Christians in this country ought to be the last people urging a rule of law that would

permit harassment, because there are plenty of places where they would be the victims."

Stern testified at the hearing on behalf of a broad coalition that included the American Jewish Committee, the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, the Anti-Defamation League, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism and the General Conference of Seventh Day Adventists.

Richard Foltin, legislative director and counsel at the AJCommittee's office of government and international affairs agreed with the importance of the guidelines.

"Removing religion from the proposed guidelines would do nothing to protect religious free exercise," Foltin said.

"To the contrary, doing so would only give free rein to those who would make the workplace inhospitable to employees with whose religious views they disagree," he said.

The EEOC, meanwhile, is not revealing how it will rule on the guidelines.

At the Senate hearing last week, EEOC officials said the commission would issue a decision after the public comment period concludes at the end of June.

IN WAKE OF MOSES ROSEN'S PASSING, ROMANIAN JEWRY ELECTS A NEW LEADER By Odette Caufman Blumenfeld

IASI, Romania, June 14 (JTA) -- Some five weeks after the death of Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen, Romania's Jewish community has elected a new leader.

The executive committee of the Federation of Romanian Jewish Communities on Monday unanimously elected Professor Nicolae Cajal as the federation's new president.

For more than four decades, Rosen was both religious and organizational leader of Romanian Jewry. Following his death on May 6, communal leaders agreed to a separation of the two powers.

The election of Cajal, which was reported on Romanian television and radio stations, was greeted warmly both within and outside the country's Jewish community.

Born in Bucharest in 1919, Cajal is a microbiologist whose research has earned worldwide recognition. He is a vice chairman of the Romanian Academy and is director of the academy's medical science division.

In addition to his scientific career, Cajal was elected to serve as an independent senator in the country's first post-revolutionary parliament in 1989.

Cajal was for many years one of Rosen's advisers, and he has been actively involved in social assistance programs run by the federation with the support of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

During interviews with television and radio stations, Cajal acknowledged the presence of anti-Semitism in the country and suggested that one way to combat it was to publicize the activities of Romania's Jews in the fields of culture and science.

He expressed the hope that such publicity would lead to greater understanding of Jewish values, as they apply both to life in Romania and to the civilized world as a whole.

NEWS ANALYSIS:

WHEN WILL ARAFAT ARRIVE IN JERICHO?

AS USUAL, IT'S THE \$64,000 QUESTION

By David Landau

JERUSALEM, June 14 (JTA) -- Yasser Arafat, the Palestine Liberation Organization leader, is doing what he does best: keeping everyone guessing.

This time, Arafat's will-he-won't-he drama surrounds his planned arrival in Gaza and Jericho and his dramatic, emotion-laden "return" after more than a quarter-century of enforced exile.

Arafat's advent to the two self-governing areas will both seal and symbolize the irreversible significance of the "Gaza-Jericho First" plan as the initial step in realizing Palestinian self-government throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The issue of Arafat's return has been on the negotiating table ever since the first secret talks between Israel and the PLO began a year-and-a-half ago in Oslo, Norway.

Despite months of speculation and discussion, it is still unclear what Arafat's entrance will look like or exactly when it will be.

Arafat had at one point indicated he would arrive June 5, the anniversary of the outbreak of the 1967 Six-Day War. The most recent date to surface is July 20.

Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin confirmed Monday that he has not yet received any formal notification from the PLO leader regarding his planned date of arrival.

Other Israeli officials said they do not know whether Arafat plans to visit both of the self-governing enclaves, and if so, how he proposes to cross from one to the other.

Among the reports and rumors regarding Arafat's arrival that were circulating here this week:

* Arafat wants to make a grand entrance together with President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, King Hassan II of Morocco and King Hussein of Jordan, and is trying to coordinate such an event.

They Would All Visit Jerusalem

The story surfaced in the Haifa-based Israeli Arabic newspaper Al-Ittihad, which cited unnamed high-level PLO sources in Tunis. The paper said if Arafat succeeded in bringing the three Arab rulers with him, they would all visit Jerusalem and pray at the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

* Arafat has already submitted to Israel a list of some 1,200 names of PLO officials now living and working in Tunis, whom he proposes to transplant to Jericho as the administrative structure of the self-government.

This would mean the transfer of the bulk of the PLO's bureaucracy, leaving Foreign Minister Farouk Kaddoumi and Mahmoud Abbas with a small staff in Tunis, to conduct the organization's international affairs. Under the terms of the Israel-PLO declaration of principles, the self-governing authority is barred from conducting foreign or defense policy.

* Arafat is determined to make his entree only after the World Cup soccer competition ends in the United States in mid-July.

The PLO leader reportedly wants to assure himself maximum international media attention. Some Israeli news organizations have already run

interviews with Jericho residents who stated quite clearly that if the chairman arrives during a Brazil-Argentina match, he will find the streets of the autonomous town entirely empty.

* Arafat will make his final arrival plans only after he is certain the self-governing authority has enough cash to pay its immediate bills.

The PLO leader publicly stated this demand at a meeting in Paris last weekend with countries that have promised aid to the Palestinian authority.

Arafat's aides came away from that conference with a guarantee that the countries would soon make available some \$42 million.

Saudi Arabia reportedly has already transferred \$10 million to the self-governing authority, its first contribution to the PLO since Arafat sided with Iraq during the Persian Gulf War.

While Arafat has yet to make an entrance, top PLO official Nabil Sha'ath arrived in Gaza on Tuesday, apparently set to take up residence in the autonomous region.

On the Israeli side, meanwhile, security measures designed to guard Arafat have moved into high gear.

According to reports here, 10,000 Israeli policemen will be deployed to protect Arafat.

In addition, the Shin Bet secret service will be working to protect the man who for years was its No. 1 enemy.

Right Wing Vows Mass Demonstrations

While Israeli security forces prepare to protect the PLO leader, right-wing parties and extraparliamentary groups have vowed massive demonstrations -- in Jerusalem and in Jericho -- to greet his arrival.

In the heart of Jerusalem, a coalition of right-wing groups opposed to the Israeli-PLO accord has established a tent encampment intended to draw settlers from all over the territories. Some extremists have even called for Arafat's assassination.

Last week, former Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren issued a halachic ruling regarding the death of the PLO leader. "Every means possible must be used to prevent the master murderer from stepping upon the soil of the sacred Land of Israel," Goren wrote. "He must be prevented from sullyng Jerusalem and the Temple Mount."

To support his ruling, Goren cited remarks Arafat made during a recent speech at a Johannesburg mosque calling for a jihad, or holy war, to regain Jerusalem.

That speech, whether it revealed Arafat's true intentions or was designed to shore up support among Palestinian hard-liners, had a clear, immediate and negative impact on Israeli public opinion.

The adverse Israeli reaction apparently made an impact on Arafat, who sent three letters to Rabin last week.

Rabin's office would not publicly disclose the contents of the letters, but media reports here suggested the letters were intended to repair the damage caused by the Johannesburg speech.

Arafat also reportedly reaffirmed, as Rabin had demanded, that he is committed to the peace process. He also reportedly suggested that Jerusalem be kept off the agenda of the talks for the time being.

NEWS ANALYSIS:**REBBE'S FUNERAL OFFERS GLIMPSE INTO POST-REBBE LUBAVITCH MOVEMENT**

By Yosef I. Abramowitz

NEW YORK, June 14 (JTA) -- The hastily arranged funeral on Sunday of the Lubavitcher rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, gave a glimpse into the post-rebbe Lubavitch movement.

The funeral and its aftermath revealed centers of power and modes of operation. And the day itself was testimony to the resilience of the movement and its followers.

For all the criticism Lubavitch attracted from other Jewish movements for its messianism, when the unimaginable day came, it went with no mass suicides, conversions or violence.

On this dark day in Lubavitch history, which will become a new Lubavitch holiday, the true nature of its messianism was revealed.

For most Lubavitchers, it was not a belief in a Jesus-like savior. Rather, Lubavitch messianism was a reflection of the love each follower had for the rebbe and their burning hope that an uncertain future and hostile world would be all right.

Lubavitchers wanted their ailing leader to live forever in the same way children want and often believe that their parents should live forever. And so it was mostly the children who lined up along the police barricades who looked the most dazed and who cried as the car with the rebbe's body sped away to the cemetery.

The death of the rebbe may temporarily galvanize the splintered movement for at least a month during the traditional mourning period. When the rebbe's predecessor died in 1950, the behind-the-scenes campaign to succeed him picked up steam only after the 30-day period.

It took the Lubavitch movement a full year to appoint Menachem Mendel Schneerson to the helm. He was the seventh rebbe of the movement and, according to many observers, probably the last.

This time succession will be different because the rebbe had no children and no apparent heirs. He left a will, but it does not address the issue of succession.

Four Centers Vying For Power

The rebbe leaves behind four distinct power centers that over the next year will jockey for power and funds.

Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, the rebbe's spokesman and driver, represents the mainline faction that includes many of the rebbe's 1,400 emissaries in over 40 countries and many of the movement's largest financial donors.

Rabbi Leib Groner, a longtime secretary to the rebbe who until recently enjoyed widespread respect and affection among Lubavitch leaders, has been in a classic leadership struggle with Krinsky.

There is little ideological difference between the two men and the people they represent, although they have clashed over the rebbe's medical treatment and differ in nuance over Lubavitch's recent messianic upsurge.

The two men and their followers set up camp on different floors of the Manhattan hospital where the rebbe was being treated for the stroke that eventually claimed his life.

Rabbi Shmuel Butman, who heads the influential Lubavitch Youth Organization and the International Campaign to Bring Moshiach, is somewhat of a loose cannon and represents the more feisty, messianic followers of the rebbe.

Last year Butman tried to anoint the rebbe as Moshiach, or Messiah, but had to back down in the face of Krinsky's behind-the-scenes maneuvering.

And then there is the 40,000-strong Lubavitch community in Israel, which is centered in Kfar Chabad along the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem highway. When reports of the rebbe's death led the morning news on Israeli radio, most of Kfar Chabad's 5,000 inhabitants rushed to the bank and then to Ben Gurion Airport to try to secure a seat on any New York-bound flight.

The Israeli branch of Lubavitch is split among numerous leaders and factions, and tends to be more messianic than its Brooklyn-based counterpart. Upon hearing news of the rebbe's death, Mordechai Ashkenazi, chief rabbi of Kfar Chabad, wept and said he believed that the rebbe, standing before God now, would ask to be reunited with his followers in this world and to "bring them toward their righteous Messiah."

While each faction was represented at the ohel, the mausoleum in Queens where the rebbe and his father-in-law are buried, the day clearly belonged to Krinsky and his followers.

It was Krinsky's office that coordinated the funeral, the logistics, the police, the media, and, most importantly, who had access to the body at Lubavitch headquarters and at the cemetery. When the first group of mourners left the ohel, Groner was among them while Krinsky stayed behind.

Few Spoke About Succession

The second group that was allowed into the ohel was the shlichim, the emissaries who collected their cemetery passes from Krinsky's office prior to the funeral and who have depended on Krinsky more and more in the two years that the rebbe was incapacitated.

Amid the crowds, few if any spoke about succession, partly as a sign of respect for the rebbe and partly out of fear of what the battle for succession would bring. Lubavitch's political and spiritual influence and success in raising hundreds of millions of dollars has been up until now dependent upon the rebbe's unifying personality and role.

The ad-hoc governing structure in the days following the funeral has the groups working together, with Krinsky as the gentle but firm coordinator.

As the mourning period passes, the rebbe, even in death, will continue to be the figurehead, the spiritual parent and the inspiration to all Lubavitchers who will study his writings and watch videotapes of his lectures.

Baby boys will be named after him. Some of the rebbe's ambitious disciples will say they are the rightful ones to interpret the rebbe's teachings and apply them to the future. Most followers, however, will rededicate themselves to doing good deeds, bringing Judaism to the far corners of the earth.

They will justify the rebbe's death by saying that the Jewish people were not yet worthy of the Messiah, and they will honor the rebbe's life with their lives of continued service.