

NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israeli government leaders sought to calm a jittery public with reassurances that Syrian troop movements in Lebanon were tactical steps designed to exert pressure to resume peace talks on Syrian terms. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Israel would not be swayed by the maneuvers to change his government's opposition to territorial compromise on the Golan Heights.

■ Sponsors of the organized Jewish community's voter registration drive are distancing themselves from their own guidebook because it attacks the religious right. Jewish Republicans charged that the publication amounts to a partisan effort to get votes for Democratic candidates. [Page 3]

■ Jewish groups praised New York Gov. George Pataki's order to terminate a contract with a security agency affiliated with Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam. The agency, X-Men Security, has been accused of distributing anti-Semitic literature in a housing complex in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn.

■ An 18-year-old Jewish man stabbed an Arab woman in eastern Jerusalem, lightly wounding her. The alleged attacker shouted that he wanted to join imprisoned Yemenite leader Uzi Meshulam, who, with some of his followers, was barricaded inside his home for two months in 1994 and had a shootout with Israeli authorities.

■ Nurses across Israel held a one-day strike, calling for larger hospital nursing staffs. Union leaders said patients were being denied needed treatment because of the shortage of nurses.

■ Shimon Peres, Labor Party head and former Israeli prime minister, proposed a memorial service for slain Israeli leader Yitzhak Rabin that would be held at the Israel-Gaza border. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat would be among those invited.

■ An Israeli airman was killed and two were missing after an Israeli helicopter crashed in the Mediterranean Sea during military exercises.

FOCUS ON ISSUES**Rabbinic sexual exploitation: Leaders breach a sacred trust**

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — On a hot summer day in 1991, when her husband had taken their two adolescent sons out of town, Connie Rappaport's rabbi decided to come over for a swim in the lake near her house.

Rabbi Arnold Fink, the family's spiritual leader at Beth El Hebrew Congregation in Alexandria, Va., for more than a decade, had been counseling one of the boys and had grown close to Rappaport and her sons.

When rabbis go astrayPart 1
of a series

"I was welcoming a friend and teacher who had been part of my religious and family life for a long time," said Rappaport.

As they ate the ice cream sundaes she had served, Fink suddenly shoved his spoon in her mouth and said, "You must taste mine," Rappaport recalled in an interview.

"In the next instant he grabbed me and pulled me over to him in a tight embrace. I found myself locked with him in an intense and passionate kiss.

"A passionate, sexual involvement was not what I expected," Rappaport, a free-lance radio reporter, said of her ensuing six-month relationship with the rabbi.

Fink, in a recent interview, acknowledged the relationship, but said it was appropriate because he was not counseling her in any way at the time and he believed that Rappaport was in the process of getting divorced.

But Rappaport says that although her marriage was troubled, she planned to stay with her husband another several years until their sons were in college. She was also dealing with the recent death of her mother.

"I honestly did not know how to say 'no' to my rabbi, the most important authority figure in my life at the time," Rappaport said.

Rappaport's story is far from unique.

Although the overwhelming majority of rabbis do not misuse their power by sexually harassing or abusing their congregants, sexual exploitation happens more often than anyone would like to think.

"We're dealing with a huge problem that I don't think we fully understand," said Rabbi Mark Winer, senior rabbi at the Jewish Community Center of White Plains, N.Y.

Rabbinic sexual exploitation involves more than adultery. It is the misuse of a powerful role, experts say, and includes unwanted sexual advances toward a congregant, verbal or physical harassment, taking advantage of a counseling relationship or even acquiescing to a congregant's overtures.

American society more conscious of the issue

American society has grown more conscious of the issue of clergy sexual misconduct in recent years. And the problem has not escaped the Jewish community, as several recent cases illustrate:

• In a well-publicized case, Rabbi Robert Kirschner, a charismatic and successful young Reform rabbi who led Northern California's largest synagogue, allegedly sexually exploited and harassed female congregants — including an anorexic woman — over a period of several years.

The father of four children, Kirschner was married at the time. When four of his victims came forward to the synagogue board and demanded his resignation, he complied, with an exit package worth close to \$400,000, according to local news reports. A dozen women ultimately came forward to complain and at least three women settled out of court with the synagogue and its insurance company.

Today, Kirschner works as the program director of the Skirball Cultural Center in Los Angeles, which is affiliated with the Reform movement's rabbinical seminary.

• Early in 1995, a congregant complained that she had been fondled by a widely beloved Conservative rabbi. The rabbi had led her Philadelphia-area synagogue for nearly 50 years. Once she came forward, the floodgates

opened. At least a dozen women in the congregation said the rabbi had been verbally harassing and fondling them, with some incidents dating back 40 years. The rabbi was forced to retire early.

• In mid-1995, a Reconstructionist rabbi was accused of pedophilia by someone he allegedly had molested 17 years earlier, when he worked as youth director at the boy's congregation.

When questioned by members of the Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association's ethics committee, the rabbi admitted to having molested one or two other minors since being ordained eight years before. The association expelled him earlier this year.

Although no official statistics measuring the extent of the problem of rabbinic sexual misconduct exist, there are some reliable indicators, say those who have studied the issue. In the mid-1980s, when Winer, a member of the Reform rabbinic organization's executive committee, informally studied the 60 largest congregations in his movement, he found that during a 20-year span, allegations of rabbinic sexual misconduct resulted in nearly as many pulpit changes as deaths and retirements combined.

Experts on clergy sexual misconduct — Jews and non-Jews — estimate that the incidence of rabbinic sexual exploitation is about the same as among Protestant ministers. A 1992 analysis of surveys of Protestant ministers from five mainline denominations revealed that 39 percent had had sexual relationships of some type with congregants, according to Marie Fortune, founder and director of the Seattle-based Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence.

Twelve percent of the ministers surveyed admitted to having sexual intercourse with their congregants.

Leaders of each of the American Jewish community's major religious organizations vehemently disagree that the Protestant figures apply to the Jewish community.

"That number bears no relationship to the reality of incidents in our community," said Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the head of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations. "I think it is a wildly exaggerated figure and until there is evidence to the contrary, I don't believe it."

'Different levels of mistakes'

Rabbi Joel Meyers, executive vice president of the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly, said, "I don't believe 38 percent is right."

"I don't want to sound like I'm denying the fact that I know there probably is such sexual exploitation," he said, but "our approach to the whole issue of human functioning, including sexuality, as Jews is quite different than that of Protestants or Catholics, and I think that our approach by and large is much healthier. I have a feeling that there is less of the exploitative."

Rabbi Steven Dworken, executive vice president of the Rabbinical Council of America, an Orthodox organization with about 1,000 members, said the Orthodox rabbinate, too, is less exploitative.

"We're all human beings and all have the potential to make mistakes," he said. "But there are different levels of mistakes and I would like to think that an Orthodox individual would be particularly careful when it comes to any kind of suggestion of impropriety."

But many rabbis working in congregations and other settings say the comparison with the Protestant figures confirms their own sense of what is happening in the rabbinate. "People who make light of it, who say it's a few rotten apples, don't get it," Winer said. "When you have an epidemic like this, you have to look at something going on underneath the surface."

Rabbi Nina Cardin, a member of the executive

council of the Conservative movement's rabbinic organization, said she believes that "we as rabbis don't yet know how to handle this."

When a married rabbi has sex with a congregant, or a single rabbi has sex with a married congregant, more than adultery is at issue. Similarly, any sexual relationship between a rabbi and a congregant he or she is counseling — formally or informally — is widely considered inappropriate. Jewish and non-Jewish experts in the field say that there is something that comes with the title "rabbi" that some members of the clergy do not understand and others exploit: power.

Rabbis have spiritual, psychological and emotional power over their congregants, say experts in clergy sexual misconduct. No matter how egalitarian the relationship between rabbi and congregant appears to be, they say, there remains an ineluctable imbalance of power.

"Rabbis, or any religious figures, embody a representation of God whether they want to or not," said Debra Warwick-Sabino, director of the California Center for Pastoral Counseling, an agency that deals with clergy sexual misconduct. "With other people you have a secular type of trust, but with clergy there is a sacred trust."

Warwick-Sabino said she was sexually harassed by Kirschner, the California rabbi, which she says led her to study the issue professionally.

Some rabbis dispute the notion of a power imbalance. "A rabbi is not God, not an emissary of God. A rabbi is a teacher; our tradition is clear on that," said Fink, the Virginia rabbi.

'I felt like I was making love to God'

But Rappaport, the congregant who accused him, had a different view. "I never called him 'Arnold.' He was 'Rabbi,'" she said. "I felt like I was making love to God. That's what made it so powerful."

Fink, who has since remarried, said in a telephone interview that when he dated Rappaport, he made it clear to her that "I'm dating her as a person, not as a rabbi, that this could in no way be construed as a rabbi or counselor relationship."

After the rabbi broke off the relationship, Rappaport brought a complaint to the Reform movement's rabbinical organization, claiming that Fink had exploited her. In response, the ethics committee of the Central Conference of American Rabbis sent Fink a letter of censure for conducting a relationship that it said had "the appearance of impropriety."

"In publicly accusing me, Connie grabbed a different kind of power," Fink said. "My hands are tied behind my back. The congregation has been victimized by it."

Fortune, of the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, said: "A congregant who turns to her rabbi for counsel or as a student is not his peer."

"She is not in a position to be fully consenting even though she may be eagerly engaged in this process" of sexual relations and "may even have initiated it."

Mental health professionals call it a "diminished capacity to consent" when congregants or patients are unable to rebuff an unwanted overture from a clergy member, therapist or doctor. Fifteen states have criminalized sexual exploitation between therapists and clients. Some of those laws apply to clergy as well.

According to Arthur Gross Schaefer, a Reform rabbi at Kehilat HaAlonim, in Ojai, Calif., when a rabbi sexually exploits a congregant in some way, the damage can be more profound than when a doctor or therapist does the same thing. "Not only is a congregant being abused by a very powerful figure, but the tradition is abusing them and God is abusing them." □

Attack on religious right spurs flap over voter registration drive

By Matthew Dorf and Daniel Kurtzman

WASHINGTON (JTA) — Sponsors of the organized Jewish community's voter registration drive are distancing themselves from part of their own guidebook because it attacks the religious right.

Jewish Republicans launched a broadside attack against the guide last week, charging that the "1996 Get Out the Vote Program Plan and Action Manual" amounts to a partisan effort to urge votes for Democratic candidates.

A sample sermon, which is included in the guide and which assaults the religious right, has drawn fire from Matt Brooks, executive director of the National Jewish Coalition, the Republican Jewish group.

Brooks said that even though he supports the effort to register American Jews to vote, he is consulting an attorney to investigate whether to file charges against the Jewish groups for what he says is partisan activity.

As non-profit, tax-exempt organizations, Jewish groups and synagogues are prohibited by the Internal Revenue Service from engaging in partisan political activity.

The charges prompted the sponsors of the effort to apologize for the tone of the offending section. At the same time, they maintained that the sermon and the larger effort to register voters is not partisan.

"This is a small blemish in a much larger effort," said Lawrence Rubin, the executive vice chairman of the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council.

NJCRC and the four Jewish religious movements sponsored the voter guide, which was endorsed by dozens of major Jewish organizations and local federations.

The flap came to a head as the largest religious right organization, the Christian Coalition, gathered here during the weekend for its annual convention.

It also came as the centerpiece of the coalition's legislative agenda, the passage of a religious equality amendment to the Constitution, appeared likely to die in Congress.

'Peddlers of coercion'

The voter guide's sample sermon admonishes American Jews that "the religious right is a threat to our nation, to the Jewish community and to our fundamental liberties."

The sample sermon goes on to say that "the leaders of the religious right are peddlers of coercion who, if given the chance, will launch a radical assault on pluralism, civil rights and religious freedom."

Brooks of the NJC says the statements, using code words, amount to a call to vote for Democrats.

"In the minds of the Jewish community, the religious right and the Republican Party are linked," Brooks said. "For any member of the Jewish community who was sitting in shul during the High Holy Days and heard this sermon, they could have [reached] no other conclusion but to register and vote Democrat."

Whether any rabbi actually used the sermon is unknown. One official with a religious organization who sponsored the effort and asked not to be identified said, "No rabbi worth his salt would have used the sample sermon."

Sponsors of the effort agree that the section on the religious right had, as Mark Pelavin, associate director of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, put it, "a more combative tone and was more aggressive than is appropriate."

But he, like other sponsors, disputed Brooks' charge that it advocates partisan activity.

"Those who are magnifying the one paragraph, in one appendix, of a 20-page document should frankly be ashamed of themselves," said Pelavin, whose organization prepared the guide.

As for Brooks' threat to take legal action, Marc Stern, co-director of the American Jewish Congress' legal department, said Brooks would have a difficult time proving his case. "The IRS generally acts only when there is the clearest of evidence," Stern said. "That does not appear to be the case."

The voter guide is not the first time that the Religious Action Center has locked horns with the Christian Coalition. When the Federal Election Commission filed a lawsuit last month accusing the Christian Coalition of mobilizing to support Republican candidates, Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center, hailed the action.

In a statement, Saperstein chided the coalition for "being a booster of one political party."

Officials with the Christian Coalition did not return numerous requests for comment.

Not all American Jews, however, believe that the Christian Coalition is a danger for the Jewish community.

Two rabbis, Yechiel Eckstein and Daniel Lapin, addressed the Christian Coalition's annual convention here last week. Eckstein, founder and president of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, praised the coalition for bringing "moral sanity, sobriety and principles back into society."

He received a standing ovation from the more than 3,000 activists when he said, "True Christians are among the Jews' best friends."

In an apparent swipe at some in the Jewish establishment, Lapin, founder of Toward Tradition, a group of Jewish conservatives, told the gathering, "Remember that there are all kinds of attempts that the secular left employs to silence us religious conservatives."

School prayer amendment unlikely

Meanwhile, what had been the centerpiece of the Christian Coalition's legislative agenda — a constitutional amendment that would allow for organized school prayer — appeared to be breathing its last gasps in the 104th Congress.

Prospects for passage of a school prayer and religious liberties constitutional amendment were slim from the start: The Senate has never considered it, and it has always been uncertain whether the votes would be there in the House.

Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) had promised the Christian Coalition that the House would vote before Congress adjourns at the end of September to enable the coalition to include a list of how each member voted in the 45 million voter guides it plans to distribute to 100,000 churches in October.

But congressional leaders have since shied away from that promise, wary of a divisive debate about religion in the waning weeks of Congress, according to observers.

A dispute between Republican lawmakers over language of the measure is largely to blame for its demise in this Congress.

Two factions, one led by Rep. Henry Hyde (R-Ill.), the other by Rep. Ernest Istook (R-Okla.), have been unable to agree on whether an amendment should focus broadly on religious freedoms or explicitly allow for student-sponsored prayer in public schools.

And at the Christian Coalition's convention, there was scarcely an utterance about school prayer or constitutional amendments. "We interpreted that as a fairly significant sign that there's no organized constituency pushing hard for this right now," Pelavin said. □

Reform group criticizes police in wake of anonymous threats

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israel-based group of the Reform movement is criticizing the Jerusalem police for failing to find those responsible for making telephone threats to the movement's office.

The Israel Religious Action Center, an agency of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, filed the complaint last week after coming under a barrage of anonymous hate calls during the past three months.

Police officials said they had traced some of the calls to telephones located near the Chasidic yeshivas of Gur and Slonim in fervently Orthodox areas of Jerusalem.

The office's complaint comes amid increased tensions between fervently Orthodox groups and more liberal streams of Judaism that emerged after Orthodox parties won 23 seats in the Knesset and a strong role in the governing coalition.

Knesset member Meir Porush, leader of the fervently Orthodox Agudat Yisrael Party, deplored the calls but said he was sure they had not been made by yeshiva students.

Anat Galili, the spokesperson for the center, was critical of the police for not arresting anyone even though the first complaint was filed more than three months ago.

She noted that a caller making telephone threats to Aharon Barak, chief justice of the Supreme Court, had been arrested after just one day.

Barak received the threats a month ago, after the court issued a ruling that kept a major Jerusalem thoroughfare open on the Sabbath and religious holidays. □

Russian premier condemns recent attacks on synagogues

By Lev Krichevsky

MOSCOW (JTA) — Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin has condemned the recent bombings of two synagogues in Russia.

The premier's statement was included in his Rosh Hashanah message to the country's Jewish community.

"I'm using this opportunity to express my indignation about recent terrorist explosions at the synagogues in Moscow and Yaroslavl," said Chernomyrdin.

He called synagogues Russia's "national sacred places" and said that "an end should be put" to their desecration.

Chernomyrdin's statement was the first public comment by a Russian official on the April bombing of the Yaroslavl synagogue and last month's attack on the recently reopened Lubavitch synagogue in Moscow.

The attacks caused no injuries, but both buildings were seriously damaged.

Jewish leaders hailed the premier's message.

"I'm happy that we received such a response from the prime minister," said Pinchas Goldschmidt, chief rabbi of Moscow. □

Chasidim converge on grave in Ukraine for new year's rite

By Lev Krichevsky

KIEV, Ukraine (JTA) — Following a tradition that dates back to the beginning of the last century, some 8,000 Chasidic pilgrims made their way last week to the small Ukrainian town of Uman to visit the grave of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav at Rosh Hashanah.

Seeking the fruits of a deathbed promise their leader made, members of the Bratslaver Chasidic sect from

the United States and Israel converge annually on Uman, a city of about 50,000 halfway between Kiev and Odessa.

Rabbi Nachman, who was born in 1772 and the founder of Bratslaver Chasidism, became famous for his teachings and mystical interpretations of Jewish texts.

A great-grandson of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Chasidism, Rabbi Nachman emerged as one of the leading figures of the burgeoning Chasidic movement.

Suffering from tuberculosis, Rabbi Nachman moved to Uman to be near the mass grave of the Jews of the town, who were forced to choose between conversion or death during the Chmielnicki revolt and massacres of 1648-49.

According to his wishes, when he died in 1810, Rabbi Nachman was buried among the 20,000 martyrs of the Haidamak persecutions in the 18th century, which were more limited in scope than the Chmielnicki massacres, but even more terrible in their cruelty.

On his deathbed, he promised his followers that he would personally intercede on behalf of anyone who visited him, saying that he would lift them out of hell by their peyos, or earlocks.

Since then, his followers have returned to Uman every year on Rosh Hashanah to pray, sing and dance at his grave. He remains the only leader, or rebbe, that the Bratslaver Chasidim have ever had.

The pilgrimage to Uman has become such a central event for Bratslaver Chasidim that a small international uproar broke out in 1993 when then-Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk agreed to a request from then-Israeli President Chaim Herzog to transfer Nachman's remains to Israel.

Both the Israeli and Ukrainian presidents, who thought they would be doing the Chasidim a favor, dropped the idea after they were besieged by protests from the group, who insisted that the remains stay in Uman. □

Netanyahu, Weizman excluded from speaking at Rabin yearzeit

By David Landau

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A Cabinet committee has drawn criticism for its decision to exclude President Ezer Weizman and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu from the list of speakers at the official ceremony commemorating the anniversary of the death of Yitzhak Rabin.

The decision, which was made last week by the Cabinet's Ceremonies and Insignia Committee, came in deference to the wishes of the Rabin family.

The slain premier's widow, Leah Rabin, has expressed outrage at Weizman's failure to mention her husband in his speech at the opening of the new Knesset earlier this summer.

She has also frequently voiced the view that the political right, led by Netanyahu, was indirectly responsible for the atmosphere of threats that preceded Rabin's murder and that Netanyahu has never admitted this responsibility, much less apologized for it.

The Israeli daily Ha'aretz said in a Sept. 8 editorial that the state ceremony commemorating the first anniversary of the Nov. 4, 1995, assassination must rise above Leah Rabin's sensitivities.

"The Cabinet committee erred when it failed to distinguish between the family's ire and the official nature of the ceremony," the editorial said.

"Propriety and protocol require that the president and the prime minister speak."

The memorial ceremony is scheduled for Oct. 24, which corresponds to the 11th day of Cheshvan, the Hebrew calendar date of the Rabin assassination. □