

NEWS AT A GLANCE

- **President Clinton expressed disappointment with the lack of progress by Israeli and Palestinian leaders during two days of talks in Washington.** Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, however, called the summit a victory. The summit concluded amid new reports of violence in the territories. [Page 1]
- **Israeli helicopters rocketed Hezbollah bases in southern Lebanon** after fundamentalist gunmen wounded two Israeli soldiers, it was reported.
- **Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with about 40 Jewish officials in Washington.** In a passing remark, Netanyahu chided as "not being helpful" those Jews who criticized the Israeli government during the recent conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, participants said.
- **Republican presidential hopeful Bob Dole was scheduled to meet in Washington with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.**
- **First lady Hillary Rodham Clinton rallied her husband's Jewish supporters in a conference call to kick off the Clinton-Gore Jewish Leadership Council.** More than 1,000 people at some 65 sites listened in to the hourlong program that included an update on the Middle East summit under way in Washington.
- **A Jewish attorney in Houston filed a complaint against a Texas judge who forced him to take off his yarmulka in court.** The judge told Gil Fried to remove his yarmulka before testifying last month as an expert witness at a civil trial.
- **Researchers are finding more evidence that as many as one in 40 Ashkenazi Jewish women has a gene linked to breast cancer,** but there is no consensus on how to apply the new genetic knowledge, scientists said.
- **Two suspected far-right extremists were arrested in Austria after they stormed an exhibition on Nazi war crimes and threatened more than 200 visiting schoolchildren,** according to a news report.

After the summit, talks shift back to negotiators in the region*By Matthew Dorf*

WASHINGTON (JTA) — It's back to the Middle East.

Israeli, Palestinian and American negotiators are shifting their talks back to the region after a two-day emergency summit here failed to gain momentum in a teetering peace process.

And while the sides are at least now talking, the prospects for the next round of meetings, scheduled for Sunday, appeared dim as the tension in the territories intensified.

President Clinton expressed disappointment that the negotiators were not able to reach any formal agreement in Washington. "We have not made as much progress as I had hoped," Clinton told reporters as he pleaded for calm in the Middle East.

"Please, please, give us a chance to make this work," Clinton said as Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian Authority head Yasser Arafat sat stone-faced and grim-looking behind the president in the East Room of the White House.

The principals did not address the media, leaving Clinton to field questions alone.

At one point, he offered them the floor as reporters peppered them with questions, but the Israeli premier and Palestinian leader refused to speak.

Arafat and Netanyahu neither shook hands nor exchanged glances during the half-hour session with reporters.

After the session, however, the two leaders shook hands and left together.

But in a separate briefing with reporters later on, Netanyahu said the meetings were a victory because the summit served to "cement the principle that the path to peace is through negotiations, not through violence."

"Peace can progress as long as security holds," the Israeli premier said.

Arafat had also scheduled a separate news conference, but canceled it at the last minute.

Clinton had called the summit to try to salvage the peace process after it was ravaged by last week's explosion of violence.

Rioting by Palestinians — touched off when Israel opened a new entrance to an archaeological tunnel alongside the Temple Mount in Jerusalem's Old City — quickly escalated out of control, with Palestinian police and Israeli soldiers exchanging gunfire.

By the end of the week, 57 Palestinians and 15 Israelis were killed.

In the territories, a tense quiet reigned — one that Palestinian officials warned could erupt into violence should the outcome of the Washington summit disappoint residents. In the West Bank on Wednesday, there were reports of residents stockpiling food and sandbagging homes in preparation for a possible resumption of hostilities.

Near the town of Halhoul, a 17-year-old Palestinian reportedly was shot dead by Israeli army fire after he apparently threw a firebomb and stones at Israeli cars. Four other Palestinians were wounded in the incident.

'People are frustrated'

In Bethlehem, stones were thrown at Israeli soldiers near Rachel's Tomb. Palestinian police dispersed the demonstrators.

"There has been an order from the high commander not to protest or engage in any demonstrations or other activities," the mayor of Kalkilya told Israel Radio. "But people are frustrated."

In Gaza, Palestinian police were on alert for possible resumptions of violence. Palestinians observed a five-minute symbolic strike in solidarity with Arafat and to protest Israel's continued closure of the territories.

Israeli tanks, meanwhile, were moved into positions around Jewish settlements and near Palestinian population centers in the territories.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai said the stepped-up Israeli presence was only a measure of preparedness. "We are not going to war," he said during a visit to Jewish settlements in the Gaza Strip.

The meetings in Washington, which began Tuesday, continued virtually non-stop for two days at all levels. Jordan's King Hussein also

participated in the summit. Despite concerns that Netanyahu and Arafat would not meet face-to-face, they did come together.

The Americans had sought an agreement that included an Israeli commitment to redeploy from Hebron on a specific date in exchange for a Palestinian pledge to renounce violence as a means to attain diplomatic gains.

Both sides, however, refused to sign on.

Trying to put a somewhat positive spin on the summit, Clinton said both Arafat and Netanyahu, by coming to Washington, had recommitted themselves to a "non-violent future" and showed that there is "no alternative to the path of peace."

The talks Sunday, scheduled to take place at the Erez Crossing near the Gaza Strip, will not include the region's leaders. Instead, U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross will meet with senior Israeli and Palestinian officials.

The top item on the agenda will be Hebron, Clinton said.

Netanyahu told reporters that he "made it very clear that we are committed to a redeployment in Hebron. We are not reluctant to do it."

Netanyahu has said he would uphold the agreement to redeploy Israeli troops from most of the West Bank town, but wants to negotiate modifications to take into account the security needs of Hebron's Jewish settlers.

He said that when the talks resume Sunday, they will be continuous and will focus simultaneously on Hebron and security issues. He said he rejected calls to set a date for redeployment in Hebron because that is "a certain way to obstruct the negotiations."

When asked whether the peace process is back to square one, the president said there is "a clear commitment not to renegotiate agreements by which both sides are bound." □

(JTA correspondent Naomi Segal in Jerusalem contributed to this report.)

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Hebron's Jews seek support through tours of community

By Michele Chabin

HEBRON, West Bank (JTA) — Not prepared to let diplomats decide its future, the Jewish community of Hebron is once again on the offensive.

In mid-September, just a week before widespread clashes between armed Palestinians and Israeli soldiers left dozens of people dead and hundreds more wounded, the community launched a major public relations campaign to win new supporters.

Hebron is widely regarded as a litmus test of Israeli-Palestinian relations. Under intense pressure from critics who view the settlers' presence there as an unnecessary obstacle to peace, the community — 52 families and 200 yeshiva students — are trying to prove otherwise.

In addition to underscoring their right to remain in the city, which has 120,000 Arab residents, the settlers are trying to convince their government that any Israeli troop redeployment will result in yet another Hebron massacre.

For the Jews of Hebron, the word "massacre" relates not to the 1994 killing spree by Kiryat Arba settler Dr. Baruch Goldstein, but to the murder of 67 Jews by Arab rioters in 1929.

Working on the assumption that most Jews and Christians would support their cause if they knew more about Hebron's history — as well as the settlers' precarious security situation — the community says it is trying to "educate" the public.

"What many people don't realize is that we're not just 50 families living in Hebron, but the representatives of

all Jewish people who believe Jews have a right to live here," says Shani Horowitz, a mother of seven children.

In the year since the signing of the Interim Agreement, in which Israel formally pledged to redeploy its troops from most of Hebron, the community has openly encouraged Israelis and tourists to visit their city on day trips, weekends and Jewish holidays.

Although the campaign did in fact attract thousands of sympathetic or merely curious visitors, the settlers say a bigger push is now needed.

Unless more support, financial and otherwise, is generated, the settlers fear that the Israeli army will indeed redeploy, a move they believe will endanger their security.

Just before the recent violence in Jerusalem and the territories, the community placed "Visit Hebron!" ads in the Jerusalem Post and other daily newspapers. Promising "an enlightened and captivating tour," the ad stated that "all security precautions are scrupulously observed."

When this reporter and eight tourists took the tour in late September, these precautions were absolutely essential. The evening prior to the visit, and on the day itself, sporadic street fighting, which later intensified into armed clashes, broke out in Hebron.

Riding at all times with an armed guard in a bus with shatterproof windows, the tour participants felt no imminent danger. At only one time, during a visit to Hebron's tiny Jewish enclave of Tel Rumeida, was the tour temporarily halted, due to rioting a few streets away.

Had the tour taken place a day later, when Israeli troops and Palestinian police exchanged fire outside the Tomb of the Patriarchs, the experience might have proven very dangerous indeed.

Stressing Judaism's roots to the city, tour guide Moria Zeira took the five Jewish and four Christian visitors to Hebron's four Jewish enclaves, and to the Tomb of the Patriarchs, which is now a shared mosque and synagogue.

Sitting in the domed room that Jews use as a synagogue, she pointed to a locked door.

"Jews and Arabs used to share the room on the other side, but since Baruch Goldstein, the guy from Kiryat Arba who killed 29 Muslims while praying here, Jews have prayed in this part."

This was one of the only references to Goldstein or his actions during the five-hour visit. During a 15-minute film presentation, the 1994 Hebron massacre was never mentioned.

Instead, the film and overall tour focus exclusively on Jewish history, from the time the patriarch Abraham purchased land in Hebron and King David's sojourn there, to the 1929 massacre of Jews and Hebron's "liberation" during the Six-Day War.

'The Jews are sitting ducks'

The tour's emphasis is on the danger to Jewish interests in Hebron, past and present. Although some of the tour's participants may not have shared their hosts' political views, all said they came away with a better understanding of Israel's political predicament vis-a-vis the disputed city.

"This tour showed me that the Jews are sitting ducks, really vulnerable," said Yehuda Herman, a tourist from New Jersey. When asked whether he thought the tour's presentation was balanced, Herman said, "No, it's one-sided. There's no Arab opinion, and I would have liked to hear both sides. Still, I'm glad I came."

Among the tour participants were Thea and Bernhard Hessellund, a Christian couple from Denmark.

"We have been to Israel many times but had never been to Hebron," said Thea. "Our position is pro-Israeli but not anti-Arab. This trip just confirmed our view that it will be extremely difficult to find a solution." □

Israeli court asked to stop woman from surrogacy effort*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli man, ordered by the Supreme Court to grant his estranged wife possession of frozen eggs fertilized with his sperm, has asked a lower court to bar her from continuing the surrogacy process in Israel.

The request marked the latest twist in the drawn-out drama between Danny and Ruti Nahmani, whose headline-making case has been proceeding through the Israeli court system for more than five years.

In a 7-4 ruling last month, the high court said Ruti Nahmani's right to motherhood superseded Danny Nahmani's right not to be a father.

Last year, a five-judge panel had ruled in the husband's favor. The ruling set a precedent with the judges' decision that the state could not impose parenthood on men or women.

The couple had married 12 years ago, but remained childless.

After a bout with cancer, Ruti Nahmani had a hysterectomy, and the couple later decided to attempt in vitro fertilization. At that time, surrogate motherhood was not yet legal in Israel, though a law has since been enacted to make it so.

Danny Nahmani subsequently left his wife and had two daughters with another woman.

After last month's Supreme Court ruling in her favor, Ruti Nahmani issued an appeal to women in Israel to be surrogates for the fertilized eggs.

In response, Danny Nahmani this week sought to invoke a legal technicality to prevent his wife from continuing the process. His lawyer, Diana Har Even, said surrogacy legislation, passed in March of this year, requires the parents of the fertilized egg to sign an agreement with the prospective surrogate mother. The agreement is in turn submitted to a Health Ministry committee for approval.

By law, the committee must receive recommendations from a doctor, social worker and psychologists regarding the parties' suitability to continue the process.

Har Even said the former couple had not begun this process when a court initially ruled in Ruti Nahmani's favor, the decision that the 11-justice panel upheld last month. Har Even said the process was created to protect the unborn child, and did not allow the preferences of one parent to be placed before the well-being of the child.

Danny Nahmani said he submitted this request because of the hardships the Supreme Court ruling has caused him. He said Ruti Nahmani was refusing to grant him a divorce and that he was still required to pay her monthly support payments of some \$700. He also said all their common property remains in Ruti Nahmani's possession and that he is now unemployed and unable to support the children he has with his current partner. □

French Jewish leader seeks to moderate hate speech law*By Lee Yanowitch*

PARIS (JTA) — A human rights commission headed by a leader of France's Jewish community has advised Justice Minister Jacques Toubon to tone down controversial new legislation aimed at toughening the country's hate speech laws.

Toubon had asked the National Consultative Commission on Human Rights to give an opinion on the measure, which would make anyone issuing a statement against "an ethnic group, nation, race or religion" liable to a year in prison and a \$60,000 fine.

Sanctions would increase to two years in prison and a \$100,000 fine if the remark is judged to incite discrimination, hatred or violence.

The bill was widely criticized — on the left as well as within France's center-right coalition — as threatening freedom of speech by giving courts too much of a free hand in interpreting what constitutes a racial statement.

The human rights commission — headed by Jean Kahn, president of the Consistoire, the body responsible for the religious needs of France's 600,000-strong Jewish community — praised Toubon's proposal to stiffen existing anti-racism laws.

But in its opinion, reached in a 30-3 vote, the commission seemed to agree with the proposed measure's critics and suggested that the bill's wording only refer to "statements with a racist character." Citing the French Constitution's protection of freedom of opinion, the commission said: "Out of respect for this fundamental freedom, the legislator can only intervene to protect democratic public order against manifestations of racism or xenophobia that are endangering it."

Toubon proposed the new legislation after extreme-right leader Jean-Marie Le Pen said in a radio interview last month, "To say that the races are unequal is a fact, an unremarkable statement." Inciting racial hatred is a crime in France, which, along with Germany and Belgium, has some of the most stringent laws against espousing racial hatred in the 15-nation European Union.

But Toubon found last month that existing laws were too vague to prosecute Le Pen. □

Israel to help South Africa establish moshav-style farms*By Suzanne Belling*

JOHANNESBURG (JTA) — In two major pilot projects to empower the black community of South Africa, Israeli experts are helping to introduce the moshav system into farming areas outside Johannesburg and Pretoria.

The projects involve a partnership that includes the Israeli government, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, two South African agricultural training centers and the local Jewish community.

Israel has pledged to send two agricultural experts, one of whom specializes in irrigation and the other in poultry farming, to South Africa for a period of four years to establish and run the pilot agricultural projects.

The experts are being sent to South Africa through Mashav — Israel's Center for International Cooperation.

Both projects will be modeled on the Israeli moshav system, which combines some of the features of cooperative and private farming, and will involve some 500 South African farmers in the training programs.

Ze'ev Luria, counselor to the Israeli Embassy, discussed the Israeli government's involvement in the projects during a recent ceremony to mark the handing over of some of the land that will be used in the training projects. "I believe that Israel is able to share its own experiences with the developing communities in South Africa," Luria said at the ceremony. "We in Israel have gone through many stages of development within a relatively short period of time, and we have the will and the capacity to implement similar projects of sustainable developments in your country."

Luria said he hoped that the projects would be replicated by other communities in South Africa.

Bertie Lubner, president of the South African Associates of Ben-Gurion University, said, "South Africa's Jewish community has resolved to be an integral part of the country's 'rainbow nation' — not only with words, but also with deeds." □

SIMCHAT TORAH FEATURE
Illuminating a timeless text:
New releases delve into Torah

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and all the creatures within them.

Before long, some of those inhabitants wrote down the way they understood their beginnings, and soon other people were explaining what the stories really meant.

Biblical interpretation was born, and it was good.

People have been analyzing the meanings of Torah for thousands of years; the most enduring Jewish commentaries date back some 1,500 years and are codified in the Talmud. Yet for generations, the endeavor was the nearly exclusive province of clergy and scholars, and the students were mostly in synagogues and classrooms.

Now, a flood of commentaries on the book of Genesis, created expressly for popular consumption, has burst forth in almost biblical proportions. At least six new volumes have been published in the past few weeks alone, just in time for Simchat Torah, the holiday celebrating the completion of the annual cycle of Torah readings.

The holiday, which begins Saturday night, includes the recitation of the final verses of the last book of the Torah, Deuteronomy, and begins the cycle anew by reading the first lines of Genesis.

Several of the new interpretations of the Bible's first book are by writers and scholars — Rabbi Burton Visotzky, Naomi Rosenblatt and Karen Armstrong — who are featured in Bill Moyers' upcoming public television series about Genesis, scheduled to begin broadcast in mid-October.

They join other Genesis analyses published in the last two years, including a newly completed translation by Everett Fox of "The Five Books of Moses"; the final volume of a series of books of commentaries on the Torah published by the Jewish Publication Society; a volume of commentaries on the Haftarat, the writings attributed to the biblical prophets, which was published by the Reform movement earlier this year; and commentaries on other traditional texts, including the Book of Ruth.

Created Genesis study group

Interest in the Bible, for many people, is clearly nothing new. "The fact that Jews and gentiles have been studying Bible is old news," said Visotzky, a professor of Midrash at the Jewish Theological Seminary and the author of the new "The Genesis of Ethics: How the Tormented Family of Genesis Leads Us to Moral Development."

"The fact that it's burgeoning in the publishing industry, that it's made it out of the Jewish press into the general press, that's the news."

It has been nine years since Visotzky created a Genesis study group in Manhattan — initially with writers, and more recently with business executives — which inspired Moyers to create the television series.

For 13 years, Rosenblatt, a psychologist by profession, has been conducting Bible study groups in Washington with U.S. senators — Jew, Christian and Mormon alike.

Fox, an associate professor of Judaica at Clark University, began translating the Bible in 1968, and first published his poetic, fluid interpretation of Genesis in 1972. Twenty-four years later, Schocken published his "The Five Books of Moses."

Why now has the subject erupted into something popular and — apparently — marketable?

"We are living in a very difficult time when people question their own values and bemoan the lost

values of the past," Fox said in a recent telephone interview. There is also the "end-of-the-millennium angst," Fox said. "One always goes back to the sources of the culture to see if we've strayed from those ideals, and these stories of Genesis in particular still exercise such a powerful hold on our imagination," he said. "They haunt us."

Another reason for the spate of new books is rooted in an attempt on the part of liberal religious intellectuals "to rescue something of the Judeo-Christian tradition from the religious right," said Peter Pitzele, author of "Our Fathers' Wells: A Personal Encounter With The Myths of Genesis."

Most of the Jewish authors of these new mass-market interpretations are not Orthodox. Most are religious in the liberal sense, though some describe themselves as secular. Yet they are interpreting the Torah not from a scientific-historical perspective, but from a place that views the Bible as a source of great truth and wisdom which belongs to them, as Jews, in a deep and intimate way.

Many of the authors of these new commentaries and translations grew into adulthood in the 1960s, an era that gave birth to an egalitarian ethic, a sensibility that questions every presupposition and strives to make accessible to individual people what once may have been remote or opaque, or required a rabbi to explain.

The era also saw the development of contemporary feminism, which opened up religious tradition to the questions and interpretation of women.

These forces intersected with the rise of a multidisciplinary approach to textual analysis, and gave people permission to bring their knowledge of psychology, literature, linguistics, philosophy and anthropology to their reading of Torah. As a result, the new Bible interpretations depart from those that preceded them, and are truly deconstructions and reconstructions of Torah. "The deconstructionist movement has affected everyone," Pitzele said. Today, there is a new "willingness to look at the unfinished and shadowy sides of our culture, and the Bible is really rich for that."

'A Freudian reading of Rashi'

In the preface to her book "The Beginning of Desire: Reflections on Genesis," Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, a popular Jerusalem-based teacher of Torah, wrote, "To understand Isaac, Sarah and Rebecca through a Freudian reading of Rashi is, of course, to reunderstand ourselves."

Genesis in particular is the focus of so much attention because its players and themes resonate most deeply with readers today, say the authors of the new commentaries and other teachers of Torah.

The Bible's first book can be read as "an ugly little soap opera about a dysfunctional family," wrote Visotzky in his new book. Genesis has plot lines that would make writers for Melrose Place blush. A woman orders her husband's mistress and her child to leave town. Two sisters sleep with their father. One brother cheats another out of his inheritance. And a father, believing he is hearing the voice of God, convinces his son to follow him up a mountain and then takes a knife to his throat.

The book also contains the kinds of quandaries people face more routinely: infertility, envy, greed and loneliness.

Rabbi Neil Gillman, who has authored no new Genesis commentary but teaches Jewish philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, said, "Genesis has so much pull because it's so human. It's immediately relevant, absolutely candid. There is no attempt to make it nice." He also said, "The human dynamics make the stories fascinating and absolutely relevant to ordinary people and their lives." □