

**NEWS AT A GLANCE****AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD****Reform Judaism gains followers in country where it has its roots**

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — More than half a century after nearly vanishing from the country where it began, Reform Judaism is making a comeback in Germany.

“It is important to have Reform Jewish groups here so that women are no longer just observers, but can participate equally in services,” says Marian Stein-Steinfeld, a member of Kehillah Chadashah, a Reform community founded three years ago in Frankfurt, the city where progressive Jewish thinkers such as Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber once taught.

“I have gained a new relationship to Judaism,” says Stein-Steinfeld, whose two children, Reuven, 14, and Mariam, 12, celebrated their Bar and Bat Mitzvahs with the Kehillah community instead of at the main Frankfurt synagogue.

“It is hard to teach children today how to integrate Judaism into their life,” says Stein-Steinfeld. “The children weren’t interested in the more Orthodox tradition at the main synagogue.

“Since we started going to Kehillah, we have started practicing Judaism again in our everyday family life.”

In the early to mid-19th century, German-speaking Jews played a key role in launching Reform Judaism in Europe and the United States.

By the 1930s, the majority of German Jews attended Liberal services.

Rabbi Walter Jacob, chief rabbi of the Reform Beth Shalom temple in Munich, says the German Liberal movement was ideologically akin to the American Reform movement, but closer to Conservative Jewry in liturgical practice.

After the war, Jewish life in Germany was re-established primarily by Eastern European Holocaust survivors, who instituted the Orthodox services common in Eastern Europe.

As a result, most of the main synagogues now in Germany are Orthodox, with services held entirely in Hebrew and with separate seating for men and women.

But Reform communities are beginning to sprout: There are now more than 1,000 German Jews who belong to some 20 Reform communities throughout the country, communal leaders estimate.

Germany’s overall Jewish population is now more than 60,000, half of whom are recent immigrants from the former Soviet Union.

Although the liturgy and music vary, all Reform groups have mixed seating for men and women, stress the equality of women and conduct services with prayers in German as well as Hebrew.

Most of the Reform groups do not have rabbis, cantors or religious directors. Services are led by members.

**Umbrella organization established**

In Munich, however, Jacob’s appointment was the first for a German-speaking Reform rabbi since the war.

In June, nine communities convened in Munich to establish the Union of Progressive Jews in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, an umbrella group aimed at promoting cooperation among Liberal German-speaking communities.

And in another indication of the growth of the Reform movement here, the first Reform Hebrew-German prayer book since the 1920s will be published here this fall.

Susanne Keval of Frankfurt considers it important to have a choice in religious life.

“Judaism in Germany will be much richer and more creative if there is more plurality,” she says. “It is important that we become more active in religion through greater participation.”

The greater degree of participation in Reform services appeals to Jewish folk singer Daniel Kempin, a member of Kehillah. “I feel connected to a community again,” he says. “The warm relationships that have evolved in this group bring me closer to my Jewish identity.”

Despite the growth of interest in Reform services, the groups are

■ A government-appointed committee charged with finding a way to resolve a crisis over conversions in Israel plans to reconvene later this week in another bid to break its deadlock. The committee failed to come up with a recommendation to resolve the dispute before last Friday’s deadline. [Page 3]

■ Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dispatched a close aide to thank Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat for his help in apprehending the killers of an Israeli cab driver. A Palestinian court sentenced three Palestinians to prison terms for the murder. [Page 4]

■ Israel’s Shin Bet security service chief, Ami Ayalon, visited Britain to investigate claims that the July 30 twin suicide bombing in Jerusalem was planned in London, according to a British news report. [Page 4]

■ The Palestinian self-rule government said it would consider a boycott of Israeli products to counter the sanctions imposed by Israel after last month’s twin suicide bombing. [Page 4]

■ The international and Australian Maccabiah Games organizations are establishing an office to deal with last month’s fatal bridge collapse at the opening of the 15th annual Maccabiah Games. The office will deal with the ongoing investigation into the Yarkon River and the filing of lawsuits. [Page 2]

■ N.Y. Gov. George Pataki directed his superintendent of insurance to launch an investigation into the failure of European insurance companies to compensate Holocaust survivors and their families for policies written between 1933 and 1945. The insurance superintendent plans to meet with companies that wrote policies during this time by the beginning of September.

■ Police arrested hundreds of neo-Nazis in Germany and approximately 50 extremists in Denmark who were marking the 10th anniversary of the death of Hitler deputy Rudolf Hess. Scuffles broke out at a few of the pro-Hess rallies.

hampered by a lack of acceptance on the part of Germany's established Orthodox communities.

Orthodox Jewish leaders have repeatedly expressed concerns that the new Reform groups could cause splits in the community, substantially weakening organized Jewish life in Germany.

Members of the small Reform movement disagree.

"We aren't taking anyone away from the existing Orthodox communities," says Stein-Steinfeld. "We are collecting some of the people who don't go at all by offering an alternative."

Ludmilla Edelman, who was born in Russia, grew up attending services in the small Jewish community in Osnabruck, located in northern Germany.

"Twenty years ago, no one talked about Reform Judaism because we were worried about just getting together a minyan," she says.

"There was just one community because we felt it was important to stick together.

"Now, I can decide to which congregation I want to go — I feel better represented when I can make this choice myself."

Funding has become a real problem for Reform groups, according to the newly elected chairman of the Union of Progressive Jews, Micha Brumlik, who is a professor of education at the University of Heidelberg.

Because of their concerns about breaking up the community, few of the more traditionally minded Jewish communities have been willing to designate part of the government funds they receive to Reform groups.

Despite their limited access to existing financial and educational resources, Reform leaders believe they can succeed.

The union plans to publish prayer books and support the training of rabbis, cantors and teachers, it said in a recent statement.

At a recent conference on German Reform Jewry in Arnoldshain, near Frankfurt, there was a dispute about a decision to link the newly founded union with the World Union for Progressive Judaism, which is an umbrella group of Reform, Liberal and Progressive congregations.

A representative of the Gottingen community said her group considered itself Conservative and did not want to be part of a union that was closely tied to the Reform movement.

### 'Who is a Jew' hits Germany

A previous association of German-speaking Reform and Conservative communities that was founded last year fell apart in part because of the willingness of some groups to accept members who claim patrilineal lineage.

While traditional Judaism determine one's Jewishness through the mother or conversion, Reform Jews accept as Jewish anyone born of a Jewish father as long as the child is raised Jewish.

The new union says the nine founding communities have agreed that membership will be open only to those who claim matrilineal lineage or those who have formally converted.

The decision is expected to improve the credibility of the union with Germany's Orthodox communities, which reject patrilineal descent.

At the conference in Arnoldshain, most participant groups reported a growth in membership.

Representatives from the Hanover group said up to 100 people regularly attend their Friday evening services, which is often more of a turnout than at the city's Orthodox community.

Petra Theilhaber, a member of Frankfurt's Kehillah Chadashah, is encouraged by the interest from abroad in Germany's burgeoning Reform movement.

"Jewish organizations elsewhere are noticing that something is happening here of which it is worth taking note," says Theilhaber.

She hopes more international organizations will reach out and support the newly forming German groups.

"The recognition from abroad strengthens the interest here," she says. □

### Australians grow impatient over Maccabiah Games inquiry

By Jeremy Jones

SYDNEY, Australia (JTA) — Members of Australia's Jewish community are growing increasingly impatient over delays in obtaining test results on water from the scene of the bridge collapse at last month's Maccabiah Games tragedy in Israel.

Two Australian athletes were immediately killed July 14 and hundreds of other participants at the games injured when a pedestrian bridge collapsed before the opening ceremony at the Ramat Gan stadium, plunging scores of people into the Yarkon River below.

Two more Australians died weeks later as a result of complications that medical officials linked to contaminants in the river water.

With an additional 10 Australian athletes still in serious condition, reportedly as a result of ingesting water from the Yarkon, accusations are mounting here that Israeli officials are taking too long to issue the results of their tests of river water samples.

The delay has prompted an angry reaction from the parents of Sasha Elterman, who remains in intensive care at Schneider Children's Hospital in Tel Aviv.

Elterman's father, Colin, said that the doctors still do not know exactly what his daughter should be treated for.

In a radio interview last week, Maccabi Australia President Tom Goldman said that "when someone dies four weeks after an accident, it is more than a drowning episode."

He said the only report he has seen so far was on a water sample taken some distance from the scene of the tragedy. The sample did not show dangerous pollution levels.

Goldman said he did not believe the Israeli government was purposely delaying the release of the results, which he attributed to "everything being part of the police reporting procedure."

"What we are suggesting is that they need to be pressured to work faster," he said.

Goldman returned last week from Israel with water and soil samples.

He has commissioned independent tests on the samples and is reportedly considering suing Israeli authorities if an investigation indicates that water toxins caused the death of some of the athletes.

Maccabi Australia and the international Maccabi organization are reportedly establishing a central office that will deal with all details related to the bridge collapse and will help victims and their families file lawsuits.

The daily newspaper The Australian claimed last week that it had obtained test results indicating high levels of sewage in the river water at the scene of the tragedy.

The director of the Cooperative Research Center for Water Quality in Sydney, Don Bursill, said the results indicated that the river water "is highly contaminated from a micro-biological point of view" and is similar to sewage that has had the solids removed from it.

Bursill said that the high bacterial counts were not enough to kill a person, although "it would not make you feel very pleasant." □

**Conversion panel to reconvene  
in new effort to break deadlock***By Michele Chabin*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A committee charged with finding a way to resolve a crisis over conversions in Israel will make another bid to break its deadlock.

The committee failed to come up with a recommended solution by last Friday's deadline.

But, instead of disbanding, the committee was planning to convene again Thursday to discuss whether to extend the deadline.

Both Orthodox and non-Orthodox committee members stressed in interviews that the negotiations are not dead.

"The fact that we are continuing to meet means there's hope," said Orthodox Rabbi Nahum Rabinovitz.

One of the Orthodox members, Rabbi Simcha Meron, tendered his resignation last week, according to the Israeli daily Ha'aretz. Although Meron has not officially retracted his resignation, he does plan to attend this week's meeting, sources close to the committee said.

The committee, headed by Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman, was created by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to forge a path acceptable to the three major Jewish streams to avert the passage of controversial pending legislation.

That legislation would codify the Orthodox monopoly over conversions performed in Israel.

The committee, which includes one Conservative, one Reform and five Orthodox representatives, had been meeting daily since June 30 in an effort to submit its recommendations by the Aug. 15 deadline.

It was expected that the governing coalition would act on the recommendations by Sept. 5.

Although discussions on the question of how to register non-Orthodox converts in Israel were reportedly going well in recent weeks, the negotiations began to break down last week, according to the sources.

Bobby Brown, the prime minister's adviser on Diaspora affairs, indicated that the committee's negotiations began to falter after the High Court of Justice ordered the appointment of a Reform woman to the Netanya religious council. That decision prompted protests from Israel's Orthodox establishment.

**'We need more time'**

Religious tensions were further exacerbated by an incident last week at the Western Wall during Tisha B'Av, when police forcibly removed a group of Conservative men and women who were praying together at the edge of the plaza.

Fervently Orthodox men, who find such egalitarian prayer groups offensive, tried to drown out the prayers of the 200 Conservative worshipers before the police intervened.

"Some of the acts that took place last week have not helped us create the mood in the country needed to move forward on a solution," Brown said.

"However, I still believe we can lower temperatures and get people to talk rationally. I think the issues can be solved, but we need more time."

Despite the religious tension in the country, some committee members remained hopeful that they could devise a solution to propose to the government.

"Within the committee there is a great deal of good will," said Rabinovitz. "This is a very complex matter. The committee is trying to solve a problem that has been building up for many years."

Said Rabbi Reuven Hammer, the Conservative representative, "There's a general feeling in the committee

of wanting to extend [the negotiations], but the exact details have yet to be worked out."

The agreement to establish the committee came after more than two months of talks between coalition representatives and Reform and Conservative leaders, including last-minute marathon talks that involved Netanyahu himself.

As part of the compromise, the coalition agreed to suspend legislative work on the bill codifying the Orthodox conversion monopoly, and the Reform and Conservative movements agreed to suspend litigation pending before Israel's High Court of Justice.

Hammer questioned recently published statements by Knesset member Aryeh Deri of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party that the prime minister has promised to push ahead with the controversial conversion bill.

"My understanding is that such a promise wasn't made," Hammer said. "If it was, there would be no need to meet. Obviously, if we felt there was no possibility of success we wouldn't continue."

If the committee does not reach a compromise, the non-Orthodox movements are expected to reactivate their conversion-related court cases.

The Orthodox parties would likely pursue the contentious conversion bill, which requires two more Knesset votes before it can become law. □

**Israel's 1998 budget includes  
spending cuts of \$650 million***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The Israeli Cabinet has approved a 1998 budget of some \$46 billion that includes more than \$650 million in spending cuts.

The treasury had argued that the cuts were necessary for the government to meet a deficit target rate of 2.4 percent of the gross domestic product.

Finance Ministry officials previously announced that lower than expected tax revenues had forced the government to look for other ways to meet the deficit target rate.

The government also endorsed an inflationary target rate for next year of 7 to 10 percent — slightly higher than the rate preferred by Bank of Israel Governor Jacob Frenkel.

The budget decision provided only a broad outline for next year. Specific elements — including where the cuts will come from — have yet to be worked out.

The budget also includes plans to privatize state-run companies. In response, Israel's Histadrut trade federation authorized members to go on strike Sept. 2.

But a Histadrut official said contacts with the government could prevent a strike.

The budget proposal, put forward by Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman, was approved at a Cabinet meeting Aug. 13 by a vote of 9-3.

Ministers Zevulun Hammer and Yitzhak Levy of the National Religious Party and Eliyahu Yishai of Shas voted against the proposal.

Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai did not vote. He walked out of the meeting to protest the denial of his request for an increase of some \$100 million to the military budget. He had sought the increase for new weapons and ammunition supplies.

Foreign Minister David Levy also left the meeting.

Earlier this year, the Cabinet cut some \$226 million from the current year's budget in order to meet a deficit target rate of 2.8 percent.

At its meeting, the Cabinet also endorsed reforms proposed by the finance minister, including opening the fuel and electricity markets to competition. □

**Israelis, Palestinians at odds despite arrests in murder case***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A murder case involving a Jerusalem taxi driver brought only a brief pause to the hostile Israeli-Palestinian rhetoric of recent weeks.

Israeli officials this week praised the cooperation of the Palestinian Authority that led to the swift capture of three Palestinians who admitted to killing taxi driver Shmuel Ben Baruch over the weekend.

But the officials stressed that the capture did not meet Israel's demand that the authority clamp down on terrorist infrastructures in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Israeli sources said that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dispatched a close adviser, attorney Yitzhak Molcho, to the Gaza Strip on Saturday night to thank Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat for his quick response in apprehending the three Palestinians.

But Netanyahu spokesman David Bar-Illan said the arrests were "not the same as destroying the infrastructure of the terrorist organizations."

Israel called for the Palestinian crackdown on terrorism after the July 30 twin suicide bombing in Jerusalem that killed 14 Israelis. In an effort to pressure Arafat to take steps against Islamic militants, Israel imposed a full closure on the territories and withheld the transfer of millions of dollars from tax and customs revenues it owes the Palestinian Authority.

Netanyahu also announced that negotiations with the Palestinians would not resume until Arafat demonstrated that he was prepared to fight terrorism.

Palestinian officials countered over the weekend that they were considering a boycott of all Israeli goods to retaliate against the sanctions.

Arafat was quoted Sunday as saying the Palestinians were prepared to face an ongoing closure of the territories, saying, "We know how to face it as Palestinian people."

**Arafat calls for 'national unity' talks**

On Saturday, Arafat said that the Palestinian Authority would not accept "dictates" from Israel and would not carry out mass arrests of Islamic militants.

The Palestinian leader also called for "national unity" talks with militant groups in the self-rule areas to prepare a united front against Israel.

During his latest shuttle mission to the region last week, U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross succeeded in convincing Israeli and Palestinian security officials to resume meetings — with CIA officials present — aimed at re-establishing security cooperation.

After a three-way meeting was held Sunday in the West Bank town of Ramallah, an Israeli official reportedly voiced the hope that his Palestinian counterparts would provide information on the explosives used in the July 30 attack.

In a related development, the head of Israel's Shin Bet domestic security service, Ami Ayalon, was reportedly in London to probe claims that the attack had been carried out by Arab militants based in Britain.

On Sunday, Arafat cited the arrest by his forces of the three Palestinians who confessed to murdering Ben Baruch as proof that the Palestinian Authority was working with Israeli security forces.

A Palestinian military court sentenced the three Palestinians on Saturday, hours after the 45-year-old taxi driver's bloodied body was found in a well in the Jericho area. The court sentenced two of the men, aged 19 and 20, to life in prison with hard labor for premeditated murder. The third, aged 17, received 15 years in prison for com-

plicity. The three said they only intended to steal the car, but killed Ben Baruch when he tried to run away.

Ben Baruch was married with four children.

His wife, Betty, said he had been sympathetic to the Palestinian cause.

Ben Baruch had been reported missing since Aug. 14, when he picked up the three Palestinians near the Arab neighborhood of Jebel Mukabir in southeastern Jerusalem.

The three told Ben Baruch they worked at a nearby car wash and asked him to drive to the West Bank town of Jericho, according to Israeli media reports.

Palestinian police found Ben Baruch's body Saturday morning in an irrigation well in Jericho. They notified Israeli officials, who later recovered the body.

Palestinian police said his head had been smashed with a stone and his neck stabbed with a screwdriver.

The taxi driver's bloodstained taxi was found last Friday night in a Palestinian refugee camp outside Jericho.

One of the Palestinians arrested said that he had sold the taxi to a chop shop in the area for \$2,000. □

**Caught on video, Israeli officers convicted of kicking Palestinians***By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli court has sentenced two border policemen to eight months in prison for beating Palestinians who tried to enter Jerusalem without proper permits.

The two policemen, Tzahi Shmaya, 19, and David Ben Abu, 20, were each also given 12-month suspended sentences. The sentences will take effect in 45 days, to give the two time to appeal.

Shmaya and Ben Abu had been charged with aggravated assault and abuse of authority relating to an incident last October, when they were caught on an amateur video beating and kicking six Palestinians apprehended while trying to get into Jerusalem illegally.

When handing down the sentences Aug. 14, the judge was quoted as saying he hoped the punishment would deter recurrences of such actions by border police.

The sentences came a day after the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem issued a report describing what it said were 15 cases of "beatings, degradation and serious abuse" of Palestinians by Israeli security forces during the past three months.

B'Tselem activists said ill-treatment of Palestinians was extremely widespread among border police.

Israel's Channel One Television broadcast interviews Wednesday with two Palestinians who claimed they were beaten by border police.

The two, Ahmed Moussa, 19, and Mahmoud Ghneim, 27, said they were recently beaten after entering Israel without permits during the closure Israel has imposed on the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The closure began after the July 30 twin suicide bombing in Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market that killed 14 Israelis and wounded at least 170 others.

The television report said that three border policemen took the two Palestinians to an isolated area, where they beat them. Ghneim said that the border policeman tied his leg to a jeep and dragged him along the ground some 60 feet. Justice Minister Tzachi Hanegbi is investigating the incident.

Last year, when reports of the incident involving Shmaya and Ben Abu first surfaced, the border police commander said that such violence was unusual and that guards posted in sensitive areas are carefully screened.

But the commander added that border police face intense pressures as they attempt to prevent Palestinians from entering Israel illegally. □