



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright announced that Israeli-Palestinian peace talks would resume on Oct. 6. [Page 2]

■ Israel further eased its closure on the West Bank by increasing to 29,000 the number of Palestinian workers allowed to enter the country from the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority, meanwhile, arrested several more Islamic militants.

■ Eighty-five percent of American Jews support U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's recent call for a "timeout" on Israeli settlements, according to a poll commissioned by the Israel Policy Forum. Eighty-nine percent think the United States "must be even-handed when facilitating negotiations" and 59 percent think cutting off aid to the Palestinian Authority would increase terrorism. The survey of 1,198 American Jewish adults, conducted this month, has a margin of error of approximately 3 percent.

■ An Israeli soldier was killed during a battle with Hezbollah fighters in southern Lebanon that ended several days of relative quiet. [Page 3]

■ The Swiss Parliament's lower house rejected a government proposal that it issue a decree calling on the Swiss central bank to contribute some \$70 million to the Holocaust Memorial Fund. The bank had sought the decree, saying that it did not have the authority to make the contribution on its own.

■ One of Russian Jewry's umbrella organizations, the Va'ad, condemned a law recently passed in Russia restricting religious freedom as "anti-democratic" and "anti-constitutional."

■ Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy called on the Palestinian Authority to accept a "binding code of conduct," including the renunciation of violence as a means to achieve political goals, in order to restore a sense of trust. Speaking before the U.N. General Assembly, Levy also criticized the world's refusal "to speak out against Iran's policies, its declarations and its actions."

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Celebrating the study of Talmud: Thousands find a 'spiritual uplift'

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen and Peter Ephross

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Shema sounded like thunder — or perhaps like the clarion call of a shofar.

As 20,000 people chanted the words that affirm God's singularity and power, the most elemental words in Jewish prayer rose up and seemed to linger at the top of Madison Square Garden.

The moment served as a powerful conclusion to an emotional gathering for the men and women attending the celebration marking the completion of the study of the entire Talmud — one page a day for 7,211 days in a row. It is a practice called *Daf Yomi*, or daily page, which was initiated by Rabbi Meir Shapiro of Poland in 1923. The practice takes seven and a half years to complete.

Celebrating the end of a cycle of Talmud — which is a compilation of commentary and interpretation of the Torah — with thousands of others gives one "a spiritual uplift, a kickstart" to keep going, said Sammy Hamburger, who had come from London to participate in the 10th *Daf Yomi* Siyum HaShas, the completion of the daily study of Talmud.

"It's literally the best part of the day. It beats anything else you can do," said the 34-year-old yeshiva student.

For Sunday's event, sponsored by Agudath Israel of America, another 6,000 people filled the theater next to the Garden. Some 18,000 more were at the Nassau Coliseum in nearby Long Island, which was booked when the first venue sold out within weeks of tickets going on sale. All told, 70,000 people participated in the event, either in person or by satellite hookup in places as far away as Eugene, Ore.; South Bend, Ind.; and Sao Paulo, Brazil.

Orthodox Jewry was present in all its diversity.

There were Chasidic men born and raised in Brooklyn, N.Y., who speak only Yiddish. They came wearing bekeshes, or long black coats, over their tzitzit, black knickers and stockinged legs.

Other men, dressed in dark suits and rakish fedoras, clearly move comfortably in secular worlds.

Though the scene as a whole called to mind an earlier time and place, Joseph Kupferstein, for one, has no trouble fitting even the most modern technology into his tradition.

Kupferstein, an assistant vice president for the Wall Street brokerage giant Merrill Lynch, studies the Talmud for an hour each morning.

More than 200 men study Talmud in the middle of each work day on Wall Street, he said.

Using the Internet to study the Talmud

When he returns home, he logs onto his computer and discusses that day's page on the Internet, which was designed, he said, with God's purpose.

"The Internet was created so Jews can live anywhere and feel united," he said.

Multimedia tools for accessing the *Daf Yomi* — from CD-ROMs with thousands of pages of text and commentary packed onto one silver disk to telephone services that are accessed daily by subscribers the world over — have proliferated in the last few years.

And though it is only men who learn the *Daf Yomi*, some 6,000 women attended Sunday's celebration as well.

"My grandmother is a Holocaust survivor," said Shani Stein, 21, who lives with her parents and four siblings in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn and was sitting next to her grandmother at the event. "When she saw the men she started crying, pointed to the numbers on her arm, and said, 'The Nazis wanted to kill us, but look, we're dancing.'"

Indeed, the growing number of Orthodox men who study Talmud daily is a source of great pride for leaders of the haredi community, as the fervently Orthodox are known. Many spoke of it Sunday night as a triumph over the past and a "resurrection" of Torah life from the ashes of the Holocaust.

After the recitation of the Kaddish prayer, which praises and sanctifies God's name, Abish Brodt — a Brooklyn businessman who has

recorded several albums of traditional Jewish songs and was one of 300 men on the dais — began singing the song that greets every happy occasion in a shul: "Siman Tov and Mazel Tov."

In moments, hundreds of men were on their feet, hand-in-hand and dancing in the narrow aisles between crowded rows of folding chairs set up on the floor of the arena.

The gathering was described by speakers as an antidote to another threat to Jewish survival: assimilation.

"The vanishing Jew is an awesome, frightening fact in contemporary America," said Rabbi Yaakov Perlow, the head of the Yeshiva of Novominsk in Brooklyn. "Those whose faith is uncontested by secularism, by materialism, remain in klal Yisrael," or the Jewish people.

Some of the men who participate in the daily learning, which often takes place early in the morning before work, or late at night after the day's work has been finished, do so because they find it a worthwhile intellectual exercise. For others, it is a way to try and earn merit in God's eyes and bring blessings back to the Jewish people.

Those who study Torah daily are said to be promised a place in the world to come. But in this life, the siyum enjoyed its share of incongruities.

Black-hatted, long-bearded men ordered pre-packaged bags of kosher popcorn and corn chips under a colorful sign, hanging over the Garden concession stand, which boasted a pepperoni pizza in all its trefe glory.

The booths on the perimeter of every floor, which usually house Garden employees hawking New York Rangers jerseys and New York Knicks souvenirs this night found the non-Jewish staff vending leather-bound tractates of Talmud and gold-plated coins commemorating the event.

The experience was one that Yossi Gleiberman, wanted to share with his children.

As 9-year-old Eli and 6-year-old Tzviki held on tight to his hands, the 31-year-old Gleiberman spoke of what learning Daf Yomi has brought to his life.

He has studied Talmud in all of the 23 countries that his job as a watch importer has taken him to over the last few years, he said. And while in some, like China and Japan, he has studied alone in the morning, in others, including Thailand and Denmark, he has hooked up with a group of men doing the same thing.

"You meet new people all over the world learning the same thing on the same day and it's almost like you're part of a big club," Gleiberman said.

"It's also great for my children to see me doing this," he added. "It inspires them, too." □

Israel, Palestinians to resume peace talks with U.S. assistance

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was the first to admit that it was only a "medium step forward."

After six months of suspended negotiations, during which violence and recriminations prevailed, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators will return to work next week, she announced Monday.

The Israeli-Palestinian joint liaison committee, chaired by Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy and the Palestinian Authority's second-in-command, Mahmoud Abbas, who is also known as Abu Mazen, will begin meeting Oct. 6. On the agenda will be discussion of a "timeout" that would require both sides to refrain from unilateral steps regarded as impediments to the peace process, such as Israel's building more homes in West Bank settlements, Albright said.

Also on the agenda will be Israeli-Palestinian security cooperation and further redeployments of Israeli forces from rural West Bank areas, she said.

The two sides will also discuss outstanding issues stemming from the 1995 Interim Agreement, including the opening of a Palestinian airport in Gaza, the building of a Palestinian seaport and the creation of a safe route for Palestinians traveling between Gaza and the West Bank.

Committees discussing those issues were set to resume in the summer, but those talks were postponed after suicide bombers struck Jerusalem's Mahane Yehuda market July 30, killing 15 Israelis. Tensions escalated further after a Sept. 4 triple suicide bombing in Jerusalem left five Israelis dead.

Albright found the peace process in tatters when she visited the Middle East the following week, and she warned both Israel and the Palestinians that she would not return to the region unless both sides took steps to revive the trust needed to resume peace talks.

"There had been a downward spiral and a crisis of confidence," she said. "We have not only arrested the downward spiral, but have taken a step forward" was how she described her meetings Monday with Levy and Abu Mazen at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in Manhattan.

Levy and Abu Mazen, who were originally expected to appear with Albright at the news conference, were not present.

U.S. Special Middle East Coordinator Dennis Ross will go to the region to help relaunch negotiations, she said.

"There is a great sense of willingness to work together and a desire to get the peace process back on track." □

Israeli president asks Mubarak to free convicted Druse citizen

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — President Ezer Weizman is looking to succeed where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has failed.

During a visit Sunday to Egypt, Weizman obtained a promise from Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak that he would look into "constitutional ways" to pardon an Israeli citizen recently sentenced by a Cairo court on charges of espionage.

At a joint news conference, Mubarak said he would examine whether he could pardon Azam Azam as part of a general amnesty granted to other prisoners.

Weizman told reporters that extensive coverage of the case, which has strained Israeli-Egyptian relations, had not helped resolve the problem.

Netanyahu said earlier this month that he expected Mubarak to pardon the 35-year-old Druse man.

Mubarak later rebuffed the request, saying that Netanyahu had insulted the Egyptian judicial system when he called the verdict in the case "twisted."

In a seven-page letter to Netanyahu, Mubarak said that Netanyahu's high-profile efforts made it virtually impossible for Mubarak to do anything on Azam's behalf.

Azam, a mechanic at an Israeli-Egyptian textile plant in Cairo, was convicted Aug. 31 of spying for Israel and sentenced to 15 years in prison with hard labor.

Azam, who was arrested last November in Cairo, was charged with giving women's underwear soaked with invisible ink to an Egyptian national, Emad Abdel-Hamid Ismail, who then used the ink to write messages to Israel about the state of Egyptian factories.

The Cairo court sentenced Ismail to life imprisonment for being an accomplice. Israeli officials have insisted that Azam was not a government agent. □

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Palestinian land purchases center on eastern Jerusalem

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — For sale, preferably to Palestinian customers, is a \$3.5 million piece of real estate in predominantly Jewish western Jerusalem.

The man who made this offer, Yoram Yazdi, is a Jewish businessman from Jerusalem.

"I received the property as a gift from a relative," Yazdi said in an interview. "Its market value is \$2 million, but I would have to pay \$1.5 million in taxes."

Yazdi said the property could be used for housing and business purposes, but he would not provide additional details about it.

He contacted Faisal Hussein, the Palestinian Authority official in charge of Jerusalem affairs, assuming that the self-rule government could easily find someone to pay the tax in order to gain a foothold in western Jerusalem. But Hussein turned down the offer.

The Palestinian Authority seems to be more concerned with preventing Jewish inroads in the part of Jerusalem that Palestinians envision as the capital of their future state rather than staking claims to western Jerusalem, which has been part of the Jewish state since 1948.

Yazdi has not given up hope of selling the building to a Palestinian, but he appears to have given up hope on the Jewish state.

"With God's help, we shall complete the transaction," he said. "I have no remorse, and I feel no obligation toward this state. As soon as I get the money, I will take my family and leave the country."

He did try to contact at least one potential Jewish buyer.

"I wrote [Dr. Irving] Moskowitz at the time, telling him that my property was up for sale," Yazdi said.

He was referring to the Miami-based businessman who made headlines this month with his effort to house Jews in the predominantly Arab neighborhood of Ras al-Amud on the Mount of Olives.

"But Moskowitz did not show any interest," Yazdi said.

The question remains how unique Yazdi is in his willingness to sell property to Arabs.

"I was surprised to see how many Israelis sell their property in west Jerusalem," said Dr. Ahmed Tibi, a close adviser to Palestinian Authority Chairman Yasser Arafat.

Anything Moskowitz does in eastern Jerusalem, Arab entrepreneurs can do just as well in western Jerusalem, Tibi added.

Nothing hindering Palestinian purchases

He warned recently that if Moskowitz went ahead with his housing drive in eastern Jerusalem, Palestinians were ready to complete three real estate deals in western Jerusalem.

"I would like to know how Israelis would feel if they woke up one morning to find the Palestinian flag raised above buildings in the heart of west Jerusalem with Arabic music playing loud out of those buildings," said Tibi.

"I believe Israelis will begin to doubt the wisdom of their actions and provocations in east Jerusalem."

Have Palestinians indeed begun a real estate offensive in western Jerusalem?

According to Shalom Goldstein, an adviser on Arab affairs to Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert, there has been no political decision by the Palestinian leadership to launch a campaign of purchases in western Jerusalem.

Legally, nothing stands in the way of a Palestinian

to purchase real estate in western Jerusalem, or, for that matter, anywhere else in Israel.

"With the exception of state-owned lands, even a Saudi millionaire can come and purchase half of Tel Aviv," Avigdor Feldman, a lawyer who represents residents of eastern Jerusalem in real estate matters, said in an interview.

Feldman represents a group known as Al-Kanun, or The Law, which works with Arab families whose property was purchased by Jews.

Palestinians claim ownership of thousands of properties in 370 towns and villages that they deserted during Israel's 1948 War of Independence and that Israel subsequently confiscated.

Feldman said he recently won four court cases in which he contested Jewish claims to Palestinian property in Silwan, an eastern Jerusalem neighborhood. A fifth case is still in court.

When it comes to property purchases, the Palestinians appear to be focusing on pre-emptive real estate buys in eastern Jerusalem rather than trying to provoke Israelis in the western part of the city.

Their goal is to prevent real estate ventures such as the one initiated by Moskowitz at Ras al-Amud.

"The problem is that transactions are carried out in secret, and it is not always easy to trace them in time," said Feldman.

Several Arab groups have recently been established in eastern Jerusalem to collect funds for real estate purchases there.

And in August, Jordanian and Palestinian businessmen founded a group designed to invest money in eastern Jerusalem.

The new group, the Jerusalem Development and Investment Corporation, has initial capital of \$100 million. Based in the Jordanian capital of Amman, the group is headed by multi-millionaire Abdul Majid Shuman, chairman of the Arab Bank.

Along with making land purchases and offering legal advice, the group hopes to help the economy of eastern Jerusalem so that Arabs living there will not be tempted to sell their land and move elsewhere.

Representatives of the group recently announced that they would raise \$500 million "to prevent the emigration of Jerusalem residents by creating job opportunities and investment projects." □

Hezbollah fire kills Israeli soldier

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) — An Israeli soldier was killed Monday during a battle with Hezbollah fighters in southern Lebanon that ended several days of relative quiet.

Capt. Gal Levran, 21, of Rishon le-Zion, is the 22nd IDF soldier to be killed in Lebanon in recent weeks.

Levran, an intelligence officer, served in the same battalion that lost five of its soldiers when they were trapped in a brush fire following an Aug. 28 battle with members of the Shi'ite Amal movement.

A total of 39 IDF Force soldiers have been killed in Lebanon since the start of the year. On Sept. 5, 12 Israeli naval commandos were killed in a raid on Lebanon in what was the IDF's heaviest casualty count in more than 12 years in a single military operation.

The recent rise in the number of fatalities has renewed debate in Israel over the army's presence in the security zone.

Defenders of the Israeli presence in Lebanon say it is necessary to protect Israel's northern settlements until a political agreement is reached. Critics of the policy have argued that it only leads to more casualties. □

A NEW YEAR DAWNS

Jewish expatriates find a way to celebrate new year in Budapest

By Michael J. Jordan

BUDAPEST (JTA) — This is not your parents' Rosh Hashanah meal.

That's on the mind of many American Jews in Budapest as they prepare for holidays spent away from home.

Turning to Hungarian Jewry is rarely an option.

The community overall is deeply assimilated. If Hungarian Jews celebrate holidays at all, they do so with their own family. Besides, there are sometimes verbal and cultural obstacles.

So American Jews — a significant portion of the estimated 16,000 Americans living in Hungary — tend to gravitate toward their own during the holidays, to "hang out" with friends who become a surrogate family.

Then the network kicks into gear.

"I knew three Jews here, and those people knew some" people, said Anita Altman, a three-year resident of Budapest and the lifestyle editor of the English-language weekly Budapest Sun. "Before long, you have a group of 12 with nowhere else to go, but wanting to celebrate the holidays in a meaningful way."

Often they gather at the Dohany Street Synagogue.

Inside and outside, it's a social scene for both Hungarians and expatriates.

The Moorish-style synagogue, Europe's largest, packs more than 3,000 people into the ground floor and two balconies.

Men sit downstairs; women sit upstairs. After passing through the metal detectors at the entrance, the chatting continues even through the service.

But mostly, holidays here for Americans are about food. That's when the work begins.

It starts with the ordeal of finding a host. It might be the only person with an actual dining room.

Most apartments are modest and fairly cramped. The prospective host sometimes needs coercion, guilt or blackmail to seal the deal.

There is no free ride in Budapest. To ease the burden, holiday meals are typically potluck affairs.

Hosts ask friends to help

Often with the help of a friend, the host delegates responsibility and determines who brings which supplies.

And it is not only about honey cake. There are also logistical problems.

Hosts routinely send out SOS's for more folding chairs, an extra table or added silverware — even photocopies of the prayers.

It takes quite a bit of effort, but there's no alternative. "No one else will do it for you," said Alison Rose, who has also lived here for three years.

"At home it's something your parents usually do," said Rose, a native of Tempe, Ariz., and the managing editor of the East European Constitutional Review.

"But here I've had to take a little initiative and be more active."

Rose, 26, said she rarely celebrated holidays when living in the United States. Now she's even hosted her first Passover Seder.

"It was more like a dinner party," Rose conceded.

Yet the effort that comes with participation prompts some expatriates to rethink and, perhaps, reconnect with their Jewish identity.

Living 5,000 miles from home, many effectively shed most familial obligations.

"You can't say, 'Oh, my parents are making

dinner, so I have to go.' Here you don't have to go," said Pearl Gluck, 25, who grew up in Brooklyn's Chasidic community and now coordinates a Jewish-studies lecture series here at Central European University.

The meal itself is often laid-back. Hungarian girlfriends, boyfriends and even curious non-Jewish friends are often invited.

Through the meal, participants search for shared friends and swap holiday stories. Later, after the meal is finished, a self-congratulatory mood sets in.

"Weren't we clever?" Altman, 43, from Roslyn, N.Y., explains the mood. "An event we'd always relied on someone else to do for us, we'd done ourselves. At least we did something."

And that's the point: to do something, says Rabbi Boruch Oberlander, a Lubavitcher believed to be the only American rabbi in Hungary.

His services in Hungarian and Hebrew during the High Holy Days draw just a small handful of Americans, anywhere from two to seven. But he still inserts a few minutes in English.

"A Jew should always feel at home in synagogue, wherever he is in the world," said Oberlander, 31, a Brooklyn native who arrived in Budapest in 1989 just before the collapse of communism. "And on the holidays, they need that feeling of community, that they're not alone in the world." □

German court hopes to avoid ruling on slave laborer claims

By Deidre Berger

FRANKFURT (JTA) — A German court is deliberating the case of 20 former Jewish slave laborers in a factory near Auschwitz who have asked the German government for compensation.

But the presiding judge said last week that he hoped there would be a political solution to the problem before the court makes a ruling.

After hearing testimony last week, the district court in Bonn said it would issue a verdict Nov. 4.

A ruling in favor of the plaintiffs, 19 of whom live in Poland and Hungary, could pave the way for additional suits from other former Nazi slave laborers.

German officials are currently negotiating with the Conference on Material Claims Against Germany about compensation payments to Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe.

Germany has paid more than \$54 billion in compensation to Holocaust survivors since World War II.

However, those living in Soviet bloc countries were unable to apply for compensation during the Cold War, and Communist East Germany refused to make any payments.

Jewish organizations estimate there are between 15,000 and 40,000 Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe who have never received compensation.

The Bonn government has balked at paying compensation either to Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe or to former slave laborers for Nazi enterprises, most of whom live in Eastern Europe.

Most of the companies who used slave labor during World War II have likewise declined to make payments.

The companies have argued that they paid the Nazi SS for the forced laborers they employed and that any further compensation should come from the government.

In August, the German government and officials of the Claims Conference announced the establishment of a joint commission to recommend solutions.

The commission is expected to make its proposals before the end of the year. □