



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Premier faces Knesset threat

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faces what observers call the most serious threat so far to his government when the Knesset votes Wednesday on a bill calling for new elections.

The bill requires only a majority of those present for preliminary passage.

If passed, the bill would still face three additional votes.

Kraar bows out

Martin Kraar withdrew his name from consideration for the top professional slot of the new United Jewish Appeal-Council of Jewish Federations partnership.

Kraar, who is now executive vice president of the CIF, has accepted an offer to become executive director of the American Committee for the Weizmann Institute of Science.

Arms proliferation to top agenda

U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said discussions aimed at halting the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction would top the U.S. agenda at a September summit between President Clinton and Russian President Boris Yeltsin.

Albright singled out Russian cooperation with Iran's missile program during comments to reporters after meeting with Russia's foreign minister, Yevgeny Primakov.

Meanwhile, Israel's defense minister told the French magazine *Politique Internationale* that the United States and many European nations will share blame if Iran develops long-range missiles and weapons of mass destruction.

Direct allocations approved

The Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland approved \$2 million in direct allocations to Israel and abroad, bypassing the national UJA-federation system. The money is earmarked for projects in St. Petersburg, Russia, and Beersheba, Israel.

An additional allocation of \$1 million is pending an evaluation of how the money would be spent. The decision by the Cleveland federation is part of a growing movement toward directed giving — and reduced donations to UJA — begun last year by a handful of U.S. Jewish communities.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Tour of Ukraine communities finds remnants of Yiddish life

By Lev Krichevsky

KHMELNITSKI (JTA) — Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz knows a lot about Jewish life in Ukraine.

But on a recent trip to Jewish communities and sites in southwestern Ukraine, the acclaimed translator and commentator on the Talmud still found a few surprises — one being that a large number of Jews here speak Yiddish.

In the small town of Shargorod, Steinsaltz spoke in Yiddish with Jewish passers-by in the old part of town.

The town once had a thriving Jewish community; now there are only about 100 Jews here.

Steinsaltz, who usually lectures in Hebrew, spoke to the communities he met this time in Yiddish as well.

While some of the Jews in their 40s and 50s here understand Yiddish, most of the speakers of the language of Eastern European Jewry in Podolia, as this region is known, are older.

For Steinsaltz, the lesson is clear: "The fact that Yiddish is widely understood here means that the process of assimilation in Ukraine is one generation behind" the process in most of the former Soviet Union, he said.

Steinsaltz, a 61-year-old Jerusalem rabbi and talmudic scholar who has served as a spiritual leader for Jews in the former Soviet Union since 1995, traveled through the region earlier this month with a group of 20 Jewish community leaders from the former Communist stronghold.

The group, known as Chaverim, Hebrew for friends, consists of individuals who take part in Steinsaltz-led seminars throughout Russia and Ukraine.

This time, most of the seminar was conducted on the bus, while the group was traveling between the cities.

Steinsaltz told the students — whose ages ranged between 25 and 52 — about the life and writings of the Chasidic leaders who lived in the area. The students also studied parts of the Talmud.

Faculty members from the St. Petersburg Jewish University lectured about Jewish culture and architecture in the area, which was first home to Jews in the 15th century.

The region's Jewish population is now less than 5,000.

Since most younger Ukrainian Jews have emigrated during the past decade, Jewish communities here are predominantly elderly.

Indeed, pensioners make up more than 60 percent of Jews in smaller Ukrainian communities, most of whom have found themselves suffering as a result of the economic deterioration that has taken place since Ukraine became independent after the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991.

The Jews who live here are not religious. Few go to synagogue — if there is one in their town.

And even fewer know how to daven, or pray.

For example in the town of Khmel'nitski, whose Jewish population numbers more than 1,000, there are only three men in their 70s and 80s who know how to pray in Hebrew.

"It's never too late to start with what a small Jewish boy starts," Steinsaltz told the attendees, who gathered in a synagogue that was recently returned to the Jewish

MIDEAST FOCUS

E.U. envoy seeks conference

The European Union's Middle East envoy is pressing ahead with efforts to convene an international conference aimed at advancing Middle East peace.

Miguel Angel Moratinos held talks in Syria about the proposal before traveling to Lebanon, and later to Israel. The proposal for a European-sponsored conference was first advanced by France and Egypt. Israel opposes the idea.

Security chief blasts premier

The head of Palestinian security in the West Bank called Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a "racist" who "starts to lie as soon as he opens his mouth."

Jibril Rajoub told foreign correspondents that war with Israel was a possibility if Netanyahu did not implement previously signed accords. "Hundreds from both sides will be killed," he added. "If Israel tries to enter our areas, battles will also happen in certain Israeli areas."

Newspapers back British Airways

Fervently Orthodox newspapers in Israel are urging their readers to fly British Airways instead of El Al or other carriers.

The papers cite the modest dress of stewardesses on the British carrier and the film-free seating areas it has set up for its Tel Aviv runs.

The call came as British Airways announced it would soon add one flight to its Tel Aviv-London route, bringing the weekly total of such flights to 15.

Army to get more dishwashers

Israel's army is buying dishwashers for many of its smaller bases, freeing soldiers from one of the least liked chores of army life.

Until now, only the kitchens at the largest bases were equipped with dishwashers.

community. "Even when a man is very limited in means, this does not excuse him from not being a Jew," he said, responding to the claim that the younger generation should lead a Jewish revival.

"I didn't expect that the rabbi would say such things," said a woman in her 70s after the lecture.

She added that now she intends to light Shabbat candles in her home — something she has never done in her life.

Some of the sites the group visited are places whose memory still sears Jewish consciousness.

Never before had Steinsaltz visited the Jewish community in the town that bears the name of Bogdan Chmielnicki, who led the 1648 rebellion against Polish rule during which tens of thousands of Jews were killed.

Steinsaltz still refers to the city as Proskurov — the original name of the town that was changed to Khmel'nitski in the 1950s to honor the man who is still revered in Ukraine as a pioneer of that country's movement for national liberation.

But Steinsaltz used the fact that the Jews rebuilt their lives here after the Chmielnicki massacre to provide an inspirational message.

"In percentage, that massacre was like the Holocaust. It was a disaster. But it was not the end of Jewish life here," he said.

Indeed, less than 100 years ago after that this community's spiritual quest generated a new religious movement: Chasidism.

Steinsaltz made stops in several towns and shtetls to visit the graves of some of the most revered Chasidic leaders of the early generations.

Among them was the Ba'al Shem-Tov, Hebrew for master of the good name. The Ba'al Shem Tov, also known as Besht, was one of the founders of Chasidism, the populist, charismatic movement founded in the 18th century.

His grave — inside a small ascetic white-brick mausoleum — stands in the middle of a nearly destroyed Jewish cemetery in a town of Medzibezh, where Besht spent his most creative years and where he died in 1760.

During the Nazi occupation of World War II, a German artillery battalion stood at the cemetery. Only a couple of dozen of graves survived, including the ones of Besht and some of his family.

Today, Medzibezh, a site of pilgrimage for Chasidic Jews since the last century, has only one Jewish family.

A new synagogue for pilgrims — a very modest-looking building — is being built next to the cemetery with funds donated by a Chasidic family from France.

The group also visited graves of Chasidic leaders in the towns of Uman, Anopol and Berdichev.

A member of the group said the visits helped her understand the spiritual needs that bring people to these sites.

"We experienced living history on this trip," said Natalia Gutkina, a Jewish teacher from the Russian town of Nizhny Novgorod.

"It's amazing that one can still feel the spirit of life that has long gone," Gutkina said. □

Alleged smuggler fails to show up in court

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A man charged with attempting to supply Hezbollah gunmen in Lebanon failed to show up for a court appeal after he was released last week from federal custody.

The Anti-Defamation League issued a statement that Fawzi Mustapha Assi, 28, "never should have been allowed to go free."

The ADL statement added that the "judicial system clearly underestimated the sophistication and dedication of those who actively support and engage in terrorism."

Assi, who is charged with attempting to transport night-vision goggles, a thermal imaging camera and other equipment to the fundamentalist Islamic organization, lives in Dearborn, Mich.

The resident of the Detroit suburb is believed to be the first person arraigned under the 1996 Anti-Terrorism Act. □



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JEWISH WORLD

Museum: Remove crosses

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum called on Polish authorities to remove more than 50 crosses placed outside the Auschwitz death camp. Members of a Catholic workers group set up the crosses over the weekend just outside the walls of Auschwitz as part of a campaign to maintain Christian symbols at the site. Miles Lerman, chairman of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, who last year helped negotiate the removal of eight crosses from inside the camp grounds, said the crosses "are being used as a tool in a political fight that I condemn in the strongest terms."

Lawyers fail to reach settlement

No progress was achieved when lawyers representing Holocaust victims and Swiss banks met before a federal judge in New York in an attempt to reach an out-of-court settlement of Holocaust-era claims.

Meanwhile, Swiss officials wrote a letter to the leaders of all 50 U.S. states and 15 major cities urging them not to back threatened sanctions against Swiss banks. The letter said sanctions — threatened if the banks do not settle the claims — "could trigger a vicious circle of threats and counter-measures" that could affect nearly 500,000 jobs created in the United States by Swiss companies.

Lithuania removes pardons

Lithuania stripped the pardons granted 22 citizens who had been convicted of crimes against the state during the Soviet era. The move came after Israel presented evidence that the Lithuanians may have helped murder Jews during World War II.

Brandeis announces chair

Brandeis University announced a professorship in Jewish education. The person who will be selected for the professorship, believed to be the first in Jewish education at a non-sectarian university, will help train professionals in the field.

UJA organizes singles tour

Some 700 single American Jews recently returned from a two-week tour of Israel organized by the United Jewish Appeal. UJA officials said the tour was conducted in an effort to counter intermarriage.

Heirs to get Einstein home

A summer house that once belonged to Albert Einstein is being returned to the famed physicist's heirs, according to German officials.

After Einstein left Germany for the United States in 1933, concerned about the rise of German anti-Semitism, the house in the town of Caputh, near Berlin, was seized by the Nazis and later taken over by the Communist government of East Germany.

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

Steinsaltz-led wedding breathes new life into sleepy Ukraine town

By Lev Krichevsky

SLAVUTA, Ukraine (JTA) — Even when the entire celebration was complete, Natan Kitaykisher was amazed that Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz had just conducted his wedding.

"I still cannot believe what I've just seen," said the 26-year-old leader of the town's Jewish congregation.

"I could never dream of it," he said.

Slavuta was not on the original itinerary of Steinsaltz, who was leading a group of Jewish community leaders from the former Soviet Union on a tour of Jewish memorial sites in southwestern Ukraine.

Steinsaltz, who lives in Israel, is known for his translations of the Talmud into modern Hebrew, English and Russian.

But Kitaykisher, who studied a few years ago at a yeshiva run by Steinsaltz in Moscow, heard of the rabbi's plan to come to the area and asked if it was possible to arrange a stop in Slavuta.

Because the synagogue in town was so rundown, the ceremony was conducted outside the town's only modern public facility — a concert hall.

Most of the town's Jews showed up at the ceremony — many of them just out of curiosity.

The heroes of the occasion — Kitaykisher and Eleonora Rabina, an engineer from a neighboring town — looked tense during the affair.

The wedding was performed in full accordance with Jewish ritual.

A red velvet canopy with yellow silk fringes was brought from Kiev, as was a ketubah, or marriage contract.

Kosher wine and food were served for the few dozen guests.

The only substitute to Jewish tradition was a light bulb wrapped in plastic, which the groom used instead of a glass to crush at the end of the ceremony.

The Kitaykisher-Rabina ceremony was the first Jewish religious wedding in the town in at least 15 years.

The wedding also featured a band that played Jewish melodies.

In the 19th century, the town's name became famous among Jews throughout the Russian Empire for its printing house — one of the few Jewish printing houses that functioned in Russia at the time.

The Slavuta Brothers printing house, as it was known, issued the bulk of Chasidic literature then.

It even had a copyright on the Babylonian Talmud in Russia.

The local Jewish community was destroyed during the Holocaust.

Among those Jews who returned to town after World War II was Rabbi Yitzhak Liberzon.

Liberzon was one of a handful of rabbinical authorities to remain active in the postwar Soviet Union.

The community was rebuilt due to the rabbi's efforts.

Since Liberzon's death 15 years ago, however, the community has gradually declined.

According to Yakov Baram, chairman of the community, the town of 35,000 individuals is now home to 240 Jews.

Some 500,000 Jews are estimated to live in Ukraine.

There are approximately 52 million people who reside in the former Soviet republic. At least one Jewish activist here said the present will be the final chapter in the region's Jewish history.

"There is no chance for revival here," said Mikhail Lerman, the leader of the region's Jewish population.

"Our future is in Israel," he said.

Kitaykisher disagreed. After the wedding, he said, a young couple came up to him and asked if he could help arrange a "real Jewish wedding" for them. □

Former convict finds difficulty in rejoining Jewish community

By Lori Epstein

Jewish Bulletin of Northern California

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — Nancy Mizrahi's Jewish world vanished the day she was sentenced to prison for embezzlement.

Before her 1993 conviction, the stockbroker lived in a lovely suburban home near San Francisco, her two daughters were beginning preschool at a Jewish community center and she was active in her synagogue community, she said.

"I was very involved in Jewish life. All my friends were Jewish. I used to be in a Jewish women's group," she said.

But by 1991, her marriage and finances were failing. Both spiraled out of her grasp by the time she was sent to the Northern California Women's Facility in Stockton, Calif.

To make matters worse, family members as well as friends from her close-knit Jewish community cut their ties with her, she said.

"My life was falling apart. I was a desperate person," Mizrahi recalled in an emotional interview.

Though she's been out of prison since 1995, the 44-year-old hasn't seen her two young daughters since before she was incarcerated.

They were 3 and 5 then.

Mizrahi would like to come back to the synagogue community. Her rabbi, Sheldon Lewis of Palo Alto, Calif.'s Congregation Kol Emeth, has been supportive throughout the ordeal but, she said, she still feels like a pariah.

"I just don't feel welcome," she said.

Few suburban congregations find themselves in the position of receiving a returning convict.

And a certain amount of awkwardness is almost inevitable. But for the former inmate, the path back to the mainstream is a difficult one.

Mizrahi's feelings of having fallen from grace in her community are typical, according to Isaac Jaroslawicz, director of the Aleph Institute, a Jewish prisoners' advocate group based in Florida.

"It's not easy going back," said Jaroslawicz.

"People still make judgments, failing to recognize the difference between bad people and good people who commit bad acts," he said.

However, Jaroslawicz said he hasn't heard of many communities that have banned a former inmate outright.

"Under Jewish law, after you've paid your debt, you are to be forgiven as if you are sinless. We have a long way to come in that regard."

An old friend of Mizrahi recently urged her to return to her former synagogue. Mizrahi actually has visited Kol Emeth a few times since she got out of prison.

But the visits were unsettling. Mizrahi said she bowed her head with shame, thinking that all eyes were upon her.

"Everybody talks and they look at me and don't know what to say," she said.

"Everything is so moralistic in the Jewish community and we are supposed to be perfect, and that's just not reality."

Lewis said he didn't think most of his congregants even know of Mizrahi, whom he described as marginally active before her

imprisonment. However, he said he understood her feelings.

"Nancy is a very sensitive woman. She may feel alienated, and that's hard to get at," said Lewis. "But I think that she knows from her friends and certainly from me that she is welcome."

While the Torah does not prescribe prison as an acceptable means of doing penance, Lewis said no congregation should turn away someone who has made teshuvah, or penance, for their transgressions.

Mizrahi, he added, "has paid dearly for her mistake."

The former stockbroker said that mistake involved her embezzling about \$200,000.

Lewis vouched for his congregant's character during her resentencing hearing.

While she was in prison, he held a Passover seder for her and an interfaith group of inmates, Mizrahi recalled.

"He was always there for me," she said.

Thinking back on her incarceration, she says Judaism was her only support in prison.

The prison's Jewish chaplain, Rabbi Samuel Graudenz, pushed her to brush up on Hebrew and study Jewish texts.

She wore a Magen David despite the harassment it provoked from anti-Semitic people there.

When she was feeling particularly down, she walked the prison yard with the Jewish singer Debbie Friedman's songs playing on her headset.

"My Judaism was a source of comfort and hope. It was the only thing that kept me from going crazy, knowing I had a heritage and was different" from other inmates, she said. "Learning Hebrew kept me mentally stimulated."

From her cell she wrote letters to friends, some of whom didn't write back. No one but her rabbis ever showed up for holidays.

Mizrahi is slowly putting her life together. She has remarried to a Jewish man, her childhood sweetheart, and is working as an administrative assistant.

She said she feels good about herself, but anguishes over her broken family.

Two sisters still won't talk to her now, nor will some old friends. She has obtained a number of court orders to visit her daughters, who, she said, have been sequestered by her ex-husband. But the girls' father has ignored all of the injunctions, she said.

"The little one doesn't even know who I am," she said.

Despite painful memories, Mizrahi forces herself to return on a regular basis to Chowchilla, the federal prison near Fresno, Calif., where she was first admitted.

There she visits a Jewish friend. The woman is a former Hadassah activist, Mizrahi said, but gets no attention from her former community in San Jose, Calif.

"When you meet her, she is like every other wonderful Jewish woman at the table next to you," Mizrahi said.

Mizrahi has been trying to locate a rabbi to visit the woman, who battles illness and faces a life sentence for conspiracy to commit murder.

Chowchilla officials told Mizrahi that they've also been searching for a Jewish chaplain to serve Jewish prisoners. That was three years ago.

In the meantime, Mizrahi wants to organize a Jewish group to visit the woman on a semi-regular basis. After all, she said, it's what she would have wanted while in prison. □