



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 76, No. 172

Thursday, September 17, 1998

81st Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Study: Jewry to be halved

The population of Diaspora Jewry will be reduced by half within 30 years if assimilation trends continue, according to a study issued by the Jerusalem-based Institute of the World Jewish Congress.

The study also predicted that the United States, home to the largest Jewish community with 5.6 million Jews, will be surpassed by Israel within the next 10 years.

League slams Israeli-Turkish ties

Military cooperation between Israel and Turkey was condemned during a meeting of the 22-nation Arab League in Cairo.

"We call upon Turkey to reconsider its ties with Israel," the group's secretary-general said.

Meanwhile, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat reiterated his charge that Israel is planning to invade the self-rule areas when he declares Palestinian statehood next year.

Arafat told the group he was counting on Arab support should that happen.

Israel links report to Camp David

Israeli officials issued a report detailing instances of anti-Semitism they said "permeate the official Egyptian media."

The report was issued on the 20th anniversary of the Camp David accords.

These accords, in part, called on Israel and Egypt to "abstain from hostile propaganda against each other."

The report underscored the frigidity of relations between the two countries since the accords and the 1979 peace treaty were signed.

Palestinian acted alone

A Palestinian accused of an attempted bombing in Jerusalem two months ago acted alone, Israeli police said.

Jalal Rummana was severely burned at a Jerusalem intersection in July when a fire broke out in his van, which contained flammable liquid and bags of nails.

He served 20 months in an Israeli jail in the early 1990s for membership in Hamas.

But police said he was not acting in concert with the group during the latest incident.

N.Y. Board of Rabbis issues survey of rabbinic cooperation

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — The New York Board of Rabbis has released a collection of hundreds of recent examples of rabbinic interdenominational cooperation from across the country.

But a conflict within the board itself over an interfaith prayer service last week in New York illustrates the continuing tensions among Judaism's streams.

The examples of cooperation range from some that seem groundbreaking to others that don't involve substantive interdenominational cooperation at all, as when rabbis offer their own views of the pluralism debate in panel discussions or when congregations around the country separately host a crash course in Hebrew offered by the National Jewish Outreach Program.

Many of the examples came in two arenas where joint interdenominational work has long been practiced: chaplaincy and adult Jewish education.

Other examples in the New York board's report:

- New York Orthodox synagogue Kehillath Jeshurun opened up space in its Ramaz Day School to Conservative congregation Or Zarua, which used the room for High Holidays services and its community seder.

- A workshop on intermarriage, held in San Francisco's East Bay last June, drew about 25 Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist and Reform rabbis.

- In Portland, Maine, rabbis from each of the four denominations met last June to discuss establishing a community mikvah, community day school and kashrut oversight committee.

- In San Francisco in August, a community-wide Tisha B'Av service involved Orthodox, Conservative and Reform rabbis.

- In Houston in August, the Fourteenth Annual Cantors' Concert was held at a Reform temple, with Orthodox, Conservative and Reform cantors performing together.

- A group of 38 Los Angeles-area rabbis from each of the four denominations, calling themselves "Darchei Shalom," or Paths of Peace, issued a statement calling for Jews to adopt a code to govern the way Jews speak and write about each other.

Rabbi Mark Schneier, president of the New York Board of Rabbis, came up with the idea for the study because "people only hear about the divisiveness and the conflict" within the Jewish community.

"I'm trying to give a more balanced view of the state of the Jewish union. There's a calling out there for the Jewish and rabbinic community to find ways to unite, and there's a very strong foundation of rabbis out there making a concerted effort to find ways to cooperate and find areas of common cause," he said.

The \$10,000 cost of the study was underwritten by philanthropists Charles Bronfman, Michael Jesselson and Michael Steinhardt as part of their joint \$50,000 gift to Schneier's new effort to put together a nationwide association of boards of rabbis.

Just as Schneier released the report, however, the New York board faced a conflict which may, according to some, threaten Orthodox participation in the 117-year old organization. With more than 800 members, it is the nation's largest local interdenominational rabbinic organization.

The imbroglio began when Reform Rabbi Robert Levine, head of the board's interfaith committee, sent a letter to the membership inviting his colleagues to participate in a Sept. 9 service at St. Patrick's Cathedral on behalf of the city's poor.

Orthodox members of the board — including Schneier — strongly objected,

MIDEAST FOCUS

Ross expected to fail

U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross will be unable to broker an Israeli-Palestinian agreement during his current shuttle, a senior Israeli official said.

While a departure date has not been announced, Ross is expected to leave the region before the start of Rosh Hashanah on Sunday night.

Leniency sought for Har-Shefi

Defense lawyers pleaded for leniency during the sentencing trial of the woman convicted of failing to try to prevent the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

The judge delayed until later this month the sentencing of Margalit Har-Shefi, who was found guilty in June of failing to warn police about Yigal Amir's plans to carry out the November 1995 assassination. The offense carries a maximum sentence of two years.

Casino opens in Jericho

A casino built with funding from Austrian and Palestinian investors held a glitzy opening-night bash in the West Bank town of Jericho.

The casino hopes to attract Israelis, Palestinians with foreign passports and foreign tourists. Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat made the casino off-limits to residents of the West Bank and Gaza Strip as a gesture to Islamic officials. Hamas founder Sheik Ahmed Yassin railed against the new venture, calling it a den of iniquity.

Municipal workers strike

Garbage remained uncollected and other municipal services were suspended in several Israeli cities as some 100,000 municipal workers went on strike.

The workers are seeking wage bonuses comparable to those won in a settlement last week between the Histadrut labor federation and the country's Finance Ministry.

because their interpretation of halachah, or Jewish law, prohibits them from praying in a church and from engaging in joint prayer with non-Jews.

Levine quickly sent out a follow-up letter to board members, trying to present the event as the innocuous gathering that he felt it was.

But at a time when right-wing interpretations of Orthodox Judaism hold growing sway and centrist Orthodox rabbis worry about being tainted as insufficiently strict, it failed to control the damage, which has played out in a series of recent angry articles in the Orthodox newspaper *The Jewish Press*.

The event itself was a success, said Levine after the service, with the massive landmark cathedral filled with Catholics, Jews, Protestants, Muslims and Buddhists.

From the dais looking out over the crowd, he said, he couldn't tell if any Orthodox New York rabbis who are members of the board attended.

According to Rabbi Irving Greenberg, a longtime analyst of Jewish religious and communal life who predicted in 1985 that religious extremism would polarize the Jewish people into virtually two religions, the flap within the New York board is more reflective of current reality than the examples of cooperation in the organization's study.

While he welcomed Schneier's effort to point out the "moments of light and relief, the big picture is that there's less cooperation and communal activity and willingness to do things together than there ever has been," Greenberg said in an interview.

"No one should fool themselves into thinking that the big picture is truly a good one," he said, when "the atmosphere is one of an almost total breakdown" between the different Jewish religious philosophies.

Greenberg compared the examples cited in the New York board study to the few thousand righteous gentiles who risked their own lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

While we should be grateful for them, he said, "no one has the illusion that they stopped the catastrophe from happening." □

State-of-the-art Jewish day school, largest of its kind, dedicated in L.A.

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — The Milken Community High School dedicated its \$30 million campus on Sunday, formally opening what is believed to be the largest non-Orthodox Jewish high school in the United States.

The school's curriculum combines high-tech subjects, such as robotics and biotechnology, with intensive Jewish studies.

At the dedication ceremony, the biggest hand was given to Michael Milken, the former junk-bond king, whose family foundation contributed a third of the school's cost.

Described by the Los Angeles Times as "an educator's dream," the school is wired for the Internet and video conferencing in every classroom; has fiber-optic hookups in science labs, art and broadcasting studios; and even boasts lounges for students.

Tuition is a hefty \$14,000 a year, higher than at many colleges and universities.

Although the school is under the auspices of the Stephen Wise Temple, a large Reform congregation, the affiliations of the 640 students range from Reconstructionist to Conservative, and they hail from many parts of the United States, Israel, Argentina and Iran. The school is set on a hilltop in the Sepulveda Pass, with a sweeping view of Los Angeles and the San Fernando Valley. It adjoins the Skirball Cultural Center and is a short distance from the Getty Museum.

Rabbi Isaiah Zeldin, founder of the Stephen Wise Temple, said at the dedication that he was even more privileged than Moses in being allowed to see and enter "the promised land."

The school's first classes actually opened eight years ago in temporary facilities at the nearby University of Judaism.

Even as the students, families and dignitaries celebrated the opening of the Milken school, Zeldin broke ground for an additional building to house more science labs and classrooms. □



Daily News Bulletin

Caryn Rosen Adelman, *President*
Mark J. Joffe, *Executive Editor and Publisher*
Lisa Hostein, *Editor*
Kenneth Bandler, *Managing Editor*
Lenore A. Silverstein, *Business Manager*

JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at www.jta.org.

JEWISH WORLD

CLAL sells Sh'ma magazine to Jewish activist for a dollar

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

Insurer addresses claim issue

A Swiss insurance firm said it had found fewer than 20 insurance policies that could have been taken out by Holocaust victims.

Officials for Baloise Insurance Group, Switzerland's fifth-largest insurer, said the company is willing to settle any claims, provided there is sufficient evidence.

Baloise is one of 16 European insurers facing class-action lawsuits of \$1 billion each for refusing to pay out on policies taken out by Jews killed during the Holocaust.

Austrian firms used slave labor

Lawyers for Holocaust victims said three Austrian firms should pay compensation for using slave laborers during World War II.

The companies were identified as industrial giant Voest-Alpine, vehicle assembler Steyr-Daimler-Puch and rayon manufacturer Lensing.

The lawyers recently filed class-action lawsuits in New York and New Jersey against several German firms on similar charges.

CCAR Issues call

The U.S. Reform movement's rabbinical arm issued a call to all Americans to join Jews in making the final 10 days of September a National Ten Days of Atonement.

The call by the Central Conference of American Rabbis was issued in a statement that referred to President Clinton's reading from the Reform prayer book last week when he apologized for his actions in the Monica Lewinsky sex scandal.

This year, the last 10 days of September correspond to the Jewish days of repentance between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur.

Besser joins fund council

Switzerland announced that Rabbi Chaskel Besser, president of the Agudath Israel World Organization, has been appointed to the advisory council of a Swiss fund for Holocaust victims.

The council helps establish eligibility criteria for the \$185 million Holocaust Memorial Fund, which was set up last year by Swiss banks.

The fund, which has distributed money to some survivors in Europe, is preparing to distribute money to needy survivors living in the United States.

Holocaust program begins

Students are starting classes in what is likely the world's first doctoral program in Holocaust history.

The program at Clark University in Worcester, Mass., has two endowed professorships in Holocaust history.

NEW YORK (JTA) — How many significant business deals conclude with the buyer handing over a \$1 bill and both sides reciting unusual Hebrew blessings?

Not many. But when it came to Yossi Abramowitz purchasing the publication Sh'ma from CLAL: The National Center for Learning and Leadership, that's how the deal was done.

Abramowitz closed the deal here last Friday by reciting a prayer describing God as the One who can raise the dead, since CLAL, long losing money on the periodical, had planned to shut it down. Rabbi Irwin Kula, president of CLAL, then said a prayer thanking God for being the increaser of wisdom.

Sh'ma is called a magazine but, printed in black ink on eight white pages, looks more like a newsletter.

It was created in 1970 by Rabbi Eugene Borowitz as a forum in which Jews with controversial points of view could debate ethical matters as they related to the world at large.

Many articles sparked controversy. In the years immediately after the 1967 Six-Day War it was virtually heretical to criticize Israel, but one article in Sh'ma's pages said that even if Israel ceased to exist, Judaism would be just fine.

Another piece, which generated more criticism than any other in Sh'ma's pages, recalled Borowitz, was by a Christian cleric who wrote that his co-religionists were repenting for their role during the Holocaust, and that it was time for the Jewish community to forgive them.

By the time he handed Sh'ma over to CLAL in 1993, the Jewish community had turned to more internal matters, said Borowitz in an interview, and so Sh'ma's focus followed suit.

In the meantime, with concise but challenging articles, Sh'ma had become "must reading" for the Jewish community's spiritual and institutional leaders.

Edited by Rabbi Nina Beth Cardin while under CLAL's auspices, it became a forum for exploring spiritual matters and the nature of Jewish communal life.

There were articles about kavanah, or mindfulness, in worship and in organizational leadership.

Other pieces covered the flowering of family foundations and "The Ten Commandments of Voluntarism."

"We didn't do reporting, we did reflection. We looked at, 'Where's the me in all of this?'" Cardin said in an interview.

Readership grew slightly from the 5,500 subscriptions Sh'ma had under Borowitz to about 6,500.

Abramowitz hopes to increase circulation significantly.

"Sh'ma will be a neutral and exciting print vehicle through which Jewish leaders and thinkers [can be] inspired to try and tackle some of the tougher issues facing Judaism right now," said Abramowitz, a 34-year-old activist and publisher.

His main enterprise, under which Sh'ma will now fall, is Jewish Family & Life!, whose central project is a Web site, Jewishfamily.com and 17 others, covering everything from Jewish food to Jewish sports.

"Average Jews turn to Jewish Family & Life! to rejuvenate themselves, their families and their faith.

"It's time to help Jewish leaders become inspired change-agents in a community that is tired of its mediocrity and bored by its old ideas."

Another priority, he said, "is to help the non-Orthodox movements overcome their religious inferiority complex and also to be a bridge to the thinking modern Orthodox world."

His primary challenge at the moment is to come up with the \$100,000 he needs to keep Sh'ma in print.

The first, slated for November distribution, will be devoted to the concept of rebirth — spiritual, institutional and communal — and the second will be devoted to debating school vouchers. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD**California rabbi uses gimmicks to engage unaffiliated in Judaism**

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — This time of year, Rabbi Shlomo Schwartz, wearing a "Grateful Yid" T-shirt and baseball cap, offers an alternative to the legions of Los Angeles Jews who wonder whether they want to pay anywhere from \$100 to \$400 for admission to High Holidays services.

"Schwartzie," as everyone calls him, passes out leaflets, which announce in bold lettering, "No Tickets, No Appeals" for services open to "Conservative, Reform, non-affiliates & any Jew that moves."

This year, he expects a total of 3,000, mainly single, Jews — most of whom may not have stepped inside a synagogue since their Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

For their free tickets, worshipers also get a Rosh Hashanah eve "Schmooz and Cruise Singles Party," a study session, for women only, by the rabbi's wife, Olivia, and songs by the Schwartz Family Tabernacle Choir, consisting of the couple's seven sons.

Especially popular is a "Stump the Rabbi" session, which in Schwartz's patented orthographic style, "is intensely animated bcz 100's of ppl R bursting w/?s they've been wanting to ask since age 12 or 13."

During one such session, a young man asked whether there was a special prayer before sexual intercourse, to which Schwartz answered instantly, "Yes, you pray she doesn't have a headache."

Though the tone may often be lighthearted, the services conform to Orthodox ritual. A mechitzah, or partition, divides men from women, and only men are called up to read from the Torah.

Schwartz, the product of a Chabad yeshiva who remains a devoted follower of the Lubavitcher rebbe's teachings, ventures where no rabbi has gone before. A one-time bongo-thumping Greenwich Village beatnik, he frequents rock concerts — flowing beard, yarmulka, Mickey Mouse suspenders, leather thongs and all — and will on occasion lace a wedding ceremony with lyrics from the Grateful Dead's repertoire.

One of his oddest venues is the Venice Beach boardwalk here, where every other Sunday he sets up a folding table and affixes a prominent "Jewish Astrology!" placard. Surrounded by books and calendars, he practices his own form of star-gazing.

Schwartz doesn't claim to be a psychic and he doesn't predict the future. "I try to tell people who they are, their essence, and through that identify their potential and how they can realize it.

"I started this astrology as a shtick, a hook, but I've been blown away by how often I hit the mark," he says.

Schwartz's unorthodox approach and style are based on the simple premise that if Jews, especially the younger generation, won't go to synagogues or join Jewish organizations, then he has to go where they normally gather or provide a setting in which they feel comfortable.

Where do young Jews meet? One place is the popular Comedy Store on the Sunset Strip, and every Purim Schwartz is there, doing his stand-up routine and reading from the megillah to a sellout crowd of 450 people. Are there any married women who enjoy being rejuvenated at a spa? Olivia Schwartz organizes a "spiritual spa retreat" for them near Palm Springs, Calif.

Do young Jewish men and women need a nice place to meet, imbibing some Judaism while enjoying themselves? Schwartz will set up a moonlight cruise or rock concert.

The 52-year old Schwartz was born in Atlantic City, N.J., the son of a cantor who had fled Vienna in 1939. The father disliked all Chasidic movements with a passion, and when his only son decided to become a Lubavitcher disciple, the father turned his back on Shlomo, predicting "you'll be a bum."

After rabbinical studies, including two years at Kfar Chabad in Israel in the late 1960s, Schwartz found his natural calling at the University of California at Los Angeles Chabad House, the first of its kind on any American campus.

He quickly became a highly visible campus figure, setting up his stand next to the followers of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Jews for Jesus.

Soon he was dragging startled students into his mobile Sukkah on wheels to wave the lulav, engaging a seven-piece rock band for a Purim party and buttonholing anyone he suspected of being a Jew.

He left his campus post after 13 years, when his unconventional methods got to be a bit much for his superiors. "I am still a Lubavitcher in my heart," he reflects, "but by no longer being an official Chabad representative, I figured I could do even more outrageous things."

Left with no job, but with a wife and 10 children — the number has now swelled to 12 — Shlomo and Olivia Schwartz founded the CHAI Center nine years ago. The name stands for "Life" in Hebrew, but doubles as an acronym for "Center for Happiness & Awesome Insights."

Sometimes criticized for his unconventional methods, Shlomo Schwartz observes, "I've been called a Reform Chasid and God's court jester, but whatever the label, I do believe that to bring Jews back into the fold one must serve God with joy." □

U.S. seeks to deport Illinois man

NEW YORK (JTA) — The U.S. Justice Department of Justice has filed a court motion to deport a man alleged to have participated in World War II atrocities against Jews.

According to the motion, Vincas Valkavickas, 78, lied about participating in a 1941 massacre of at least 3,700 Jews in Lithuania when he applied to immigrate to the United States.

Valkavickas is accused of guarding Jews who were shot to death during a two-day massacre near the Nazi-occupied town of Sviencionys in late September 1941.

Valkavickas allegedly served in the Saugamus, Lithuania's secret police, between 1941 and 1944.

Valkavickas "played an essential role in a Nazi-ordered massacre of thousands of innocent civilians," said Eli Rosenbaum, the director of the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations, which filed the motion Monday in U.S. Immigration Court in Chicago.

During the Nazi occupation of Lithuania from 1941 to 1944, approximately 94 percent of Lithuania's prewar Jewish community of 240,000 died in the Holocaust. Historians say the scale of the tragedy could have been smaller had ordinary Lithuanians not helped with the killings.

Valkavickas entered the United States in 1950 and applied for citizenship in 1994. □