



Daily News Bulletin

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82nd Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Orthodox boycott Haifa council

Orthodox representatives boycotted a meeting of the Haifa religious council.

The meeting was immediately canceled when the only people to show up were representatives from the Reform and Conservative movements. Last week, the Supreme Court ordered the council to allow the participation of non-Orthodox representatives. [Page 3]

Insurer compensates heirs

Italy's largest insurance company began compensating the heirs of policyholders who perished in the Holocaust. Some 1,551 applicants filed for payment from the \$12 million Israel-based fund established by Assicurazioni Generali. Applicants may still seek payment from the fund, which is also making payments to needy survivors and organizations dedicated to commemorating the Holocaust.

Netanyahu: No meeting planned

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied that a meeting involving Israeli, Palestinian and U.S. officials had been scheduled. His comment came after Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said U.S. Middle East envoy Dennis Ross would host the February meeting in Washington.

Group eyes more Jewish campers

A new foundation aims to triple the percentage of North American Jewish children who attend Jewish summer camp. The Foundation for Jewish Camping, which plans to announce its first grants this spring, is touting the effort as a way to ensure Jewish continuity. Some 30,000 Jewish children in the United States and Canada, or 4 percent of all Jewish children in North America, currently attend Jewish summer camp, according to the foundation.

Did Clinton snub Netanyahu?

President Clinton sent a message to Israeli Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai commending his peacemaking efforts. Israeli analysts said the message may have been a snub to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. A dove in Netanyahu's hawkish Cabinet, Mordechai reportedly held several recent secret meetings with Palestinian officials to maintain security cooperation despite the freeze in implementing the Wye accord.

APPROACHING THE MILLENNIUM

Peaceful millennialists distance themselves from a deported cult

By Avi Machlis

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Brother David stands on the rocky hillside of Bethany in eastern Jerusalem before the ancient ruins of the house of Simon the Leper. Holy Bible in hand, he reads aloud the passage from the Gospel of John that recounts the events that Christian believers say took place on the same spot almost 2,000 years ago.

At the foot of the hill is the tomb of Lazarus, whom, according to Christian tradition, Jesus raised from the dead; behind him sits the house of Simon, where Jesus and the 12 disciples dined after the believed miracle. And across the road is the house of Mary and Martha, where Jesus is believed to have lodged.

"We are the living testimony of God's preparation for the Second Coming of Christ," says Brother David, his long, dark coat flapping gently in the warm winter sunshine. "We are living in the days when the Scriptures tell us there will be even greater miracles than the ones we read there."

Brother David, 58, is one of some 100 evangelical Christians who have gravitated to the area of Bethany on the far side of the Mount of Olives to prepare for what Christians believe will be the Second Coming of Jesus.

The activities of Brother David and the small group of 20 or so who meet to pray each Wednesday evening above the Almanar Pharmacy are once again coming under intense scrutiny following the recent arrest and deportation from Jerusalem of the Concerned Christians cult.

The cult members were suspected of planning violent actions in the coming year in order to bring about the Second Coming.

A former salesman of mobile homes from Syracuse, N.Y., Brother David says he gave up his wealth, his career and his last name to help the poor on the streets of New York City before moving to Israel in 1980.

Ten years later, Sister Sharon heard a call from the Lord in her native Los Angeles and came to Jerusalem, where she met Brother David and became his companion. They settled in Bethany and set up a food-and-clothing distribution center for the poor.

"This is where Jesus stayed and ministered to the poor, where God the father chose to place his family on earth, and his son found love and hospitality," Brother David says. "Today, we minister to the poor just as he did and walk on the ground where he walked 2,000 years ago."

They have a network of 10 apartments that they rent out for \$5 a night to Christians who want to join them to await the coming of Jesus. Other than this paltry income and donations, they say they have no other means of support.

Sister Sharon has seven children and 11 grandchildren. They all stayed behind in America, except for her son Raymond, 27, who was in prison when she left but later got the call himself and joined his mother 18 months ago.

In November, Raymond married Keren Arndt, 49, a former showgirl who was called to the Lord as she watched the Rev. Billy Graham preach on television just as she was about to go on stage at Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas. She arrived in Jerusalem for the first time two months ago and married Raymond soon after.

The wedding was simple. The couple exchanged vows before witnesses but without the benefit of a pastor or official documentation. This was in part because Raymond, like his mother and Brother David, is in Israel illegally. All three have destroyed their passports and have no visas. "We're not going anywhere, so why have

MIDEAST FOCUS

D.C. break-in inquiry monitored

The head of security for Israel's Labor Party was sent to the United States to monitor the ongoing investigation into last week's break-in at the office of an American pollster hired to advise the Labor candidate for prime minister.

Meanwhile, Israeli police are probing possible links between a series of break-ins during the past four months in the homes of activists working for Ehud Barak.

Barak attacked on Pollard

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu attacked opposition leader Ehud Barak for refusing to sign a joint letter to President Clinton requesting the release of Jonathan Pollard.

Netanyahu, who met with Pollard's lawyer, said the Pollard case is a matter of national interest and should not be subject to the political considerations of Israel's ongoing election campaign. Clinton is reviewing clemency appeals for Pollard, the former U.S. intelligence analyst serving a life sentence for spying for Israel.

Chief rabbi seeks Kosovo protest

Israel's chief Ashkenazi rabbi called for a special Knesset session aimed at protesting the weekend massacre in Kosovo in which Serbian gunmen killed scores of ethnic Albanians.

Yisrael Meir Lau, a survivor of the Holocaust, said Israel bore a special responsibility to speak out against the bloodshed in the Serbian province.

West Bank settler arrested

Israeli security forces recently arrested a Jewish settler suspected of planning attacks on Palestinians.

Israeli police said the man, an Orthodox Jew from the West Bank settlement of Mitzpe Jericho, is "identified with the extreme right" and was arrested on suspicion of being affiliated with a terrorist group.

a passport?" asks Brother David. "I was called by the Lord, not the Israeli Ministry of the Interior."

"They tried to get rid of me once and it cost them dear," he says, refusing to divulge any further details of this encounter with Israeli officialdom except to say that it was in 1992 and he spent nine months in prison. "I ministered to the poor in jail just as I did on the streets — it made no difference to me."

Brother David wants to distance himself from the Concerned Christians group.

"None of us have come here to do anything violent or to harm anyone. We don't consider them Christians; they are a cult," he says of the deported group.

"There's nothing in the teachings of Christ which tells us to harm anyone. I'm happy for their sakes they were able to be caught and taken out of here."

Brother David says he does not belong to any organization and is not planning to create one. But he hopes hundreds more Christians will gather on the Mount of Olives to witness the events that he is certain will happen very soon. "The time of Jesus' coming is near and God is calling to individuals, not organizations."

Brother Raymond recalls the vision he had just 18 months ago. "I went to sleep one night and God woke me up and snapped me out of my bed," says the former drug addict. "The Son of God said there is no more time to mess around and play. I'm on my way. Get ready. In one and a half years of my life, he has done for me what I haven't done in 25 years."

Sitting under an olive tree, Brother Raymond flips through his Bible, citing highlighted passages that form the foundation of the group's theology.

The biggest sign of the "end of times" is the return of the Jewish people to the land of Israel: "Throughout scriptures, Israel is paralleled to the fig tree," says Brother Raymond. "He indicated the Jewish people would be dispersed throughout the world. When you see the fig tree blossom, you know the time is nigh."

Israel's victory in the 1967 Six-Day War, the drying up of the Dead Sea, earthquakes, natural disasters and even UFOs were all signposted in Scripture, according to Brother Raymond. "The book has never been wrong," he says.

When Jesus does return, says Brother Raymond, it will be unmistakable. "Millions of believers will be snapped up from the earth before the apocalypse," he says.

These views are disputed by mainstream Christians, who say believers have no right to predict the exact date or course of events that will take place during the Second Coming. Other millennium-watchers warn against associating the vast majority of peace-loving Christian groups, including fringe sects such as Brother David's, with radical cults that may carry out violence. Israel is beefing up security in anticipation of attacks on Muslim sites in Jerusalem by radical groups seeking to rebuild the ancient Israelite temple and spark the apocalypse.

"We must be very careful not to generalize," says Rabbi David Rosen, the director of the Jerusalem office of the Anti-Defamation League and an expert on Jewish-Christian relations.

"Not all those who see the date as having cosmic significance want to do anything concrete or even dangerous. However, the prospect of some fringe elements in alliance with extreme nationalist elements does raise the danger of a Waco or Jonestown happening here in Israel."

The International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem, which has close ties to evangelical groups coming to celebrate the millennium, insists that the vast majority of pilgrims expected during the millennium year will be peaceful.

The embassy shares the beliefs of Brother David's group that these are "prophetic times." But it said in a statement last week that setting dates for Jesus' return is wrong, and media hype focusing on extremist cults is creating a "gross distortion" of Christian views on the millennium.

"Israeli authorities certainly have the right and duty to take all reasonable precautions and make informed assessments of any potential security risks," the statement said. "However, Israelis and others need to look past the incautious dissemination of negative images and recognize that these pilgrims are coming with peaceful intentions."

"We view the Christian observance of the millennium as an opportunity for the Israeli people to welcome and win new friends from around the world." □



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JEWISH WORLD

Debate over religious councils hinges on a push for legislation

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Orthodox Israeli legislators are about to go to war with the Supreme Court over the issue of religious pluralism.

The high court, which has come under attack by the legislators for issuing a series of rulings that whittle away at Orthodox control over religious life in Israel, recently issued a decision requiring that elected Conservative and Reform representatives be allowed to serve on municipal religious councils.

And last week, the Supreme Court specifically ordered the Haifa religious council to allow the participation of non-Orthodox representatives.

Following up on the court ruling, the head of the Haifa council convened a meeting Monday.

But he immediately ended the session when representatives from the Reform and Conservative movements were the only ones to show up.

Council head Yitzhak Getz said it was clear even before the meeting that fervently Orthodox members of the council would boycott the session under order from their rabbis.

Orthodox representatives from the Likud and Labor parties also absented themselves.

The council is scheduled to reconvene next week, but by then, the high court directive to open the council to non-Orthodox representatives may be moot — because the Orthodox political parties are mounting a push in the Knesset for passage this week of legislation that would bypass the court's ruling.

Religious legislators are seeking passage of the "bypass bill," which requires every member of a religious council to abide by all religious rulings of the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate.

Reform and Conservative leaders were furious after the Knesset gave its backing to the bill in the first of three votes last month, saying the bill mocked the Supreme Court's ruling.

The powerful religious councils have exclusive jurisdiction over marriage, kashrut, burial and other religious matters for Jews living in Israel.

The councils have long been criticized as outmoded and inefficient. Chief Sephardi Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron is among those calling for reforms.

Supporters of the bypass include Knesset member Avraham Ravitz of the fervently Orthodox Agudat Yisrael Party.

Threatening to use his power as chairman of the Knesset Finance Committee, Ravitz has demanded passage of the bill as a condition for getting the nation's 1999 budget legislation approved.

In the wake of last week's Supreme Court ruling, the spiritual leaders of two fervently Orthodox parties said any high court ruling that goes against Jewish religious law is invalid.

The statement from the leaders of Degel HaTorah and Agudat Yisrael is binding on their followers in the Knesset and in government offices.

While the ruling on the Haifa council prompted the decree, it was preceded by a series of court decisions that put the judicial system on a collision course with the fervently Orthodox community.

Among the rulings was a decision by the High Court of Justice invalidating a decades-old arrangement under which yeshiva students are exempted from army service.

Also sparking controversy within Israel's Orthodox community was a recent district court ruling ordering the Interior Ministry to recognize as Jewish 23 people who underwent conversions performed by Conservative and Reform rabbis.

Interior Minister Eli Suissa of the fervently Orthodox Shas Party filed an appeal this week with the Supreme Court to challenge the district court ruling.

And in a separate move, Suissa is pressing to reduce the size of the religious councils, a move that could prevent Conservative and Reform representatives from serving. □

Accord reached on memorial

An American architect reached an agreement with Germany regarding a proposed national Holocaust memorial in Berlin.

The agreement with Peter Eisenman adds a wall of books and a research center, and reduces the size of Eisenman's previous large-scale design.

The accord, mediated by former U.S. Treasury Secretary Michael Blumenthal, who is now head of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, offers hope that the memorial, which has been mired in controversy for a decade, may soon be built.

Germany to pay U.S. survivors

Germany will pay reparations to American citizens who survived the Holocaust. The deal is reportedly worth approximately \$24 million.

Jewish leaders said it could benefit roughly 240 survivors. Release of the funds requires approval of the German Parliament's budget committee, and it remains unclear how soon that will happen.

Court rules for religious landlords

A federal appeals court ruled that landlords can cite religious beliefs in refusing to rent to unmarried couples living together.

The case involved two Christians in Alaska who had refused to rent to unmarried couples in defiance of the state's ban on housing discrimination based on marital status. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said the law interfered with property owners' free exercise of religion as well as their property rights and freedom of speech.

Lithuania urged to hold war trials

Israel's Knesset speaker urged Lithuania to bring two alleged Nazi war criminals to justice.

Dan Tichon, on a three-day visit to the Baltic state, urged Lithuania to remember the large Jewish community that once prospered there as he appealed to officials in Vilnius to press forward in the trials of Aleksandras Lileikis and Kazys Gimzauskas. Both are accused of turning Jews over to Nazi death squads during the war.

Legislator apologizes for remark

Rep. Bob Ney (R-Ohio) apologized for describing the United States as a "Christian country." Ney had come under heat from Jewish groups for saying last month that "as a Christian country, we need to feel toward the president some sympathy for the situation he is in." Ney, in a letter printed last week in *The Washington Post*, said his comments "were not made to offend anybody" and that he simply wanted to make a "generic statement about the need for forgiveness in this situation."

Israel reportedly shelved plan to assassinate Iraqi president

By Douglas Davis

LONDON (JTA) — A tryst with a mistress almost cost Iraqi President Saddam Hussein his life at the hands of the Israelis, according to the London Sunday Times.

But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu backed away from ordering the assassination of Saddam Hussein on the eve of last month's U.S.-British air strikes after the plan was given only a 1-in-5 chance of succeeding, according to the paper.

The plan — apparently supported by the Mossad but opposed by military intelligence officers, who gave the pessimistic ratings — was to have been carried out by special forces from an elite unit.

They had been trained to assassinate Saddam using guided missiles after the Iraqi leader left the home of his mistress in northwestern Iraq, said the paper.

This "window of opportunity" was discovered by the Mossad, which learned that when he visited his mistress, Saddam followed a predictable pattern.

He would usually arrive around dusk and visit relatives in the area before arriving at her home.

In the morning, Saddam would travel to a nearby secret military site.

But the key to the success of the operation was the Mossad's claim to have a source who knew in advance when Saddam would visit his mistress.

"If the accounts of Saddam's routine were correct," said the paper, "then for 15-20 minutes between leaving her and arriving at the military site, he was vulnerable."

Saddam's movements are shrouded in secrecy and are known only to his inner circle, mostly family members.

To mask his movements, the paper continued, dinner is prepared each evening at more than a dozen safe houses, with Saddam choosing his residence-for-the-night only at the last minute.

To complicate the issue even more, he uses look-alikes to spread confusion.

To confirm the quality of its information, a Mossad agent infiltrated Iraq, surveyed the location and returned with good-quality photographs of Saddam.

After Mossad head Amiram Levine convinced Netanyahu that the intelligence was sound, officials decided to formulate a plan to kill the Iraqi leader.

This is not the first Israeli plan to assassinate Saddam, according to the report.

An operation, code named Bramble, was developed by former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and former army chief of staff Ehud Barak, now the leader of the Labor Party.

The plan was revived early last year and, with the appointment of Levine, preparations began for the new plan called Bramble-II.

The commandos have been ordered to continue their preparations and remain on standby, but the paper said the plan will almost certainly be shelved now that it has been revealed.

It adds that details of the operation were leaked "because military intelligence analysts believed the assassination of Saddam would irreparably damage the Middle East peace process and Israel's future relations with Arab countries." □

Roseanne credits Kabbalah for her spiritual transformation

By Tom Tugend

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Since she was 3 years old, Roseanne's been searching for answers. Now in her 40s, the actress and television talk show host says she's found what she's been looking for in the Kabbalah.

The "fragmentations and divisions of my mind have come together. I have found the answers here," she said.

"Here" is the Kabbalah Learning Center, where 350 people of all ages and persuasions crammed into the sanctuary last week to hear the outspoken actress lecture on the changes her studies of the kabbalah have made in her life.

For 90 minutes, Roseanne held the stage in Los Angeles, linked by video to audiences in New York, Miami and Boca Raton, Fla. She discussed her perception of kabbalistic teachings, reminisced about her unhappy childhood, fielded questions and shared an unflattering take on her Hollywood colleagues.

Alternately describing Jews as the dumbest and smartest people on earth, she put the creators of "The Prince of Egypt," the recently released animated movie on the life of Moses, into the former category.

"Only really dumb Jews would come up with that," Roseanne proclaimed cheerfully. "I'd like to invite (Jeffrey) Katzenberg and (Steven) Spielberg and all the other 'Bergs' to come down here and study the word of God.

"God needs no rewrite. He needs only one draft," she said, adding that she'd like to apologize for the movie "on behalf of all Hollywood Jews."

Kabbalah, the Jewish mystical tradition, combines elements of astrology and numerology with speculations about the creation of the universe, God and the soul.

Although the teachings at the center have been denounced by some mainstream rabbis as a superficial, popularized version of a demanding body of literature, the institution attracts a growing number of Jews who are seeking a spiritual fulfillment they apparently cannot find in conventional synagogues.

The center has drawn, in particular, both Jewish and non-Jewish Hollywood stars, including Madonna, Barbra Streisand, Elizabeth Taylor, Courtney Love, Jeff Goldblum and Laura Dern.

Roseanne herself has been studying Kabbalah for four years, which she described as "the most fun I've ever had," and responsible for changing her acerbic personality.

To illustrate the transformation, she asked one woman in the audience to tell her, "I don't like you, Roseanne, and I don't believe anything you say."

The old Roseanne, she said, would have wanted to slap the heckler's face, but the new Roseanne responded, "Thank you for sharing your opinion. You have given me the opportunity to receive the light."

Roseanne credits her studies both with bringing about her spiritual transformation and healing her diseased liver and gums.

In a humorous aside, she noted that before studying Kabbalah, "I had no friends and everyone thought I was crazy." But now, she observed, "Everyone thinks I'm crazy because I talk of God all the time." □