



Daily News Bulletin

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TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

U.S. to seek Assad's involvement

The United States will seek the direct involvement of Syrian President Hafez Assad in Israeli-Syrian negotiations, State Department spokesman James Rubin said.

"I think we agree with the Israeli prime minister that President Assad will have a role to play before this act is completed, if it is going to be completed," Rubin added Wednesday. Just the same, he reiterated the U.S. position that Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharara is "empowered and authorized" to negotiate on behalf of Syria.

A day earlier, Rubin said the United States would not pressure Israel into reaching a peace deal with Syria.

"We can't push them to make decisions that they believe will be against their interests," he said. "It's Israel that has to judge its needs."

Barak predicts Syria framework

A framework for a peace treaty with Syria can be reached soon, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak predicted. It is not "presumptuous to think that we can have a framework agreement within two months," Barak told Army Radio.

Barak added that although he has made no promises about withdrawing from the Golan Heights, commitments made by his predecessors could not be ignored.

Syria claims that previous Israeli governments pledged to return all of the Golan for peace. [Page 3]

Minister discusses Iran 13

The 13 Iranian Jews jailed last year for spying for Israel and the United States should receive a public trial, Iran's intelligence minister said. "The case has been submitted to the judiciary," Ali Yunesi said Wednesday in a newspaper interview.

"If they are convicted and sentenced to death, then they will be executed, and if they are acquitted they will be released." He did not say when the suspects would stand trial.

Because of the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday in the United States, the JTA DAILY NEWS BULLETIN will not be published Monday, Jan. 17.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Looking for the 'Jew inside,' young adults grapple with Israel

By Howard Lovy

JERUSALEM (JTA) — The high winds stirring up the sands at Masada added an epic Cecil B. DeMille air to the words of Rabbi Binny Freedman.

But 24-year-old Riva Saker of Deerfield Beach, Fla., wasn't paying attention.

Freedman, a former Israeli tank commander, is one of many educators trying to raise dormant Jewish sparks within 6,000 young, mostly unaffiliated Jews on their first-ever trips to Israel.

Saker tried her best to tune out Freedman's explanation of how and why a group of ancient Jewish zealots chose to commit suicide rather than surrender to the Romans.

She was crouched on one knee, facing the opposite direction, rubbing the red dirt on her hands and gazing at construction workers making repairs on the fortress. For her, thinking of the men who built massive structures like this one — that makes Jewish history come alive more than ancient war stories.

"Now that interests me, the construction of it," Saker said. "Religiously, who dominated who for what reasons ..." her voice trails off.

Saker is the kind of Jew for whom Birthright Israel was created.

The product of a Jewish mother and a Catholic father, Saker was raised with very little Jewish identity. "I think we only did Shabbas, in my entire lifetime, about six times."

Like most young people, she is searching, experimenting with religious and philosophical ideas. For her and the other 18- to 26-year-olds who are now taking advantage of a free, 10-day trip to Israel, part of that search involves defining their Jewishness and how — or whether — to express it at all.

American Jewish philanthropists Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt spearheaded Birthright Israel, which has, as its ultimate goal, a free trip to Israel for every young Jew as a rite of passage, much like a brit milah or Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

But that is the long-term vision. So far, there are no immediate plans to bring high school-age youth to Israel in the Birthright program. That may happen by 2001 or 2002.

The big question is funding for the program, which was envisioned as a partnership among philanthropists, Israel and local Jewish federations. Israel has committed \$70 million over the next five years, but allocated only \$8 million in its budget this year. Jewish philanthropists, led by Steinhardt and Bronfman, donated \$210 million, but so far many local federations have not committed to the project.

With no financial guarantees about the program's future, Birthright is deciding whether to plan another trip in May or June. A decision is expected in the next couple of weeks. But with all the discussion over funding and the controversy over whether such a program will inspire a Jewish commitment, if it were up to the participants — mostly Americans, but also from the former Soviet Union and other countries — they would keep it going.

Even young Jews who feel they have no place within Judaism — who ran away from it after what many say were horribly ineffective Hebrew school experiences — are engaging their minds. This, they say, could not have been done anywhere else but in Israel, among the shadows of their ancestors.

But touring ancient sites like the Western Wall brought two kinds of tears to many students. Some cried because it stirred dormant religious emotions; others cried because they felt nothing as they touched the Wall, and were disappointed in themselves for

MIDEAST FOCUS

Weizman said to be seeking deal

Israeli President Ezer Weizman's lawyers have proposed a deal under which he would step down if prosecutors halt their probe of him, Israel Radio reported.

The report comes amid calls for Weizman's resignation after he admitted to receiving cash totaling nearly \$500,000 from a French millionaire.

Talks focus on next withdrawal

Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met Wednesday to discuss Israel's planned withdrawal from an additional 6.1 percent of the West Bank next week.

Israel has agreed to listen to Palestinian suggestions about which lands will be transferred, but reserves the right to make the final decision.

Syria, Lebanon sought at talks

The United States is urging Syria and Lebanon to take part in the resumption of talks on Middle East issues that are slated to begin Feb. 1, State Department spokesman James Rubin said Wednesday.

Syria and Lebanon have balked at joining the talks until more progress is made in the Israeli-Syrian negotiations.

Levy visits Morocco

Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy left Wednesday for an official visit to his native Morocco.

He will hold Israel's first substantive talks with Morocco's King Mohammed, who has reigned since the death of his father, King Hassan, last July.

Bank governor joins Merrill Lynch

The outgoing governor of the Bank of Israel, joined Merrill Lynch to lead its efforts to cultivate business with governments and financial institutions around the world. In his new capacity, Jacob Frenkel is expected to divide much of his time between New York and London.



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failing to experience a religious revelation. "I was expecting to have this big profound experience, like I was going to get to the Wall and then tears were going to come, and it didn't happen. I was really upset. Actually, that made me cry, that I didn't feel anything," said Laura Senft, 23, of Lincoln, Neb.

For others, though, seeing Jerusalem with their own eyes reconfirmed for them their reason for choosing to remain Jewish, when floating away would have been easier.

Michael Belle, 19, a University of Florida history major, didn't necessarily need a trip to Israel to strengthen his ties to Judaism.

He came with the commitment, solidified by having grown up in Ocala, Fla., where he often felt culturally and religiously alone. He especially felt that sense of loneliness two years ago, when his mother passed away and a close Southern Baptist friend, in tears, told him, "I'm crying because your mother's going to hell and I'm so sad because of that."

So Belle came to Israel in search of a sense of place, a land to call home.

"It's not that you find new things in the Holy Land," Belle said. "It's that you find the things that have sustained you, that have kept you as a Jew. This is the reward. I've already done my time.

"I've earned this trip after 18 years of isolation and sustaining my Jewish religion," he added. "So, it's not what I've gotten out of this trip, it's what I've put in to get this trip."

While Belle did not need any prodding to be inspired by Israel, the educators and tour guides participating in the 14 overlapping programs running in December and January helped the others along. The programs, run by various organizations, all followed basic educational guidelines.

Gedaliah Gurfein, a former writer for television's "Saturday Night Live," attempted to inspire the Birthright students by mixing references from the Kabbalah seamlessly with quotes from the British show "Monty Python's Flying Circus." He told one group that their visit here should cause "the little Jew inside of you to pop out."

It's the "Jew inside" of all those who came in search of their Birthright that was the focus of a great deal of attention.

Richard Joel, the president and international director of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life, which is bringing about half of the participants to Israel, said the young adults are not simply touring the sites of Israel, but they are being asked to think and discuss how these sites reflect their own identity. It's part of an attempt to get away from today's mantra of "I'm a cultural Jew."

"If you push the students who say they are culturally Jewish, and ask them to tell you what it is, ask them to tell you about their story, you don't hear a lot of culture, you hear a lot of vagueness," Joel said.

Joel said that educating them about Israel's struggles and history is meant to make them think about its place in Jewish history and in their own history.

Birthright participants toured the entire country — they floated in the Dead Sea, listened to settlers on the Golan Heights talk about their uncertain future, went hiking at the Ein Gedi nature preserve, visited Yad Vashem — but when asked about their most moving experience, most came back to the Western Wall.

Autumn Brietstein, 23, of New York City, who works for a reproductive rights nonprofit organization, has a problem with the separation of women at the Wall and with Orthodox Judaism. She also has a hard time finding a sense of spirituality in the rituals of Judaism. Still, the tunnels under the Western Wall that moved her.

"I guess it comes full circle for me to be standing there, and to know that someday, to my great-great-great grandchildren, that place will still be important," Brietstein said. "And it's not that the place is more important than what's inside — the religion, the spirituality, comes from within — to me, having a physical manifestation helps to make it meaningful."

As for Laura Senft, who cried because she felt nothing at the Wall, she eventually "loosened up about it and I'm not expecting God to come down and say, 'You're not handling Israel the way I want you to.'"

So after her tears, she stood at the Wall and said a prayer. Usually, she feels very strange about expressing herself like that. She didn't know what to say, so she said the Shema.

"I figured that was a good thing to say." □

JEWISH WORLD

Jewish leaders briefed on talks

An aide to Israeli Foreign Minister David Levy briefed Jewish leaders Tuesday about the negotiations with Syria. Alon Pinkas, in a conference call with members of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said Israel believes that the Syrians are serious and have made a strategic decision to reach a peace deal.

However, he did raise concerns that Syrian President Hafez Assad was not directly engaged in the talks.

He also said the United States has been supportive of Israel during the negotiations and has not pressured the Jewish state.

Barak calls for bipartisan support

Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak said Wednesday on CNN that before an agreement with Syria is concluded, Israel "will have a better feeling of the readiness of both" the Clinton administration and the U.S. Congress to provide aid to support the deal.

Meanwhile, five members of the Senate Appropriations Committee were in Israel to discuss the costs of a possible aid package and tour the Golan Heights.

Islamic group seeks retraction

The Washington-based Council on American-Islamic Relations called on Republican leaders to repudiate recent comments by the director of the House Task Force on Terrorism and Unconventional Warfare.

The call came after Yossef Bodansky, a native Israeli who is now an American citizen, was quoted in Canada's National Post newspaper as saying that "several thousand" Muslim militants are "hiding within the mosque system" in North America.

Cross crusader convicted

A Polish court convicted a radical Catholic leader of inciting hate against Jews when he rallied hundreds of followers to erect crosses outside Auschwitz.

The court in Oswiecim, where the former Nazi death camp is located, fined Kazimierz Switon \$98 and gave him a suspended sentence of six months.

Papon to get pacemaker

A former Vichy official who is serving a 10-year prison term for his role in the arrest and deportation of Jews from France during World War II will undergo heart surgery later this week, his lawyer said Wednesday.

Maurice Papon, 89, will have a pacemaker implanted during the operation, the lawyer added. Papon, who underwent triple bypass surgery several years ago, has requested a presidential pardon for medical reasons.

Barak upbeat as he breaks his silence on talks with Syria

By Naomi Segal

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak has broken the silence that prevailed during his weeklong talks with Syria in Shepherdstown, W.Va.

In a series of media interviews he gave upon returning to Israel on Tuesday, Barak was upbeat about the negotiations, saying that a framework for an agreement could be reached soon.

It is not "presumptuous to think that we can have a framework agreement within two months," Barak said in an interview Wednesday on Army Radio.

Clearly aimed at bolstering support for the peace treaty he is trying to achieve, the interviews were seen by some as an effort to counter the estimated 150,000 Israelis who turned out Monday night in Tel Aviv to demonstrate against turning over any of the Golan Heights as part of such a treaty.

Barak told Army Radio that although he has made no promises about withdrawing from the Golan, commitments made by his predecessors could not be ignored. Syria claims that previous Israeli governments pledged to return all of the Golan for peace.

In a television interview a day earlier, Barak also stressed that he had made no commitment to Syria regarding a Golan withdrawal.

The comments came in the wake of reports that he had offered to withdraw to the international border of 1923 — which falls short of the Syrian demand for a withdrawal that would give Damascus control over the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, but which would still anger those Israelis opposed to any withdrawal at all.

Summing up the talks, Barak said the "negotiations have reached a critical stage, requiring difficult decisions." But he added that it was impossible to predict whether the next round of talks, slated for next week in the United States, would be conclusive.

Barak downplayed the widespread media reports that Syrian Foreign Minister Farouk al-Sharaa had been cold toward him during the Shepherdstown talks.

For many Israelis, Sharaa's coolness — and that of the Syrian delegation in general toward its Israeli counterparts — had dampened their own enthusiasm for a peace deal.

Barak said that in light of the serious issues on the negotiating table, the issue of courtesies was secondary.

"If the agreement moves toward a decision, it is clear to all that even [Syrian President Hafez] Assad will have to see us and shake hands. If we do not reach an agreement, there is no point to the question," he said.

Barak also downplayed the significance of the Tel Aviv rally, saying that a large number of the protesters would change their minds when they saw the peace dividends from an agreement.

He predicted that a "sweeping majority" of Israelis would support him when a planned referendum on the evolving accord is presented to the public. □

Fervently Orthodox rabbis ban use of Internet

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Leading fervently Orthodox rabbis have issued a religious ruling banning their followers from using the Internet out of concern it could lead to "sin" and "destruction" and lead the young astray.

The ruling, which appeared in haredi newspapers, was printed on fliers and posted in fervently Orthodox neighborhoods last week. It was signed by rabbinical leaders of several haredi groups, including the Belz, Sadigura and Vizhnitz, as well as members of the Shas Council of Sages.

Shas spiritual leader Rabbi Ovadia Yosef and rabbis of the Chabad movement did not sign the ruling.

A special rabbinical council, whose ruling served as the basis for the ban, termed the Internet a "danger thousands times more serious" than television, which could bring "destruction and ruin." The ruling said the Internet exposed users to all kinds of "sin," adding that if required for work, it should be used sparingly.

The ruling also prohibited the watching of digital movies via computer. □

Martin Luther King's relationship with Jews detailed in a new book

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — To honor the legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., schoolchildren all over the country are learning about his fight to win civil rights for black Americans through nonviolent protest. They are learning about the marches he led, the people he rallied and the stirring speeches he gave.

As students prepare to observe Martin Luther King Jr. Day on Jan. 17, Rabbi Marc Schneier also wants them to learn about the close relationships King had with Jews in his inner circle of advisers, the rabbis who participated in making the civil rights revolution a success and the sense of common cause that King felt with Jewish concerns, such as the oppression of Soviet Jewry.

Schneier, a modern Orthodox rabbi in New York, is president of the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding and of the New York Board of Rabbis.

His new book, "Shared Dreams: Martin Luther King Jr. and The Jewish Community," details King's relationship with Jewish figures and provides information that was little known beyond experts in the field and the players themselves. It examines the complicated, ambivalent connection between the two groups.

Some today believe that in the 1950s and 1960s, Jews universally supported the idea that black Americans should enjoy the same rights as white Americans — that it was a halcyon era in black-Jewish relations, and only the emergence of anti-Semitic black nationalists poisoned the atmosphere, say experts in the field.

"That's rosy-eyed nonsense," said Arthur Magida, author of "Prophet of Rage: A Life of Louis Farrakhan and his Nation" and the editor of Schneier's book.

"We love to romanticize this particular past and say we all marched hand and hand together, we were all beaten arm in arm together," he said. "Some of us were and some of us weren't. Most of us stayed home and were cowards in our own fashion."

Questions remain about the realistic possibilities of resurrecting some sense of fate linking Jews and blacks based on what happened 30 and 40 years ago.

But there is value in recalling what was, Magida said.

"To revisit these episodes is an important reminder that we once had among us a man whose yearning for freedom transcended the color of his own skin."

Among the stories about King and the civil rights movement found in Schneier's new book:

- King repeatedly used the Jewish experience as a model of success over oppression. He respected and admired values taught by Judaism and, as a deeply religious man, felt inspired by the Torah itself. He was sure that an alliance between blacks and Jews was fundamental to progress in civil rights. King felt a sense of kinship with the Jewish people and welcomed — even expected — Jewish support and felt let down when it was not forthcoming.

- Rabbi Maurice Eisendrath, president of the Reform movement's Union of American Hebrew Congregations, was forced by his members to withdraw an invitation to King to speak at the group's 1959 convention in Miami.

- Most Southern Jews, concerned about their own vulnerability and comfort, preferred the status quo to standing up on behalf of blacks and resisted the civil rights effort. Those rabbis who did get involved were primarily from the Reform movement in the northern

states; later involvement came from Conservative Jews and essentially none from the Orthodox.

- The Jews who were professionally involved in dismantling racial discrimination, like one of King's closest aides, Stanley Levison, were generally secular rather than religious.

- King argued to the Southern Baptist Convention against proselytizing Jews.

- A Jewish woman, Esther Brown, in Topeka, Kan., instigated the lawsuit *Brown vs. Board of Education*. That 1954 Supreme Court decision put an end to legally mandated racially segregated schools. Though the plaintiff named was a different person with the same surname, a black man named Oliver Brown, the whole effort began because Esther Brown resented the fact that her housekeeper's children were receiving an inferior education than her children. She persevered though harassment and threats, her husband losing his job and a cross being burned on their lawn.

- The Reform movement urged its members to get involved with the Freedom Rides, which began in 1961 in an effort to integrate Southern transportation and bus stations. Nearly two-thirds of all white Freedom Riders were Jewish.

- Among the group of clergymen known as the Tallahassee 10, arrested in that Florida city in 1961 for protesting segregation, were two Reform rabbis from New Jersey. One of them, Rabbi Israel Dresner, had a close relationship with King until his assassination.

- Rev. James Bevel, a leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in Selma, Ala., liked to wear a yarmulka because it expressed his affection for the Hebrew prophets and also helped him stay out of jail, since "Mississippi sheriffs were so mystified by the sight of a Negro preacher in a 'Jewish beanie' they preferred to let him alone." He wore one at the press conference announcing King's 1965 march from Selma to Montgomery, Ala., which prompted hundreds of marchers to wear what they called "freedom caps."

- King met Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel for the first time at a conference on religion and race in 1963 and became close, with King calling Heschel "my rabbi." They appeared together many times, most famously when Heschel joined the march from Selma to Montgomery. In 1968, King spoke at the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly convention. When he entered the hall, he was greeted by 1,000 rabbis singing "We Shall Overcome" in Hebrew. King was planning to join the Heschel family for a Passover seder that year, but was assassinated before he could.

Schneier believes that these stories can improve black-Jewish relations in a meaningful way. He obtained a \$25,000 grant to distribute thousands of copies of the book to leading blacks and Jews. The book is being sent to heads of Jewish federations, community relations councils, board members of all the movement-affiliated rabbinical organizations, and to local boards of rabbis.

"The extent of the Jewish community's very superficial knowledge of King's relationship with the Jewish community is that Abraham Joshua Heschel marched with him," Schneier said. "This book sheds new light. I want it to be used as a way for the Jewish community to be able to have a more meaningful and factual commemoration of Dr. King's birthday."

In February, in connection with Black History Month, he will distribute the book to leaders of black organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Urban League, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the congressional black delegation and the United Negro College Fund. □