



Daily News Bulletin

Vol. 79, No. 83

Thursday, May 3, 2001

84th Year

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

Rabbi Lanner claims innocence

A rabbi accused of molesting and sexually harassing scores of teen-agers in the Orthodox Union's youth group has pleaded not guilty to separate criminal charges that he fondled two teen-age students while principal of a New Jersey yeshiva.

Baruch Lanner faces up to 40 years in prison and \$250,000 in fines if convicted on the latest charges.

Lanner resigned from the O.U. last summer after more than 25 years of work with the group.

Sharon talks tough

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said he refuses to agree to a settlement freeze, adding, "We will not pay protection money for stopping terror."

Sharon also said Israel will not make do with a reduction in Palestinian terrorism, but will seek to stop it entirely.

The prime minister made the comments Wednesday during a visit to the family of an Israeli killed this week in a West Bank shooting attack.

Later Wednesday, Sharon vowed that the Jordan Valley will remain in Israel's hands forever.

He made the promise while touring the area with members of the government's Security Cabinet.

Peres adopts dovish line

Israel "will be ready to make painful compromises" once negotiations with the Palestinians are resumed, Foreign Minister Shimon Peres told the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Speaking before meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell later Wednesday, Peres adopted a dovish line, saying Israel "cannot solve anything with force."

He continued to refer to Palestinian President Yasser Arafat as a peace partner, and said that terror attacks carried out by P.A. security forces were done without Arafat's knowledge.

Israeli tanks enter Gaza

Israeli tanks and bulldozers entered a refugee camp in Palestinian-controlled territory in the southern Gaza Strip on Wednesday and destroyed 18 houses there.

The "pinpoint raid" took place because the buildings had been used as cover to launch attacks against Israeli troops the day before, Israel said.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Intermarriage survey has 'ominous' news for Jewish continuity, AJCommittee says

By Julie Wiener

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jewish women who are intermarried create much more Jewishly identified households than do intermarried Jewish men.

But regardless of whether the mother is Jewish, most interfaith families — even those raising their children as Jews — incorporate substantial Christian celebrations into their lives, often including additional Christian aspects as both the couple and their children age.

And despite the conventional wisdom that intermarriage is inevitable in an open society, Jews whose parents encourage them to marry within the faith are more likely to do so than those whose parents did not express an opinion on the subject.

These are some of the assertions of a new American Jewish Committee study on intermarried families in which the non-Jewish spouse has not converted.

Based on extensive interviews with 254 people from 127 households, the study offers a glimpse into how intermarried families — particularly ones that are raising their children exclusively as Jews — balance Jewishness with the competing pull of the non-Jewish spouse's background and family.

The participants lived in New England, New Jersey, Denver and Atlanta.

But because it relies on information from a relatively small sample of families, and because it supplies ammunition to those strongly opposed to intermarriage — including a national "in-marriage" coalition formed by the AJCommittee — the study likely will be greeted with skepticism from advocates of intermarried outreach.

The study was provided to the media on the condition that the findings not be disclosed until the research is officially released at the AJCommittee's board meeting in Washington on Thursday.

Therefore, responses to the study could not be obtained early this week.

The AJCommittee says the study proves that "the dynamics of Jewish identity within mixed marriage are particularly ominous for Jewish continuity," and that the Jewish community needs to be more aggressive in promoting in-marriage.

Months before the study was completed, the AJCommittee formed its coalition promoting in-marriage, and one of its members — Jack Wertheimer, the provost of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary — published an essay critiquing outreach to the intermarried in the March issue of Commentary magazine.

For years, Jewish leaders have divided into "inreach" and "outreach" camps on intermarriage — those who say scarce resources should be used to strengthen the Jewish commitments of people already engaged in Jewish life as opposed to those who support efforts welcoming intermarried families and encouraging their involvement in the Jewish community.

Backers of inreach often argue that welcoming the intermarried actually encourages intermarriage by reducing the stigma of marrying outside the faith.

While the leaders have debated such issues, most American Jews have quietly grown to accept intermarriage.

Ten years ago, the National Jewish Population Survey reported that approximately half of American Jews were marrying non-Jews.

This fall, an AJCommittee survey found that half of American Jews believe opposition to intermarriage is "racist," while 78 percent think rabbis should officiate at weddings between Jews and non-Jews.

The majority of rabbis do not officiate at such weddings: Orthodox and Conserva-

MIDEAST FOCUS

Assad lashes out at Sharon

Syrian President Bashar Assad claimed that Prime Minister Ariel Sharon wants to push the entire Middle East into war, but that Damascus will not be drawn into the conflict. In an interview in Spain's El Pais daily newspaper, Assad also denied that Syria has any influence over Hezbollah gunmen in Lebanon.

Assad arrived in Spain on Wednesday for two days of talks and is expected to push for a bigger European role in Middle East peace diplomacy.

P.A.: No bombs in homes

The Palestinian Authority called on potential bombmakers to stop experimenting with chemicals in their homes. "We demand from all those tampering with citizens' lives, who place explosives in residential areas, to stop," Amin Hindi, head of Palestinian Intelligence in the West Bank and Gaza, told Voice of Palestine Radio on Wednesday.

He issued the warning after two bombs apparently intended for Israeli targets exploded prematurely this week, killing Palestinian civilians. The P.A. had previously blamed Israel for those deaths.

Sharon appeals libel ruling

Israel's High Court of Justice heard an appeal by Prime Minister Ariel Sharon of a lower court's rejection of a libel lawsuit he filed against the Ha'aretz newspaper regarding his role in the Lebanon war.

The lawsuit followed publication of an article a decade ago stating that then-defense minister Sharon had misled then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin about his plans for the 1982 Lebanon war.

Knesset opposes Wagner concert

Israeli legislators appealed to organizers of the Israel Festival to cancel performances of works by the anti-Semitic composer Richard Wagner at the upcoming festival in Jerusalem. The motion passed 17-0 in a special Knesset session.



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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.
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tive rabbis are forbidden to do so, and — according to a 1999 survey by the Rabbinic Center for Research and Counseling — 57 percent of Reform and Reconstructionist rabbis refuse to do so.

The new study is written by Sylvia Barack Fishman, co-director of the Hadassah International Research Institute on Jewish Women, a professor in Brandeis University's Near Eastern and Judaic studies department and a member of the AJCommittee coalition promoting in-marriage.

It is one of the first "qualitative" studies on intermarried families, based not on survey data but on focus groups and interviews with what is believed to be a representative sample.

While it covers a range of families — including ones where both the husband and wife are Jewish — the study focuses on interfaith families that say they are raising their children as Jews.

According to the study, those families often send more diluted messages about Jewishness as the children age.

For example, many Jewish parents initially refuse to celebrate Christmas or Easter in the home, but eventually compromise out of a desire to be fair to their spouses or because aging in-laws are no longer able to host Christian holiday celebrations.

Saying she does not want to be "rigid," one Jewish woman in the study tells how she hosts Easter dinner for her husband's family, even cooking ham for the occasion.

In attempting to balance the Jewish upbringing with the influences of Christian relatives, one family ended up insulting their Jewish-raised child, as the grown child reports in the study: "Now we would go there for Christmas, and my cousins would all be getting toys from Santa and I'd be getting gifts from the dog because my Mom felt bad. From the dog, from our dog, because she" believed he couldn't "get gifts from Santa. Like that's just outrageous."

The study also found that many non-Jewish parents eventually grew to resent their children's Jewish upbringing, though they initially had agreed to the concept. The resentment stemmed from a feeling of exclusion — particularly when the child learned unfamiliar rituals and language — as well as a general discomfort with organized religion. Many non-Jews married to Jews also expressed discomfort in the survey with what they saw as the Jewish community's exclusivity and the idea of Jews being a "chosen people."

In addition to reporting on the family dynamics of the intermarried, the study also looks at the influence of parents on whether their children intermarry. It reports that 62 percent of the intermarried Jews said their parents had made no comments discouraging them from marrying outside the faith.

Roughly the same percentage of Jews married to Jews — or to gentiles who had converted — said their parents had discouraged them from intermarrying.

In addition, intermarried Jews who had grown up with several years of Jewish education, celebrating many Jewish holidays and having some Shabbat observance were more likely to raise their children exclusively as Jews.

Some of the other findings:

- Approximately three-fourths of Jewish women married to non-Jews say they are exclusively raising their children as Jews, compared to slightly less than half of intermarried Jewish men.

- While the majority of interfaith families, except those raising their children as Christian, celebrated Chanukah and Passover, other holidays were observed less frequently.

- Interfaith couples discussed the religion of the household and potential children when the relationship got "serious," rather than waiting until they had married. □

Site to focus on gay and lesbian issues

NEW YORK (JTA) — The Reform movement's seminary in the United States is creating an online resource center on gay and lesbian issues in Judaism.

Under the auspices of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, the new Web site will host discussion groups, an archive of relevant publications, answers to frequently asked questions about gay and lesbian Jews, and resources for studying and teaching Jewish texts related to sexual orientation. □

JEWISH WORLD

Bush to address AJCommittee

President Bush plans to make a "very clear call" to "recognize the importance of religious freedom" during a speech to the American Jewish Committee on Thursday, White House spokesman Ari Fleischer said.

Also slated to address the AJCommittee's annual meeting are Mexican President Vicente Fox and Israeli Foreign Minister Shimon Peres.

Bush pressed on embassy pledge

The governor of New York called on President Bush to honor his campaign promise to relocate the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

At a news conference Wednesday, George Pataki said he sent Bush a letter reminding the president of the pledge he made last May.

N.J. mayor opposes eruv

The Jewish mayor of a New Jersey suburb was accused of saying she did not want more Orthodox Jews moving in and "throwing stones at cars on the Sabbath," according to the Bergen Record.

Testifying Tuesday at a federal court hearing to determine whether Tenafly officials can legally bar the construction of an eruv — a wire permitting observant Jews to carry things on Shabbat — Mayor Ann Moscovitz said comments she made relaying some constituents' concerns about the eruv had been distorted.

Town officials say they oppose the eruv, a fixture in many Orthodox neighborhoods around North America, because it violates a local ordinance forbidding anyone to attach things to utility poles.

Group won't back off Islam book

The American Jewish Committee said a book about Islam aimed at Jewish readers will be published this week despite calls for a delay from a U.S. Muslim organization.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations says the book is biased against Islam and contains a cover portrait of the Prophet Abraham that will offend some Muslims.

The AJCommittee also is publishing a companion volume on Judaism for Muslim readers.

Survivor testifies against Nazi

A concentration camp survivor accused an 89-year-old former SS officer of beating a Jewish inmate with a club for not appearing for roll call.

The witness, an 80-year-old former Czech resistance fighter, testified Wednesday in a Munich court against Anton Malloth.

Malloth faces three counts of murder and one of attempted murder when he was a Nazi guard at the Theresienstadt camp near Prague.

ARTS & CULTURE

New British film set in a shtetl is a 'Yiddish spaghetti Western'

By Richard Allen Greene

LONDON (JTA) — For British filmmaker Ben Hopkins, "cinema is a place to experience something new and different."

With his feature film debut, "Simon Magus," the young writer-director has succeeded in creating something new and different — a movie that he describes as "a Yiddish spaghetti Western."

It's as accurate a description as any of a film that takes place in a Polish shtetl sometime in the 19th century but centers on the classic Western film conflict of who profits from a new railroad.

Recognizing that his town will die if the train bypasses it, a Jewish student, Dovid Bendel, asks the local squire for land to build a railroad station.

Unfortunately, a local Christian businessman has the same idea.

The entrepreneur recruits a Jewish outcast — Simon (Noah Taylor, the teen-aged David Helfgott in "Shine" and the band manager in "Almost Famous") — in a plot to discredit the Jews and get the land.

"The strand about two guys fighting over land and future prosperity is from a kind of Western," said Hopkins, 32.

"It's a simple story and a simple kind of message, but it's complex in the way it's told," said Bob Aaronson, whose Fireworks Pictures is distributing the film in the United States.

It has also been well-received.

"Simon Magus" was screened at the prestigious Sundance Film Festival last year, earned good reviews from The New York Times and The Los Angeles Times and is now making the art house and festival circuit in North America.

The film is full of historical ironies, not least among them that a Jew is so eager for a railroad through his Polish town, when a generation or two later, those same railroads will carry millions of Jews to their deaths.

Another surprise is that the film's sympathetic and complex portrayal of shtetl Jews comes from a filmmaker who is not Jewish.

In fact, when Hopkins started working on the script in 1995, the main characters were not Jewish. He was struggling with the script when a friend suggested that he read Isaac Bashevis Singer's "Gimpel the Fool," he said.

"Singer was one of my Dad's favorite writers, so his books were always around the house, but I never got around to reading them," Hopkins told JTA.

"Gimpel" proved to be a catalyst, and the movie's character of Simon developed from the Singer story.

Hopkins, an Oxford graduate with a degree in German and Italian, began researching the period, reading more Singer and Theo Richmond's nonfiction book "Konin: A Quest," the story of a man's search for his parents' Polish shtetl.

Hopkins also traveled to Poland.

"He let himself be led by the story. He allowed the film to cloak itself in this Jewish theme," said Judy Ironside, director of the Brighton Jewish Film Festival, where "Simon Magus" was screened last year.

She said festival-goers had received the movie well, even though Hopkins is not Jewish. "There's something very complimentary about a non-Jew choosing to focus on Jewish issues," she said.

Once it was clear in his mind that many of his main characters were Jews, Hopkins decided not to make a typical shtetl movie.

"Shtetl films — 'Fiddler on the Roof,' 'Yentl' — are generally fairly schmaltzy," Hopkins said.

"I don't think 'Simon Magus' has that kind of depiction. I wanted to show that it was hard just to be alive," he said.

"His take on the Jewish experience is less romantic," said Aaronson, the film distributor.

"It does have romance — more than one. He is at heart a romantic. But it is an intellectual film," Aaronson said. □

AROUND THE JEWISH WORLD

In ruins of former Yugoslavia, Jews build links across borders

By Ruth E. Gruber

ZAGREB, Croatia (JTA) — Amid the still-smoldering wreckage of the former Yugoslavia, a group of committed young Jews is clinging to the dream of a Jewish identity that transcends old conflicts and new national borders.

They know their dream could succumb to troubled circumstances, brain-drain emigration or new social and political divisions.

Nonetheless, through the past decade of war, bloodshed and postwar economic disaster, they have kept in touch and — whenever possible — met.

"We still feel as if we are Yugoslav Jews," said Olga, a 22-year-old student from Belgrade, referring to the days before the breakup of Yugoslavia. "Younger kids don't feel this; it's not the same for them. That's why for years we have been insisting on meeting together."

Olga was one of a dozen young Jews from Belgrade who came to Zagreb late last month for the group's latest encounter — a youth seminar that drew nearly 35 young Jews from Croatia, Slovenia, Serbia and Bosnia.

For four days, the group met for study sessions, cultural events and social occasions ranging from late-night parties to synagogue services and a community Shabbat dinner led by Zagreb's 34-year-old rabbi, Kotel Dadon.

They also joined Holocaust survivors at recent ceremonies commemorating the World War II victims of the notorious Jasenovac concentration camp.

At Jasenovac, Croatian fascists killed 17,000 Jews and scores of thousands of Serbs, Gypsies and others.

"I really felt something at Jasenovac," Olga said. "We came as a group — and we were the only young people there."

Arranging Jewish youth meetings has not always been easy, or even possible.

The wars over the past decade at times forced the group to hold their get-togethers on neutral territory — in Hungary, for example, or Austria.

"Two years ago, it would have been almost impossible for anyone from Belgrade to join us here in Croatia," said Sasha, a 26-year-old political science student in Zagreb.

In addition to attending seminars and other meetings, the group also maintains an Internet chat list.

The young people's previous meeting took place in early March at the Jewish community summer camp facility at Pirovac on Croatia's Adriatic Coast.

Most of the people at the Zagreb seminar forged close links as children during the 1980s — before the bloody breakup of Yugoslavia — when they attended the camp at Pirovac summer after summer.

"We practically grew up together there," Sasha said.

At the time, Pirovac was operated by the Federation of Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization that served the approximately 6,000 Jews in all parts of the former Yugoslavia.

A vacation at Pirovac was an annual event for many Jewish families. Many of the middle-aged Jews now leading the communities in independent Croatia, Bosnia, Macedonia, Slovenia and Serbia also developed close links during Pirovac holidays.

"I always felt safe at Pirovac," said Ina, 22, from Ljubljana, Slovenia.

"All the adults around were either relatives or friends."

Said Olga: "When you would spend five days at Pirovac with someone, you know him better than if you go out with someone for two years in Belgrade."

During the war in Croatia in the early 1990s, the Pirovac facility was confiscated by the new Croatian state. The Croatian Jewish community recently regained title to the camp, and the community and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee have allocated money to refurbish it.

The camp did not encourage religious Jewish practice, but it did instill a sense of Jewish identity and peoplehood among Yugoslavia's Jews, most of whom were highly secular and assimilated.

Most Yugoslav Jews intermarried, and most younger community members have only one Jewish parent or grandparent.

"My mother is a Muslim and my father is Jewish," said Gorijan, 17, from Sarajevo. "I was raised with tolerance, and I believe in love. I have two very contradictory religions within me, and I'll defend both."

"But I feel Jewish — I find myself in Judaism. I had a choice, and I chose."

Members of the youth seminar said they feel like survivors battling to maintain — and pass on — an identity whose shape is not always clear, under circumstances that conspire against them.

Conflict and economic collapse have prompted hundreds of Jews to leave. Today's young people say they, too, see little future at home.

"In the past 10 years, we have lost our most qualified young people, our base," Sasha said. "They left the country, went to Israel or the United States."

Others dropped out or turned their back on the Jewish community.

One former leader of the Zagreb Jewish youth group married the woman he loved — and converted to Christianity.

Another former Zagreb Jewish youth leader married an Orthodox Jewish woman and became observant — but his bride was American and he moved to the United States.

Many participants at the Zagreb meeting said they want to find Jewish spouses and raise Jewish families.

"The only person I could see spending time with would be a Jew," Olga said.

"I don't want my children to go through what I did as a child of a mixed marriage — to have to choose. Jewish things mean so much to me that I don't know if someone not Jewish could share it."

Ironically, though their group is the most Jewishly connected pool of young Jews in the former Yugoslav states, few think they will find a husband or wife within the group — because of their closeness.

"We all just feel like brothers and sisters," said Zoran, from Zagreb. □

Bishops to apologize for pogrom

NEW YORK (JTA) — Poland's bishops plan to apologize at a religious ceremony next month for the 1941 massacre of Jews by their Polish neighbors in the town of Jedwabne.

The bishops will apologize "for the sins" committed "in this painful event," a spokesman for the bishops said Wednesday. □