

IN THE NEWS

Barghouti found guilty in Israeli court

An Israeli court convicted Marwan Barghouti, a Palestinian official, of murder.

Thursday's verdict at Tel Aviv District Court found Barghouti guilty in connection with three shooting ambushes by the Al-Aksha Brigade in which five people were killed, as well as a botched suicide bombing.

But the Fatah leader was acquitted on 21 other counts of murder for lack of evidence. Barghouti, who has denied the charges but defended Palestinian terrorism as resistance, declined to ask the court for clemency.

Israeli army raid in Rafah deepens

Israeli troops killed at least eight Palestinians on the third day of a raid in the Gaza Strip.

At least three of the fatalities were gunmen shot while attacking Israeli troops, who tightened their grip on Rafah, a refugee camp in southern Gaza.

More than 40 Palestinians have been killed during the operation, including at least 10 when Israel fired into a crowd of protesters Wednesday.

Israelis demand changes in Rafah

Four Israeli groups petitioned the High Court of Justice on alleged human rights violations during army operations in Gaza.

The human rights organizations on Thursday submitted a list of demands they asked the court to impose on the Israeli army in the Gaza Strip.

These include allowing ambulances to reach casualties at the scene of fighting and transfer them from a local Gaza hospital to better medical clinics outside the city.

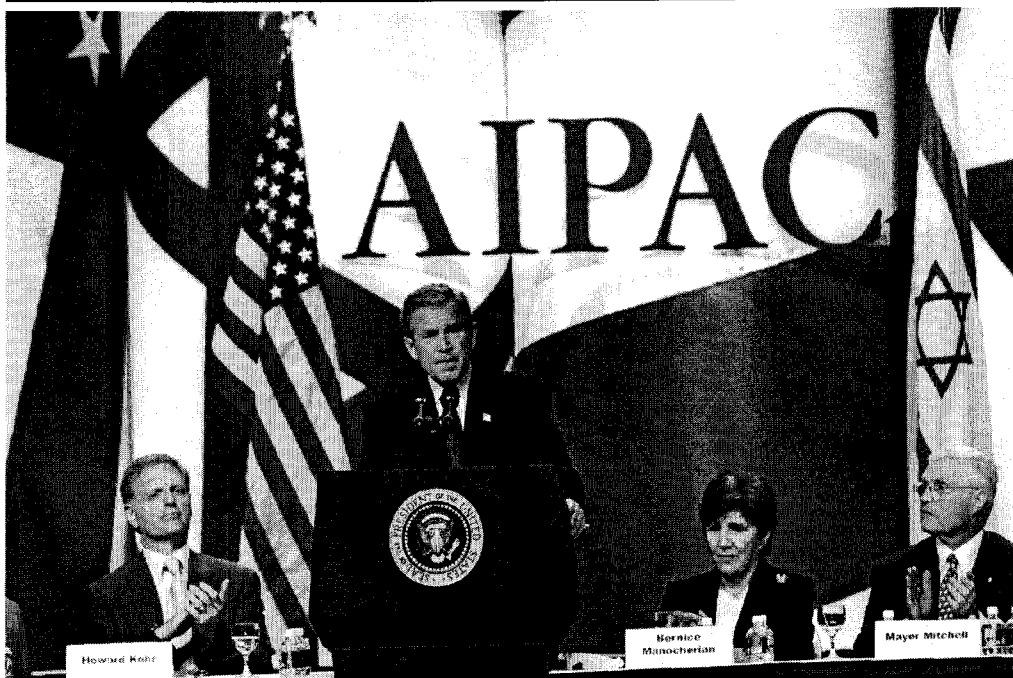
The petitioners also demanded that fresh supplies of medicine, medical equipment and plasma be allowed to reach the local hospital.

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WORLD REPORT

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Richard Lobell

President Bush addresses AIPAC's annual policy conference in Washington this week.

Despite setback in the Likud Party, Israel, U.S. pushing for withdrawal

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — It's the classic political conundrum: Two pledges to two constituencies, each at odds with the other.

For Ariel Sharon, the answer was easy: He stands to lose more by breaking a promise to President Bush than to his own Likud Party.

May 2, the day Likud members soundly rejected the Israeli prime minister's proposal to pull out from the Gaza Strip, is little more than a distant, discomfiting echo as U.S. and Israeli officials charge ahead with the plan.

Sharon at one point had said he would

abide by the Likud referendum, but that was a dim memory when his deputy, Trade Minister Ehud Olmert, addressed the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's annual policy conference Monday night.

"We had some political setbacks, but despite these political setbacks the prime minister is determined to implement the plan and fulfill his pledge to the president," Olmert told an audience that included senior administration officials and almost half of Congress' membership. Olmert spoke in Sharon's stead; Sharon was busy preparing a slightly modified Gaza withdrawal plan.

Bush reinforced the point the next day in

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his own speech to the pro-Israel lobby.

"I supported the plan announced by Prime Minister Sharon to withdraw military installations and settlements from Gaza and parts of the West Bank," he said.

The ubiquity of the plan at the AIPAC annual policy conference was a measure of U.S. and Israeli determination to proceed with it.

Generally, AIPAC avoids endorsing any plan that is not official Israeli government policy — Israel's Cabinet has yet to approve the withdrawal proposal — but the conference treated it as a fait accompli. A number of sessions dealt with its implications, and speaker after speaker endorsed it.

AIPAC's coup at the conference was getting Reps. Tom DeLay (R-Texas), the Republican House leader, and Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), the minority whip, to jointly promote the plan.

"I am hopeful that Congress, in a bipartisan way, can express support for principles the president articulated during Prime Minister Sharon's recent visit to the United States," Hoyer said. "I look forward to working with Tom DeLay to accomplish that end."

Moments later, DeLay affirmed, "I can announce today that we have already begun working with Steny to properly affirm Congress' absolute support for these principles."

Getting Hoyer and DeLay to couple their names — a rare moment of public agreement between the two — signaled the determination of Israel and its sup-

porters here to get the plan back on track.

An official familiar with the proposed bill said he expected it to be presented within weeks.

Its language would underscore the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, the official said, though the primary focus is to anchor in law Bush's recognition of some Israeli claims in the West Bank and his rejection of any right of Palestinian refugees to return to Israel.

Bush's pledges to Sharon sparked Arab anger at a time when the president could ill afford it: The transition to civilian power in Iraq is weeks away, insurgents killed the top Iraqi official this week and the U.S. military is reeling from a lingering prison abuse scandal in Iraq.

The setback wrought by the Likud vote means Bush and his aides are more cautious this time around. Secretary of State Colin Powell has pulled back from Bush's commitments to Sharon, and Bush notably did not mention them in his speech.

That doesn't mean the concessions are off the table. But Bush aides, who wondered out loud what Sharon was thinking when he submitted the plan to Likud's notoriously tough rank and file, are reserving judgment.

"We thought we were on the verge of something in this very frustrating, almost 'Perils of Pauline' Middle East saga of a search for peace, with the Sharon plan for disengagement from Gaza, where 80 percent of the people of Israel by opinion polls appeared to be for it, but Likud was not for it," Powell's deputy, Richard Armitage, said Tuesday in Senate testimony. "We were quite bullish on this, and now we're disappointed."

U.S. officials acknowledge that they didn't sufficiently prepare Arab officials before Bush's April 14 announcement with Sharon. Powell worked Arab leaders at an economic summit in Jordan this weekend, and his efforts bore fruit: Jordan's king ended the forum on a note of hope.

"We must bring justice for the Palestinians. We must offer security for the Israelis," King Abdullah II said.

More substantively, Abdullah came as

close as any Arab leader ever has to saying publicly that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat has to go.

"I think Arafat needs to have a long look in the mirror to be able to see whether his position is helping the Palestinian cause or not," Abdullah told The New York Times in its Tuesday edition.

Some leading Palestinians also suggest it might be time for Arafat to go, and want the United States and Israel to stand back in order to smooth the transition.

Hanan Ashrawi, a Palestinian legislator, said Israel's isolation of Arafat distorted his

status and hindered Palestinian efforts to retire him. "Arafat's survival has become the issue," she said. "People are willing to forgive him a lot of things they once weren't willing to forgive him."

Bush administration officials appear to agree that it's time to bring the Palestinians back on board. Powell and Condoleezza Rice, Bush's national security adviser, each met recently with P.A. Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei to press him to prepare for an Israeli withdrawal.

They were the first such meetings since Qurei assumed the premiership last year, but Israel did not object.

Gen. Eival Gilady, one of the drafters of the withdrawal plan and until recently a senior adviser to Sharon, said coordination with the Palestinians was inevitable.

"It is in our interest to let positive forces take over," he told AIPAC.

Another sign of U.S. determination to get the withdrawal under way was the muted reaction to Israel's demolition of Palestinian homes along the Gaza Strip's border with Egypt this week. Israel says the mission is intended to stop arms smuggling, and quiet along the border would hasten an Israeli withdrawal.

Whatever was happening on the surface, Armitage said in the Senate, the United States, Israel and other allies were working hard to make sure the withdrawal went ahead.

"It's kind of like a duck on the water," he said. "It doesn't appear to be moving very much, but underneath there's a lot of churning going on."

'I think Arafat needs to have a long look in the mirror to be able to see whether his position is helping the Palestinian cause or not.'

King Abdullah II of Jordan

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Henry Everett, social justice crusader, dies at 78

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — At a meeting of Fortune 500 companies about a dozen years ago, a man in a blue windbreaker went around giving the corporate executives in attendance literature attacking the tobacco industry.

"Who let this outsider crash the meeting?" asked one participant at the meeting.

The outsider was Henry Everett, the champion of social justice issues and Jewish philanthropist. Everett died from stomach cancer Saturday at the age of 78.

One of the roughly 600 people who attended Everett's funeral Monday at Congregation Anshe Chesed in New York City related the story to JTA.

"No matter where there was a group of people or businesses," said Denise Hamler, director of the Co-op America Business Network, Everett advocated for social and environmental responsibility.

The episode at the Fortune 500 meeting symbolized the life of a man who crusaded for unconventional causes and maintained his ethics and modesty despite the fortune he accumulated through his investments.

Everett was generous with his time and money to a variety of organizations, from National Public Radio and Teach for America to Hillel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

He also served as vice president of JTA's board of directors, and was on the board of the New York Jewish Week.

"Henry was a real mensch. He was passionate in his beliefs without regard to their popularity," said Mark Joffe, JTA's publisher and executive editor. "He was guided by a strong sense of justice and believed deeply in young people and their ability to change the world. It's rare these days to find people so principled, selfless and determined. We will miss him."

Everett supported the emigration of Ethiopian Jewry and Soviet Jewry to Israel. He appreciated art and nature, supporting the New York Botanical Garden and the Dance Theater of Harlem, and was a proud American, maintaining it was an honor to pay taxes.

Everett took up his causes and took on his opponents — most notably, the tobacco industry — even if it meant risking his social standing.

Attending board meetings or participating in conference calls, Everett would

peruse mounds of reading material while maintaining his attention to the discussion at hand, friends and colleagues said.

Many said they couldn't think of Everett without thinking of his wife, Edith.

Asked to summarize her father's message, Carolyn Everett spoke about both her parents. "They really stood up for things," she said in an interview. "They were always ahead of their time."

They shared an office — he as an investment adviser, she as a broker — and a belief in helping those less fortunate.

The Everetts' politics often put them at odds with the mainstream — like the time the couple took on one of New York Jewry's heavyweights, the Tisch family, over tobacco.

As a member of the UJA-Federation of New York, Henry Everett stridently and unsuccessfully protested the choice of James Tisch, whose Loew's Corporation owned Lorillard Tobacco, to head the Jewish federation in the late 1990s.

They even were escorted out of a 1982 General Assembly of the North American federation system for pushing for aliyah of Ethiopian Jewry when other American Jews and Israelis belittled the idea.

Everett maintained scrupulously high standards in his business and foundation

life, friends said, maintaining the same standards in his private relationships.

"The only thing they did lavishly was their philanthropy," said Matt Grossman, executive director of the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, noting that despite their wealth, the Everetts often traveled by Greyhound or Amtrak.

Carolyn Everett only realized the family was wealthy when she saw a blueprint of a school her parents were sponsoring in Israel.

The secret to the family's financial success was Henry's research and hard work, Edith Everett said in a booklet prepared by Hillel, which honored the couple at a dinner two months ago.

Starting out as a market researcher for Abraham and Strauss Department Stores, Everett would work until the early hours of the morning. He knew it was time to go to sleep when his neighbor, a butcher, started his day's work at 3 a.m.

Everett attended Yeshiva of Flatbush and Columbia University, at a time when Columbia maintained quotas for Jews. He entered the retail industry because it was easier for Jews to find work, but he ultimately started his own investment firm.

Everett is survived by his wife, daughter, son David and grandchildren Elias, Ethan and Hannelora.

Bush picks Neusner as Jewish liaison

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The White House has enlisted a familiar family name to serve as the new liaison to the Jewish community.

Noam Neusner, currently a domestic policy speech writer in the White House, was given the additional portfolio this week. He replaces Tevi Troy, who held the post for less than a year and is moving to President Bush's re-election campaign.

Neusner, a former journalist, is the son of Jacob Neusner, a prominent rabbi and author of hundreds of books on Judaism. Father and son collaborated on "The Book of Jewish Wisdom: The Talmud of the Well-Considered Life," published in 1996, and "The Price of Excellence: Universities in Conflict During the Cold War Era," which came out in 1995. Noam Neusner's grandfather, Samuel Neusner, founded the

Connecticut Jewish Ledger.

Noam Neusner worked as senior editor at U.S. News & World Report before joining the Bush administration in November 2002. He has crafted much of Bush's language on economic policy, and sat in on meetings between key administration officials and Jewish communal leaders.

Neusner will continue to serve as a speech writer.

"He's got a great understanding of the Jewish community and a long history of working with the community and within the community," said Adam Goldman, who served as Bush's liaison from 2001 to 2003.

Neusner said he was excited about the new opportunity.

"I'm familiar with the Jewish community from having grown up with it," he said. "It's certainly an asset to know some of the players in advance."

Pro-Israel efforts hatched in living rooms

By CARL SCHRAG

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — For months, Los Angeles Jewish activist Roz Rothstein had been watching the events in Israel with increasing horror.

But it was the hair-raising accounts of the bludgeoning murder of two Israeli teenagers in a cave near Tekoa in May 2001 that compelled Rothstein to act.

She invited 40 people from a variety of organizations and backgrounds to a meeting in her living room.

"There was nothing being done," Rothstein said. "I wasn't getting any mail. I wasn't even being solicited to buy Israel Bonds, and I'm on every list. We wanted to see what we could do together."

Stand With Us was born that night, and Rothstein is its executive director.

The group, which trains pro-Israel advocates and runs a variety of educational activities in Jewish institutions and on college campuses, is one of a new breed of pro-Israel advocacy startups that have been launched in large part because their founders believed they were filling a void.

Major Jewish organizations long have engaged in pro-Israel advocacy in schools, interfaith groups, campuses, the media and among elected officials.

Some of the newcomers felt the Jewish establishment was slow to respond to Israel's crisis after the Palestinian intifada began in September 2000. Others simply were unaware of existing advocacy efforts and drew up plans to advance Israel's cause in the United States.

Around the time Rothstein established Stand With Us, Jennifer Laszlo-Mizrahi had given birth to her first child and was trying to run her million-dollar political consultancy from home. After years traveling

around the globe, Laszlo-Mizrahi, 40, found herself watching television for hours while her son slept.

What she saw on the news upset her, and she decided she would write a check to a Jewish organization that addressed media coverage of the Middle East conflict.

But Laszlo-Mizrahi couldn't find an effort that seemed sophisticated enough — so she decided to tackle the job herself.

She closed her consultancy and established the Israel Project, a Washington-based effort to help pro-Israel spokesmen hone their message.

Laszlo-Mizrahi, whose clients included the Clinton-Gore team, collaborated with other political consultants, including Frank Luntz, whose clients come from the Republican side of the spectrum. The two

united around their desire to get Israel's message out to the American public.

Laszlo-Mizrahi has conducted polling about how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is presented to American audiences and has trained pro-Israel spokesmen.

"We run the Israel Project the same way I would run a political campaign," said Laszlo-Mizrahi.

But the stakes are very different: "Whether we win or lose with the images affects whether Jews will be able to live securely in Israel, America and Europe," she said.

Last month, the Israel Project launched a Press Ambassadors program that will train Israel advocates across America to serve as liaisons to local journalists and editors whose input shapes coverage of the conflict.

Laszlo-Mizrahi said her communications expertise has been bolstered by cooperation with groups that have community-relations experience.

The latest effort is cosponsored by the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization of North American Jewish federations, and the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, which encompasses local community relations councils and national advocacy organizations.

The choice of Shoshana Cardin — a former chair of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations — to head up the Press Ambassadors program represented an important step toward merging the Israel Project's work with establishment efforts for Israel.

Martin Raffel, JCPA's associate executive director, welcomed the emergence of "boutique operations" in Israel advocacy.

"Not everyone is suited for working through the establishment," he said.

Some of the startups discover they need the infrastructure and activists of local federations and community relations councils, and end up collaborating with the established organizations.

Gail Hyman, UJC's senior vice president of communications, noted that many startups have developed creative approaches to spreading pro-Israel messages.

"The federation system needs to pay attention because good ideas come from many sources," she said, pointing to Israel shopping fairs and the Israel Project as two examples. Those ideas have come from more groups than any newspaper story can

A CHANGING RELATIONSHIP? Part 2

Projects face survival of the fittest

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — When it comes to boutique advocacy efforts for Israel, there may be something of a Darwinian process at play.

"It's a lot like the free market with venture capital," says Stephen Hoffman, president of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization of North American Jewish federations. "Not every program can get enough capital to stay alive long enough to show a profit."

Some significant pro-Israel boutique operations have solidified their position among the campaigns and efforts under way across the country. Others have been developed by well-meaning individuals — and then abandoned.

Three years ago, former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with a group of Jewish entertainment executives in Hollywood and challenged them to do

something about Israel's image problem.

A group of people rose to the challenge and formed Project Communicate. They developed an innovative advertising campaign designed to raise awareness about Israel on college campuses and to encourage Jewish students to get involved.

The participants put up some seed money and the Los Angeles Jewish federation provided additional funding. A pilot program was rolled out on four Southern California campuses.

If Project Communicate had been an undertaking of an established group, its success might have been parlayed into a national rollout, and the "go cards" — posters, ads and focus groups — might be staples on campuses nationwide today.

But Project Communicate was an underfunded effort by a bunch of well-meaning, busy people. — C.S.

describe. They range from individual undertakings and grass-roots efforts based in synagogues or living rooms to well-funded operations focusing on one aspect of the broad picture of image making.

For many Jews, the word "advocacy" immediately brings to mind biased media coverage of the conflict. Indeed, media coverage and the situation on college campuses have sparked the greatest interest among many American Jews.

Some of the boutique efforts, like Israel at Heart, have a singular mission. Founded by New York businessman Joey Low, it brings three-person teams of young Israelis to college campuses and Jewish communities across the United States. The Israelis tell their own stories and help audiences see other sides of Israel than the conflict they see on TV.

At a meeting at Golden Gate University in San Francisco, two young Israeli men and one woman, all college students and Israeli army veterans, spoke about their daily lives to a group of 15 law students.

"I don't need people to become activists," Atalia Birman, 23, said after the session. "I don't need them to comment on every article they read. My goal is to open their minds. That's why I'm here."

Judging by the response from the audience, Israel at Heart's informal framework works. "Everybody should try to hear their story," law student Daniel Bakondi said.

The Boston-based David Project offers training sessions that teach people to "promote a fair and honest understanding of the Middle East conflict." Tactics include putting the Israeli-Palestinian standoff in context by comparing it to other international conflicts and by assessing the parties' behavior and standards.

At a training session in Los Angeles for Stand With Us activists, Charles Jacobs, founder of the David Project, sought to reframe discussion of the conflict.

"It's not about occupation and refugees," he told the crowd in a Los Angeles conference room. "The conflict is about Jewish existence in the Middle East."

While Jacobs concedes that it helps to know the details of the Arab-Israeli conflict, part of the David Project's approach to spokespersonship is the art of spin.

Jacobs offered tactics for turning a challenge or a question into an opportunity to present a preplanned message or make a statement.

While this tactic works well on television — witness the success of some Palestinian spokesmen — the most effective ad-



David Project

Alan Dershowitz meets with students in a session taped by the David Project.

vocates still are armed with facts, figures and a solid grasp of history.

Many of the startups have focused on media coverage of the intifada, but the notion that there's a problem with media coverage of the Middle East isn't new: The Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America has been operating since 1982. But it has grown significantly since the intifada began.

It has been joined on the media front by Honest Reporting, which encourages people to hold newspapers and television networks accountable for their coverage.

In communities across the country, scores of informal media monitoring groups have cropped up to keep tabs on local news organizations. Local JCRCs, as well as the national Jewish defense organizations, offer guidance.

Other approaches to media coverage have been undertaken by well-funded niche operations, including Israel 21C and Access/Middle East.

Israel 21C, whose slogan is "Israel beyond the conflict," promotes stories about aspects of life in Israel that have nothing to do with the Arab-Israeli conflict. It works with journalists to place stories from Israel about scientific, medical or technological breakthroughs.

Access/Middle East positions itself as a journalists' tool providing "context to the events as they break in the Middle East." The group's Web site aggregates stories from hundreds of sources, and the group holds conference calls and briefings.

Despite their enthusiasm for innovative efforts, many Israel advocacy veterans

caution against a tendency to identify "advocacy" with the media.

Jay Teath, director of Chicago's JCRC, said certain high-profile advocacy activities have enjoyed extensive attention out of proportion to their real importance.

"We go through fads where media coverage is the 800-pound gorilla," he said. "Then campus becomes the flavor of the month. There are individuals in startups who are convinced they have the magic bullet to solve these particular problems."

But the nature of the situation in Israel is "much more complicated," he cautioned.

Last year, UJC and JCPA offered six regional advocacy training workshops, and JCPA provides consulting services to communities as they implement local advocacy efforts. Raffel and others said the goal of enhancing American perceptions of Israel is better served by a broad effort to educate, not a narrow focus on battling media bias.

UJC and JCPA also are developing a strategic plan to turn their crisis-based advocacy efforts into a longer-term operation to support Israel advocates across the country.

While everyone interviewed for this article acknowledged that some of the startups have made a contribution, Lisa Eisen, program director for the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Foundation, predicted that when the dust settles, established organizations still will be doing most of the work.

"These flavor-of-the-week efforts make a splash and then dissipate," Eisen said. "I don't know about the sustainability of some of the newer organizations."

JTS honors Schorsch amid leadership doubts

By JOE BERKOFKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Rabbi Ismar Schorsch blasts the Bush administration for the war in Iraq and predicts that his Conservative movement will not alter Jewish law to accommodate homosexuality.

"For the Conservative movement, the issue is whether one can be politically liberal and religiously conservative," Schorsch, chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, told JTA. "I happen to think that's possible and tenable."

Schorsch, 68, has succeeded in balancing that nuanced world view during 18 years at the helm of the movement's academic and intellectual bastion.

On May 24, JTS will honor his tenure and his role as a leading voice in the Conservative movement.

"By dint of longevity, maturity, prominence and scholarship, someone has become the most recognized spokesperson for the movement, and at this juncture it's clearly Dr. Schorsch," said Rabbi Jeffrey Wholberg of Adas Israel Congregation in Washington.

The tribute comes as Conservative Judaism is at a crossroads: Its educational institutions are flourishing and its synagogues are experiencing a renewed vitality, but some say a leadership vacuum is leading to a dwindling of the ranks in what was the dominant American Jewish movement as little as a decade ago.

While many Conservative Jews share Schorsch's world view, the question hovering over the movement is whether Schorsch — or any single figure — can speak for Conservative Jewry at a time of intense soul-searching within the centrist movement.

"Rabbi Schorsch has been a wonderful leader," said Rabbi David Wolpe of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, who is seen as a rising star in the movement. But "he is the victim of being in a position from which people over-expect. He just can't be everything."

Several rabbis who gathered at JTS last winter for a conference on the latest National Jewish Population Survey

criticized the movement's leaders — while not pointing fingers directly at Schorsch — for failing to articulate a strong vision for Conservative Jewry.

Their complaints came in the wake of NJPS results that showed Conservative Jewry falling behind Reform in membership. According to the NJPS, only 33 percent of 4.3 million connected U.S. Jews

identified as Conservative. That represented a drop of 10 percentage points over the past decade, a time when the other major streams saw their ranks swell.

Rabbi Michael Strassfeld, head of the nondenominational Society for the Advancement of Judaism and co-author of the "Jewish Catalog" series that helped spawn

the chavurah movement, said Conservative Jewish leaders wrongly focused on adherence to Jewish ritual rather than on the meaning of rituals.

Strassfeld said one example of what he calls misplaced focus came late last year, when Schorsch questioned the Conservative movement's 1950 decision to allow driving on the Sabbath to encourage synagogue attendance. The change came at a time when many American Jews were migrating from cities to suburbs and lived further from their synagogues.

But Schorsch stuck to his guns.

"The more you drive, the less chance of creating a Shabbat community," he said. "That's what we failed to see. Sometimes we should be silent."

Not many pulpit rabbis seem to share that concern, however, saying that driving on Shabbat has become so commonplace that it is no longer controversial.

It might make sense to think twice about the Shabbat driving decision near JTS on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, where synagogues abound, but "in most of America it does not work that way," Wolpe said.

Such public willingness to confront Schorsch may say something about his sway over the movement. But charges that the movement lacks leadership don't move Schorsch, who called them a "knee-jerk reaction" to the population study.

Schorsch points to education as one area where the Conservative movement is thriving: Of some 200,000 Jewish day school students around the country, 25 percent hail from the movement's Solomon Schechter Day Schools or community schools largely funded and populated by Conservative Jews.

In addition, 8,000 Conservative youths attend Ramah summer camps, two new camps are going up in Northern California and Georgia and 70 percent of movement synagogue children attend congregational schools.

Meanwhile, JTS' William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education, which Schorsch helped launch, is about to graduate 130 students, its largest class. All non-Orthodox programs for Jewish educators at the other liberal seminaries together "don't equal 130," Schorsch charged.

Yet many have noted a seeming schism between the establishment New York seminary and the younger, more liberal University of Judaism in Los Angeles.

"I don't think the pull of the chancellor, or any leader, on the East Coast has the same effect here," said Conservative Rabbi Mark Diamond, executive vice president of the Board of Rabbis of Southern California.

The Los Angeles campus has stirred "competition and therefore some real life into rethinking the rabbinic school curriculum" in the movement, U.J. Rector Rabbi Elliot Dorff said.

When it comes to one movement debate, the seminary leaders diverge sharply.

Dorff, who wants to welcome gays and lesbians into Conservative congregations, remains highly critical of Schorsch's warning that the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards should not revise the movement's opposition to ordaining openly gay rabbinic students or holding gay commitment ceremonies.

That controversy has been stirring for several years, and is likely to continue at least until the committee hears arguments on the issue next March.

"This is an agenda formulated by secular society that confronts Judaism with an enormous challenge," Schorsch said. But "since Conservative Judaism remains a halachic movement, it is not going to be able to accommodate everything secular society wants."

'The more you drive, the less chance of creating a Shabbat community. That's what we failed to see.'

Rabbi Ismar Schorsch

Chancellor, Jewish Theological Seminary

FAMILY

The essence of the Torah? It's follow the Golden Rule

By JANE ULMAN

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — On the first of May, at his Bar Mitzvah at Los Angeles' University Synagogue, my son Danny received the Torah, passed down from his grandparents to my husband, Larry, and me to him.

This was not the first time.

On the sixth of Sivan, 3,316 years ago at Mt. Sinai, Danny also received the Torah, passed down from God to Moses to every Jew who would ever be born.

"Why twice?" I ask.

"Maybe the first time was to signify the unity of the Jewish people and the second time was to reinforce the commandments to me specifically," he answers.

Danny knows these commandments. Not only from 13 years of living in a Jewish family and attending Jewish schools but also from six months of studying his Torah portion, Kedoshim, the Holiness Code.

■
For, as Danny told the congregation in his d'var Torah the morning of his Bar Mitzvah, "Kedoshim is referred to as the heart of the Torah both physically and spiritually. It is the physical heart because if you unroll the Torah its entire length, Kedoshim is right in the middle. It is the spiritual heart because Kedoshim contains the most important rules to live by, including the Golden Rule."

Indeed, right in the middle of Kedoshim is Leviticus 19:18, which says, "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is the Golden Rule, found in some variation in all major religions.

How we treat other people is so important that the rabbis of the Talmud tell us, "He who publicly shames his neighbor is as though he shed blood."

And "other people" does not pertain only to fellow Jews. By adhering to the Golden Rule, the heart of the Torah, we are given an opportunity to become holy and to make the world a better place. We are given meaning to our lives. ■

(Jane Ulman is a freelance writer in Encino, Calif.)

On eve of Shavuot, conversion still is a divisive issue in Israel

By DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — As Jews around the world prepare for Shavuot and its reading of the Book of Ruth — which features the Moabite woman's famous conversion with the words, "Your people shall be my people and your God my God" — Israel continues to grapple with the highly charged subject of conversion.

Long a battleground between Israel's Orthodox establishment and the Conservative and Reform movements, the issue took on urgency with the mass wave of immigration from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s.

"I think Ruth and her conversion should indeed set the model for the current challenge of converting the Russians who live among us," said Rabbi Ehud Bandel, president of the Masorti-Conservative movement in Israel. "Once they identify with Israel and the Jewish people and society and accept the Jewish faith, they must be embraced exactly as Naomi embraced Ruth."

Bandel and others claim that Israel's chief rabbinate makes conversion especially difficult for those they suspect may not lead an Orthodox lifestyle.

"The real challenge is that unfortunately, the Orthodox establishment does not convert for Judaism but for Orthodoxy," Bandel said. The rabbinate is "reluctant to open its arms to Russian converts because everyone knows they will not be Orthodox."

■
Rabbi Eliyahu Ben-Dahan, general director of the rabbinical court of Israel — which oversees conversions — says there can be no shortcuts when it comes to following halachah, or Jewish law, with regard to conversions.

Orthodox authorities say Jewish law requires that converts undergo traditional ritual conversion and commit to adhering to all the precepts of Jewish law, or halachah. Non-Orthodox streams contend that these authorities inevitably interpret halachah as Orthodox observance. "If they think we will give up on halachah, then of

course we cannot," Ben-Dahan said. "At the end of the day, the ones who want to convert, do convert," he said.

As many as 300,000 of the nearly 1 million immigrants who came to Israel in the 1990s from the former Soviet Union are not considered Jews under Jewish law. They pay taxes and serve in the army, but can't marry Jews in Israel or be buried in Jewish cemeteries.

On their Israeli identity cards, the category for religion is left blank.

"They live as Jews but are not considered Jews," Gilad Kariv, a lawyer and ordained Reform rabbi who works for the movement's lobbying arm, said of the Russian immigrants.

Kariv cites statistics from the Jewish Agency for Israel showing that close to half of the non-Jewish immigrants when asked before they moved to Israel said they wanted to convert. Asked after their move to Israel, only 10 percent to 20 percent said they still wanted to convert.

Rabbi Chaim Druckman, who served in the Knesset as a member of the National Religious Party, has just taken up a new post as director of conversion affairs in the Prime Minister's Office. The position was established largely to deal with immigrants who may have Jewish ancestry but are not Jewish according to Jewish law, which accepts as Jews only those with Jewish mothers.

In 1998, a government commission on conversion, headed by then-Finance Minister Ya'acov Ne'eman, issued recommendations to the government.

They included the establishment of a joint institute for conversion taught by a combination of Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform rabbis.

A conversion institute has been established since, with branches across the country. Currently, it serves 2,500 students and is funded by the Jewish Agency and the government.

In the four years since the institute was founded, 3,256 people have finished their conversion studies and 1,367 have been converted. ■

'They live as Jews but are not considered Jews.'

Gilad Kariv
Reform rabbi and lawyer

NEWS IN BRIEF

MIDDLE EAST

West Bank deaths

A Palestinian youth was killed in West Bank protests that erupted over Israel's raid in a Gaza Strip refugee camp.

Witnesses said Israeli forces fired on rock-throwers south of Hebron on Thursday, killing a 13-year-old boy. In Kalkilya, Israeli commandos killed a Hamas fugitive in a shootout.

Elsewhere in the West Bank, an Israeli field commander was critically hurt when a comrade mistook him for a Palestinian gunman and opened fire.

Palestinians try to kidnap reporter

Palestinians tried to kidnap a New York Times correspondent. James Bennet, the Times' bureau chief for Israel, said he was speaking on a cell phone in front of a hospital in the Gaza Strip refugee camp of Rafah on Wednesday when a Palestinian came up to him, said hello and offered his hand.

When Bennet shook his hand, the man and another Palestinian grabbed Bennet and tried to throw him into a car.

A kidnapping was averted only by Palestinian police officers at the hospital.

The men then jumped in the car and sped away, the correspondent wrote in his story in Thursday's Times.

Shooting spree foiled

A Palestinian gang accused of killing an Arab jogger mistaken for a Jew planned to go on a shooting spree in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem District Court on Thursday indicted two Palestinian youths from the city and one from Ramallah for the March drive-by shooting of George Khouri. The gang, aligned with the Fatah movement's Al-Aksa Brigade, later apologized to Khouri's family, saying they mistook the Christian Arab for a Jew. According to the charge sheet, the three defendants confessed to planning to attack a Jerusalem apartment building.

Madonna cancels Israel concert

Madonna reportedly canceled a scheduled appearance in Israel. MSNBC reported that the pop star and Kabbalah devotee was canceling her summer concert in Israel because of violence.

WORLD

Yad Vashem protests cartoon

Yad Vashem protested an Austrian newspaper cartoon that compared an Israeli soldier to a Nazi.

One panel of the cartoon, which appeared Wednesday in *Kleine Zeitung*, shows a Nazi soldier glaring at a Jewish child. In the second panel, the same man, this time dressed as an Israeli soldier, is shown glaring at a Palestinian child.

E.U. blasts Israel

The European Union strongly condemned Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip.

In a statement on behalf of the E.U.'s president, Irish Foreign Minister Brian Cowen described Israeli actions as "completely disproportionate to any threat faced by the Israeli military and that Israeli forces showed a reckless disregard for human life."

He added, "The killing of children does not serve any legitimate cause and degrades any purpose which it purports to advance." Israel responded Thursday by calling the remarks "disgusting" and summoning Ireland's ambassador to the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem to discuss the issue.

E.U. Constitution to talk about Jesus?

Support is growing for a reference to Christianity in a new European Union Constitution.

Several of the E.U.'s new members, including Poland, the Czech Republic, Lithuania, Slovakia and Malta, are backing the move and signed a letter this week addressed to the E.U. president requesting the inclusion of a Christian reference in the constitution.

The proposal already has the support of Ireland, Italy and Portugal, and at least four other countries are believed to be supportive of the idea.

Spain, which initially was one of the strongest supporters of the move, has backed down after its center-right government was defeated by the Socialist Party in April.

Poles celebrate Yom Ha'atzmaut

A Polish student association held four days of activities to mark Israeli Independence Day.

The May 14-17 events, which included a lecture on Hebrew, lessons about the Hebrew alphabet and an exhibition of Israeli art, were sponsored by Gesher, an association for Polish-Israeli dialogue made up of students from the Jewish Studies department of Krakow's Jagiellonian University.

Israeli released in Budapest

The vice president of Israel's diamond exchange was released after seven months' detention in Hungary.

Avraham Traub, who returned to Israel over the weekend, traveled to Budapest last October and was arrested by Hungarian authorities following a request from Interpol.

NORTH AMERICA

JewsforKerry.org debuts

Jewish supporters of John Kerry launched a Web site. JewsforKerry.org, which is not affiliated with the presidential campaign of the Democratic senator from Massachusetts, will host content and discussion forums.

It seeks to make the Jewish case for a Kerry administration.

Group praises scarf settlement

The American Jewish Congress praised a settlement that allows a U.S. Muslim student to wear a head-covering.

Jewish public school students benefit because the settlement protects their religious freedom as well, AJCongress President Paul Miller said in a statement Wednesday.

"We are definitely pleased with the settlement and equally pleased that we were able to play a role in seeing this through," Miller said, noting the organization's friend-of-the-court brief.

The Justice Department settlement nullified a Muskogee, Okla., school-district policy that allowed only students who had lost their hair for medical reasons to don head-coverings.

Hollings defends Israel quote

Sen. Ernest "Fritz" Hollings (D-S.C.) defended his statement that President Bush went to war in Iraq because of U.S. Jews and Israel.

In a column that ran in three local newspapers earlier this month, the South Carolina senator said Bush launched Operation Iraqi Freedom "to secure Israel" and thus "take the Jewish vote from the Democrats."

Hollings also said Bush's Middle East policy was led by right-of-center columnist Charles Krauthammer, Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz and former Bush adviser Richard Perle, all Jews.