

IN THE NEWS

Survivors to get more compensation

A new agreement will bring \$174 million more to Holocaust-era slave laborers.

After a year of negotiations in Berlin, the funds — slightly more than half the interest earned in a settlement reached in 2000 with the German government and German firms — will be distributed by the Claims Conference to some 140,000 Jewish survivors by the end of August.

The foundation in charge of the settlement will turn over the rest of the interest, about \$169 million, to seven other organizations, including the International Organization for Migration, and groups representing non-Jewish slave and forced laborers in Poland, the Czech Republic, Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.

'Quartet' backs security reform

The diplomatic coalition pushing for Middle East peace backed Egyptian pressure on the Palestinian Authority to reform its security services.

Representatives of the "Quartet" — the United States, United Nations, the European Union and Russia — made the comments after meeting Thursday in the Egyptian resort of Taba.

The pressure on the Palestinians came amid concern about the security situation in Gaza after Israel's planned withdrawal.

Bush allocates cash for Palestinians

President Bush made special funds available for Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza. In instructions Thursday to Secretary of State Colin Powell, Bush made available up to \$34 million for special refugee needs in Sudan, Chad, the West Bank and Gaza.

The law the president used was created for nations in crisis. Sudan and Chad recently have been beset by civil unrest.

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WORLD REPORT

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Brian Hendler

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, flanked here by a Cabinet minister and his Cabinet secretary, is trying to decide whether to invite the Labor Party to join his government.

With Labor seeking leverage, Sharon works to save his coalition

By LESLIE SUSSER

JERUSALEM, (JTA) — A week ago, it seemed like a mere formality: At a time of his choosing, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would add the Labor Party to his tottering coalition, gaining the political muscle to withdraw Israeli troops and citizens from the Gaza Strip and part of the West Bank.

But stern opposition in the Likud, and rumblings of discontent in Labor, are complicating the scenario.

NEWS ANALYSIS

Compounding the confusion, Sharon has been hinting that he has other coalition options. Labor leaders withdrew the parliamentary safety net they promised Sharon — the pledge they made not to topple what has become a minority government on the understanding that they might soon join it. At least, they supported its main diplomatic initiative.

In both cases, the tough talk may be merely tactics, designed to influence the price in policies and portfolios that Labor can exact for joining the coalition. But

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■ Sharon thinks about inviting Labor to save his coalition

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such jockeying for position can assume a momentum of its own, and some pundits now say the projected alliance could fail to materialize.

In the balance could hang the fate of the Israeli withdrawal, a step that has garnered international support and that, ironically, originated in the Labor Party.

Sharon now has four alternatives:

- persist with his present minority coalition of 59 legislators in the 120-member Knesset and hope that the fractured opposition won't be able to agree on an alternative candidate for prime minister, which would be necessary to bring the government down without forcing new elections;

- bring in two breakaway Knesset members, David Tal of the One Nation workers' party and Michael Nudelman of the right-wing National Union bloc, to secure a shaky 61-seat majority;

- convince the five legislators from the fervently Orthodox United Torah Judaism bloc to support the government from outside the coalition; or

- bring in Labor for a solid plurality of over 70 and, more importantly, a guaranteed majority in the Cabinet for settlement evacuation, which none of the other options provides.

Clearly, the Labor option is by far the most attractive for Sharon, though Labor likely will want to modify the reformist economic policies that have been one of the Sharon government's proudest achievements to date.

The other alternatives can keep

Sharon's government afloat for several months, but only a national unity government with Labor could create the political ambiance to implement his controversial disengagement policy.

The snag is that many in Sharon's own Likud faction are adamantly opposed to the idea. Some still harbor hopes of stopping settlement evacuation, while others fear Labor's entry could lead to a modification of current government policies or cost them their Cabinet portfolios.

More than 20 Likud legislators are threatening to vote against any coalition with Labor. If they stick to their guns, Sharon will be hard-pressed to win a majority for a national unity government.

Sharon therefore has been sweet-talking individual Likud legislators, winning some of the dissidents over to his side.

But that's only half the battle. Harder for Sharon is the fact that Finance Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, two major Likud power brokers, remain strongly opposed to a coalition with Labor.

The conventional wisdom is that Labor would demand one of the three top portfolios — defense, foreign affairs or finance. Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz has been assured he won't have to give up his portfolio, which leaves Netanyahu or Shalom.

On Sunday, Netanyahu opened up a new front. Adding Labor to the government, he declared, would destroy his hard-won achievements in pulling the Israeli economy out of a deep recession and effecting free-market reforms.

Moreover, he added, it wasn't worth making political, economic or other concessions to woo Labor because they would "come crawling anyway. They are the world champions at crawling."

Netanyahu's contemptuous tone drew an angry response from Labor leader Shimon Peres. He accused the finance minister of conducting a policy of "piggish capitalism" that had created "6,000 millionaires in Israel and 6 million beggars."

Labor's Shalom Simchon, a former Cabinet minister, also weighed in, saying Labor now would insist on getting the Finance Ministry, and arguing that both economic growth and social justice had advanced more under Labor governments.

Sharon came down on the side of his potential coalition partners. In a warning to Netanyahu to stop rocking the boat, he said he would not support a national budget for 2005 that fails to assist the needy.

But Netanyahu's attack, and the fact that Sharon has yet to formally invite Labor to coalition talks, have prompted second thoughts in Labor about the safety net it promised Sharon.

Several recent supporters of national unity, including former Labor leader Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, now are taking a tougher line. Ben Eliezer says Labor should provide Sharon with a safety net only on matters directly connected to

the withdrawal process; in other areas, it should seek to bring him down.

Likud's Netanyahu and Labor's Peres are trading barbs.

On Monday, to show Sharon that they meant business, Labor legislators voted for a no-confidence motion related to the economy. Though the motion was defeated, 55-50, the move was intended as a warning to Sharon that unless he agrees to deal with Labor seriously, they might force early elections.

"We are closer now to elections than to the coalition," Peres declared after Monday's vote.

Unfortunately for Labor, some leading Likud legislators got the opposite message. The head of Likud's Knesset faction, Gidon Sa'ar, argued that the vote showed Sharon doesn't really need Peres or his party.

Sharon, though, is keeping his options open. He has summoned Peres and Itzik to a meeting set for Thursday, where he probably will put out feelers about a unity government.

In any case, nothing is likely to happen before October. The Knesset goes into recess in early August and reconvenes only in the autumn, when coalition contacts can be expected to come to a head.

Sharon will want to bolster his coalition for the winter session, the run-up to the withdrawal process — set to begin in earnest next March — and the 2005 budget, due to be passed by the end of this year. Netanyahu and others may well try to throw a monkey wrench into the works. The outcome of that showdown could decide the fate of Sharon's withdrawal plan.

(Leslie Susser is the diplomatic correspondent for The Jerusalem Report.)

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Jewish Agency to sponsor new study program

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — Move over birthright Israel: There's a new plan to bring Diaspora youth to the Jewish state.

The Jewish Agency for Israel is launching its largest-ever educational project to infuse young Jews with Zionism.

But unlike birthright Israel, which gives Diaspora youth free, 10-day trips to Israel, the Jewish Agency is betting on a longer Israel experience.

In the coming academic year, the Israeli government is slated to give \$10 million to groups that bring Jewish 18- to 26-year olds from around the world to Israel on educational programs that last at least five months.

With each passing year, the Israeli government will increase its contribution by \$10 million a year, with a matching grant from sources assembled by the Jewish Agency.

The program will level off indefinitely at \$50 million a year from both Israel and the Jewish Agency.

While subsidies to students will be granted on the basis of need, the idea is to halve the costs of Israel study programs to encourage 18- to 26- year-old Jews to study in Israel.

While the Jewish Agency relies in large measure on funding from the North American Jewish federation system, it

plans to diversify its funding sources for this project.

The agency plans to come up with its portion through foundations and philanthropists, its own budget and organizations that run Israel programs, said Alan Hoffmann, director general of the agency's department for Jewish Zionist education.

Participants must enroll in education programs approved by the agency, and also volunteer in community service programs.

Eligible programs would include universities, kibbutz and Hebrew study programs, Zionist yeshivas, youth movements and religious programs.

Funds will go to the organizations or, in the case of universities, to the students directly, said Michael Jankelowitz, the Jewish Agency's spokesman.

"It's something that is going to change the culture, the tradition of youngsters" all over the world, said Amos Hermon, chair of the agency's education committee.

"A meaningful year of Israel— this is the most effective factor as far as encouraging aliyah," he said. "The best lobbyists and the best advocates of the State of Israel's interests are those graduates that spent a year in Israel."

On June 16, the Knesset Finance Committee approved an initial \$2.5 million for

the Jewish Agency's "long-term program initiative," slated to begin this fall.

"Depending on how the money is going to be used, I think it will allow us to provide scholarships," said Neil Weidberg, director of Israel programs for Hadassah's Young Judea organization.

Ultimately, the program's impact will "add legitimacy to the idea of taking a year off" in Israel, Weidberg said. "It will be more accepted within the Jewish community."

Weidberg expressed concern about whether the American groups really will get enough support to make the program a reality, but he lauded the concept.

Stephen Hoffman, president and CEO of United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group for the North American Jewish federation system, thinks an energetic response from youth might drive federation support.

"I think it's one of those situations of 'If we build it, I hope they come.' And if they come, I hope the federations will do their share to make it possible," he said.

There currently are 4,000 non-Israeli Jews studying in Israel in all types of programs, mostly in yeshivas. The Jewish Agency wants to quintuple that number by 2008, Hermon said.

The official launch is slated to take place at the Prime Minister's Office in a few weeks, Jankelowitz said.

New lamp sheds light on a familiar Sabbath dilemma

By URIEL HEILMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — It may not prove as popular as the strobe light or as hip as the lava lamp, but a new kosher product may shed some light on an age-old problem.

What do you do when you're lying awake in bed on a Friday night waiting for your Shabbat timer to turn off the light?

If you have a KosherLamp, your tzuris could be over.

Planning ahead long has been a hallmark for Sabbath observers, who don't use electrical appliances on the Sabbath. That means that before sunset on Friday, observant Jews must decide whether to leave lights, stoves, air conditioners and other appliances on or off for the duration of the Sabbath — or set timers to control them.

But one rabbi-turned-entrepreneur hopes his new invention, a lamp that can be "turned" on and off without violating Sabbath restrictions, will revolutionize Shabbat convenience.

"People are not used to having on-demand lighting on the Sabbath," says Rabbi Shmuel Veffor, who invented the patent-pending device. "This is a revolutionary product for the Sabbath-

observant community."

The bedside lamp can be turned on and off by twisting a cylinder that functions as a sort of shade, covering the light. The bulb itself actually stays on inside the enclosed lamp, which is made of non-flammable material.

The product's Web site includes a detailed halachic explanation of why the lamp does not violate Jewish law.

Rabbi Shlomo Eliyahu Miller, director of the Toronto yeshiva Kollel Avreichim, explains that though the lamp base is "muk-tza" — an object that may not be moved on the Sabbath — the non-electric cylinder, which functions as the lamp's shade, is considered a separate object and may be twisted on the Sabbath to eliminate light.

A rabbinic letter of approval is included with the KosherLamp, which retails at \$29.95. The package also comes with a refrigerator magnet checklist for pre-Shabbat activities such as shining shoes, ripping toilet paper and setting lights.

"It's no different than closing the closet door, it's just better!" one KosherLamp fan, Rabbi Yitzchak Kalsmith, writes on the company's Web site.

Intifada tests pro-Israel feelings

By CARL SCHRAG

BALTIMORE (JTA) — Every week, Sheldon Berman distributes an e-mail compilation of “must-read” articles and commentaries about Israel from a variety of media outlets around the world.

“Everybody’s inundated with stuff to read,” the Baltimore accountant said recently from behind his cluttered desk. “I try to keep it to 10 pages.”

Berman began distributing his e-mail newsletter about three years ago, when he and other members of his synagogue, Suburban Orthodox Congregation Toras Chaim, decided they needed to take steps to educate their 260 member families about events in Israel.

“We’re a very Zionist shul,” he said, “and we wanted to prove it.”

Just what does it mean to be pro-Israel in America today? How do American Jews express their ties to Israel?

The old joke says that whenever two Jews get together, they have three opinions. That’s certainly true of the ways American Jews express their support for, and concern about, the Jewish state.

Does support for Israel mean writing a check, attending a rally, visiting or even moving there? Politically speaking, does it mean defending the government’s policies or advocating different ones?

The questions take on added significance at times of crisis in the Jewish state and the answers go a long way in reflecting the relationship between American Jews and Israel.

■
The American Jewish Committee’s 2003 Survey of American Jewish Opinion found that some 74 percent of respondents said they feel very close or fairly close to Israel, and 76 percent agree that “caring about Israel is a very important part of my being a Jew.”

A smaller, but still significant, majority of respondents, 63 percent, said they believe they should support the positions of Israel’s elected government even if they disagree with them.

But beyond survey numbers are the actions taken.

One measure of support for Israel is a visit or long-term stay. Berman has visited five times in the three and a half years since the Palestinian intifada began. Next

year, his son will study in a yeshiva there.

According to Brandeis University professor Jonathan Sarna, Berman is fairly typical of the Orthodox community.

“There is a huge difference between the Orthodox community and others,” Sarna said. “The Orthodox have by and large continued to go to Israel and to send their children to Israel.”

Nathan Hyman is a junior at the Orthodox Beth Tfiloh Dahan Community High School in Baltimore.

“You’d be a different kind of Jew if you were disconnected from Israel,” he said. “The message I’ve gotten from being in this school is that Israel is a cornerstone of the Jewish faith.” He added, “It seems natural to be involved.”

The school has changed its Israel studies curriculum in light of the current unrest, according to Joshua Gurewitsch, who chairs the Jewish history department.

Students learn to read media accounts of the conflict with a critical eye, and guest speakers help prepare seniors for potentially hostile encounters with anti-Israel activists on college campuses.

Many of Beth Tfiloh’s students will get additional reinforcement before going to college. Most of the 90 seniors go to Israel on an extended class trip, and many spend a year studying in yeshivas or other educational programs.

While Orthodox youngsters may have the most all-encompassing immersion in Israel education, other movements also seek to instill in their youths a strong tie to the Jewish homeland.

Just a few miles south of Beth Tfiloh, in Bethesda, Md., members of United Synagogue Youth, the Conservative movement’s youth arm, have been volunteering to run a phone bank for the Koby Mandell Foundation, which supports victims of terrorism.

Mandell was a 13-year-old Israeli-American who was bludgeoned to death by Palestinian terrorists in 2001. Mandell’s parents had made aliyah from Maryland,

where his father, Seth, had been a Hillel director.

One recent night, eight high school students phoned donors across the country to seek support for the foundation’s Camp Koby, which provides a camp-style break for Israeli children who have lost a loved one to terrorism.

Taking a quick break between calls, 15-year-old Abe — the organizers asked that last names not be published — said that learning about Mandell helped him put a face on the terrorism he learns about in religious school.

“I feel good to be doing this,” he said. “It’s better than sitting at home watching TV.”

The group surpassed its goal, raising \$1,681 for Camp Koby.

■
Rabbi Barry Block, of the Reform Temple Beth-El in San Antonio, Texas, said his congregants are very interested in Israel. He said that though they had shied away from Israel travel following the collapse of

the peace process in late 2000, now “we’re back — with a lot of excitement.”

This summer, six of his young congregants are going to Israel with the Reform movement’s youth arm, the National Federation of Temple Youth. That’s the same number that went in 2000, before

the intifada began. Another congregant is going to Israel on a high school study program. Last year none went, and the previous year there was only one.

“We’ve busted the federation’s budget for Israel scholarships,” Block said with pride.

If resuming travel to Israel is a sign that Jews are adjusting to the new reality of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, then a return of dissent and disagreement is another indicator.

Observers say that like Israelis, many American Jews who care about Israel but disagree with the government’s policies felt compelled to keep quiet during the early part of the intifada, when Israel was under constant attack.

But recent stirrings on the political left show that the limits of silence are being

A CHANGING RELATIONSHIP? Part 4

‘I distinguish between support for Israel and support for Israel’s government.’

Steve Masters
Brit Tzedek v’Shalom

reached in Israel, and American Jews who disagree with Israeli policy — or are supporting Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan to withdraw from Gaza — also are speaking up.

"There's more than one way to be pro-Israel," said Steve Masters, 44, a Philadelphia lawyer who was a founder of Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, which describes itself as a pro-Israel, pro-peace and pro-human rights organization.

Since its founding in April 2002, Brit Tzedek has advocated dismantling Israeli settlements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip and pushing Israel's leaders to be more forthcoming in peace negotiations.

When Sharon met President Bush in Washington in April, Brit Tzedek delivered to the two leaders a petition signed by 10,000 American Jews calling for the Israeli government to offer financial incentives to settlers who relocate into Israel proper.

Masters, who chairs Brit Tzedek's advocacy and public policy efforts, maintained that the group's positions are embraced by many Israelis.

"I distinguish between support for Israel and support for Israel's government," he said.

Another founder of Brit Tzedek, Marcia Freedman of Berkeley, Calif., accuses the organized community of stifling dissent on Israel. She says the old joke about two Jews having three opinions is no longer accurate.

"Now you get 10 Jews, one allowed opinion. Everything else is traitorous," she said. "It's intimidating to be told, 'You're threatening Israel by saying that.' If you're told that what you're saying is dangerous, you start being quiet."

Some community leaders have dismissed such gripes as unfounded, arguing that there simply are fewer dissenting voices because so many American Jews perceived that even Israel's most generous peace offers elicited a belligerent Arab response.

Some Jews seem to be simply turning away from Israel rather than wrestling



Demonstrators at a rally for Israel on April 15, 2002, in Washington, that drew an estimated 100,000 people.

with the difficult issues.

"Almost no one talks about Israel," said Gerald Bubis, a prominent figure in left-of-center pro-Israel groups in Los Angeles. "Far more people just are not interested in Israel today because it is just too painful for them. I see it in intangible ways."

As an example, he cited the charities chosen by children at their Bar Mitzvahs. In years past, many children asked that gifts be made to Israel-related charities, he said, but today he sees many more choosing local causes.

Still, in recent months, Bubis has noticed something of a resurgence of left-of-center voices in his community. Attendance has increased at programs sponsored by the local Peace Now chapter and the Progressive Jewish Alliance, which promotes left-of-center views on Israel.

In the small Jewish community of Eugene, Ore., Rabbi Yitzhak Husbands-Hankin watched with alarm as congregants' discussions about Israel became increasingly heated.

Husbands-Hankin initiated the creation of a Jewish Community Relations

Council, hoping it would serve as a tool for internal discussions and formulation of consensus views. But it hasn't always worked as intended.

Some members of the community have dropped out of the JCRC or declined to join at all because they feared it had a left-wing bent. Others have stayed away for the opposite reason, fearing it toes the Israeli government line.

Recently, JCRC members planned to write an opinion column about Israel's West Bank security barrier for the local newspaper. When they couldn't agree on a position even after lengthy debate, the Op-Ed was shelved, and they turned their attention to issues on which they could agree, such as working with local schools to create a Middle East curriculum free of bias.

The disagreements in a small community like Eugene seem tame compared to the scene in San Francisco.

The director of the region's JCRC, Doug Kahn, noted that thousands of local Jews can be counted on to mobilize around Israel-related issues, but he said

he is worried by the large number who simply have "moved on" to other issues or causes.

He added that the collapse of the Israeli left has caused many on the left in his community to step back from their pro-Israel activities.

"It has been a challenge to keep them engaged," Kahn said, adding that a relatively small number have become pro-Palestinian activists.

The real problem is long-term, he said, and it didn't start in the last few years: He points to the 1982 Lebanon War as the beginning of a period in which many American Jews grew disillusioned with Israel.

"It's fairly easy to mobilize the activist core around issues related to campus or media," he said. "There tends to not be enough attention paid to a diminished attachment felt by a larger cross-section of American Jews."

This series was funded by the American Jewish Committee's Dorothy and Julius Koppelman Institute on American Jewish-Israeli Relations and The Andrea and Charles Bronfman Philanthropies.

On anniversary, crowds throng rebbe's grave

By JOE BERKOWSKY

NEW YORK (JTA) — It was 7 a.m. and Avraham Berkowitz already had been standing three hours in line for his allotted two minutes at the grave of the Lubavitcher rebbe, Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

Still suffering from jet lag days after arriving from the former Soviet Union, plus the effects of a semi-fast, Berkowitz said the brief interlude at the rebbe's grave had buoyed his spirits nevertheless. "For me, this is coming to say to the rebbe, 'I miss you, I want to see your smile,'" he said.

Berkowitz, 28, was among the thousands who thronged Tuesday to the "Ohel," the covered grave site of Schneerson and his father-in-law — Yosef Schneerson, his predecessor as Lubavitcher rebbe — in Queens to mark the 10th anniversary of Schneerson's death.

Starting the night before, members of the fervently Orthodox Chasidic sect, and Jews of all stripes, began gathering at the burial place of a figure many consider a righteous person, or tzadik — and some of whose followers believe is the Messiah.

Such pilgrimages are common among religious Jews around the world, who often will trek to the graves of rabbinic leaders in Europe, and in Israel visit biblical sites such as Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem or the tomb of Shimon bar Yochai on Mt. Meron.

Schneerson's grave has become the sole such pilgrimage site in North America. With an adjacent synagogue and library open 24 hours a day except on the Sabbath, the Ohel often draws followers, but this week police cruisers and ambulances mingled with the overflowing crowds.

People trekked to the site in buses, limousines and sport utility vehicles, filling the streets of the largely African-American, middle-class neighborhood of neat red-brick homes.

For Berkowitz, the day recalled Passover 1989 when, as a teenager and Chabad member from Michigan, he came to the rebbe's Brooklyn headquarters. A Kohen, or member of the priestly caste, Berkowitz was asked to come up on stage to join in prayers.

Berkowitz had neglected to bring a tallit, or prayer shawl, and no one offered to help. Then a man handed him his own — and "it was the rebbe," he said.

Today Berkowitz serves in Moscow as executive director of the Federation of

Jewish Communities of the CIS and Baltic States, a career he traces back to the rebbe's "gesture of giving" to a young Jew in need.

"The rebbe focused on me, and he was seven decades older than me," Berkowitz said.

On Tuesday, he said, "I walked out of" the Ohel "full of strength to go back to Russia and give more Jews back to Judaism."

Many felt a similar pull. Nechama Goldman, 30, who runs a Chabad house in Oklahoma City with her husband, arrived with her five children. She had prepared the children for the trip with videos and lessons about the rebbe, teaching them one mitzvah each morning "so the day doesn't just go by."

"It's like a father or grandfather to them," she said.

She planned to pray for her children to "be good kids," for help with the couple's outreach to Jews and, ultimately, "that this should all end — that the Jewish people should all be together" upon the Messiah's arrival.

Some Chabad members believe Schneerson remains the one chosen to usher in the messianic age, while others are embarrassed by such talk. But Yossi Deren, 31, a Chabad emissary in Greenwich, Conn., echoed other younger rabbis who said the decade-old debate remains "a non-issue."

"What the rebbe did had a messianic quality: He saved Jews," Deren said. "But is it necessary to put a crown on his head?"

As the line wound toward the Ohel, people read psalms and songs and a special book of passages from the kabbalistic work the Zohar. Others watched Schneerson's sermons on video monitors along the path.

At the simple grave they cried, prayed and placed crumpled notes filled with their pleas, making the ground look as if it were covered in snow, despite the summer heat.

Rabbi Sholom Lipskar, 57, of the Chabad Shul in Surfside, Florida, had waited 90 minutes to get in, but stepped out of line to speak to a Chabad group from Texas.

"This is a bittersweet experience," he said. "We miss the rebbe very much, but the rebbe's loving presence is like a com-

forting guide that supports every aspect of your life."

Some came hoping for tangible results. Mani Pakizehgee, 39, a Los Angeles stockbroker and member of the city's Iranian Jewish community, said he'd earned "millions" of dollars since a meeting 14 years ago in which the rebbe convinced him to leave his sewing business and begin importing embroidery machines.

Now, he will pray for a wife and "even more money," Pakizehgee said half-jokingly before stepping into a white stretch limo.

'The closest contact we have today with God is through holy people.'

Yosef Mesica

Pilgrim to Rebbe's Grave

Glenn Shapiro, 51, of Hartsdale, N.Y., arrived for very different reasons in a Saab convertible. A lawyer who stages conferences for accountants and lawyers, Shapiro said he experienced a "spiritual awakening" at age 45 after meeting a Chabad rabbi near his office in New London, Conn.

Shapiro grew up in a Conservative home, and his business consumed much of his adult life. At first he "intended to stay away from these black jackets as much as possible," he said, referring to the way Chabad members often dress, but grew interested in Schneerson's teachings.

This was Shapiro's third visit to the grave site.

Since growing interested in the rebbe, he said, he has become more focused on his wife and two daughters, and last year won a state bar association award for devoting 500 hours of pro-bono legal work.

Asked to explain his life shift, he said simply, "the rebbe caused that."

Rabbi Dovid Eliezrie, a Chabad spokesman based in Yorba Linda, Calif., said the group's estimates of 800,000 followers worldwide reflected the rebbe's reach even today.

"The average Jew today identifies the rebbe as one of the great Jewish leaders of his time," Eliezrie said.

Yosef Mesica, 38, of Los Angeles, is one such Jew. Mesica, who runs an air-conditioning business, sat in a van outside the grave, immersed in prayers.

Mesica said this was his second trip to the rebbe's grave.

"The closest contact we have today with God," he said, "is through holy people." ■

ARTS & CULTURE

Israeli film shows Sephardi teen coming of age

By TOM TUGEND

LOS ANGELES (JTA) — Israeli filmmaker Shemi Zarhin is a gourmet cook who specializes in diet-busting cakes.

"I cook Sephardi style, Ashkenazi and Japanese," Zarhin said in a phone call from Tel Aviv. "Next time you're in Israel, come by and I'll show you."

The 16-year-old title character of Zarhin's film, "Bonjour, Monsieur Shlomi," also cooks up a storm.

Besides the family meals, he also does the laundry, cleans up, is the peacemaker in his quarrelsome Moroccan family, and bathes his grandfather, who greets him every morning with the film's title.

Despite his pains, the wide-eyed Shlomi is considered stupid by his family and in school, where he is flunking out.

At home, his obsessive mother has kicked out her hypochondriac husband for a one-time affair with her best friend.

Shlomi's older brother, their mother's favorite, regales the boy with details of his real and fancied sexual conquests.

Shlomi's older sister has twin babies but regularly returns to her mother's home to detail her fights with her husband, who shamefully surfs the net for pornography.

It all looks like another story of another dysfunctional family, a recurring theme in Israeli movies, when Shlomi's life slowly turns around.

"Monsieur Shlomi" is a charming film, a word rarely applied to Israeli movies. Oshri Cohen portrays Shlomi with surprising truthfulness.

The film is considerably more cheerful and wide-ranging than most dissections of adolescent angst.

As a bonus, Ashkenazi viewers will get a insight into the lifestyle of Israel's Sephardi Jews, a subject close to Zarhin's heart.

"My family arrived in Palestine from Morocco and Tangier 200 to 300 years ago," he recalled. "The Ashkenazim were here only 100 years, but they were the upper class and we were the underclass."

On shul's 100th birthday, Rome's Jews mark liberation

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

ROME (JTA) — Rabbi Vittorio Della Rocca was only 11 years old at the time, but he will never forget a historic Shabbat at Rome's Great Synagogue 60 years ago this month.

It was June 9, 1944 — just five days after Allied troops had liberated the city from the Nazis. And on that first Friday night of freedom, an American Jewish chaplain led 4,000 Jews in the Shehecheyanu prayer.

"It was an incredible scene of joy and euphoria," Della Rocca says. "There was a black spot, though, as everyone among us started counting to see if they could find all their loved ones."

The Rome temple was the first large synagogue to be liberated in Europe.

The American chaplain was Lt. Morris Kertzer, a young rabbi from Iowa City, Iowa. Attached to the U.S. Fifth Army, he had landed with thousands of other U.S. troops at Anzio and witnessed the Allied liberation of Rome.

Kertzer died two decades ago. But this month, almost 60 years to the day after that Shabbat service, Rome's Jewish community presented a scroll of appreciation to Kertzer's son, David.

A professor at Brown University, David Kertzer has gained renown in recent years for his books on Italian Jewish history.

They include "The Popes Against the Jews: The Vatican's Role in the Rise of Anti-Semitism" and "The Kidnapping of Edgardo Mortara," which recounts the story of the abduction by the church and forced conversion of a young Jewish boy in Bologna in 1858.

"For my father and for all Jewish American soldiers, to participate in the liberation of Europe was an extraordinary experience," Kertzer said.

"My father's experiences here had a big impact on me, and it's not really a coincidence that I chose the field of study that I did," he said.

During World War II, deportations of Italian Jews began only after the Nazis occupied Italy in September 1943.

Many Jews in Rome found refuge in the homes of Christian friends or in Catholic

institutions, but methodical round-ups and searches led to the deportation of more than 2,000 Roman Jews to Auschwitz. About 8,000 Italian Jews in all were deported.

The Rome community's award, presented by the city's chief rabbi, Riccardo Di Segni, and the president of the Jewish community, Leone Paserman, came during a conference June 16-17 that was held to honor the synagogue's 100th anniversary.

"During their 10 months of occupation, the Nazis had sealed the synagogue but didn't desecrate it," Paserman said. "On that first Friday night after the liberation, Jews from all over the city emerged from hiding and made their way to the temple."

"It's important to remember that the war was still going on elsewhere, and there would still be 11 months before peace was declared," he said.

Rabbi Kertzer himself wrote vividly about his experiences in Rome in a book of memoirs published in 1947.

Accompanied by another Jewish chaplain, Aaron Paperman, he entered Rome in "a jeep sandwiched between a tank and a truck" as part of an impromptu military

parade, cheered on by a million Italians. The two rabbis immediately sought out the local Jewish community.

"We were probably the first tourists since 1939 to ask, 'Dov' e' la sinagoga, per favore?'" Kertzer wrote.

"The following Friday, on the ninth day of June, the first large synagogue in liberated Europe opened its doors," he wrote.

"Four thousand men, women, and children streamed into the high-domed house of worship. Vast though the temple is, every inch of space was occupied," he wrote.

In his brief, English-language sermon, Kertzer told the Jews of Rome that the Allied soldiers shared their burdens and stressed the sense of unity that bound Jews worldwide. "We Americans, from all walks of life, wearing the uniform of America, have flocked to the house of God. And we saw Jewish soldiers from England and Canada, Jewish soldiers wearing the insignia of Eretz Yisroel, proudly enter your beautiful synagogue to join in prayer," he told them.

Rome's Jews remember painful times, and happy ones.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Powell presses Erekat

Colin Powell urged the top Palestinian Authority peace negotiator to crack down on terrorism.

Saeb Erekat met Wednesday with the U.S. secretary of state in Washington to present a plan for Palestinian elections within six months. Powell neither endorsed the plan nor rejected it, Erekat said. Erekat also said that municipal elections in Jericho, to be held in September, would serve as a model for other Palestinian elections.

Erekat added that Egyptian officials said they would confine their role in the Gaza Strip after an Israeli withdrawal to training P.A. security forces.

Saddam harbored top terrorist?

Saddam Hussein harbored a Palestinian terrorist group that specialized in plastic explosives, Paul Wolfowitz said.

The U.S. deputy defense secretary, in Senate testimony Tuesday defending Bush administration linkage of the deposed Iraqi dictator to terrorist groups, named May 15th, a Palestinian organization led by a Palestinian named Abu Ibrahim.

Wolfowitz described Abu Ibrahim as "one of the world masters" at making plastic explosives, and said Saddam harbored his group for 25 years. Abu Ibrahim is still at large, Wolfowitz said.

Denier loses ruling in Canada

A Canadian court blocked an attempt by a Holocaust denier to force Jewish officials to testify at his hearing.

Ernst Zundel had attempted to show that officials of the Canadian Jewish Congress and B'nai Brith Canada had unduly influenced senior government ministers.

The court acknowledged this week that both organizations met with ministers and issued news releases on Zundel, but added that lobbying ministers is a "legitimate exercise in an open and democratic society."

Zundel, who has been in prison for more than a year, is fighting to quash an order that declares him a danger to Canadian society. The government issued the order as a first step toward deporting Zundel to Germany, where he faces legal charges.

WORLD

Swiss judge blasts lawyer

The federal judge overseeing the Swiss banks settlement issued a rare public rebuke of a figure in the debate.

Judge Edward Korman of the U.S. District Court of Eastern New York blasted lawyer and novelist Thane Rosenbaum, who he charged "promoted a campaign of misinformation" during his April testimony in Korman's courtroom on the \$1.25 billion settlement, the Forward reported. Rosenbaum opposed proposals by Korman to allocate the majority of \$650 million remaining from the fund to poor survivors in the former Soviet Union.

Rosenbaum told the Forward that Korman's memo was "mean" and "hysterical."

Germany sued over lost art

A U.S. group sued Germany for \$18 billion, alleging the country is hiding artworks stolen during the Holocaust.

The lawsuit against the German Finance Ministry was filed in U.S. District Court in New York by the Association of Holocaust Victims for Restitution of Artwork and Masterpieces, Reuters reported.

A lawyer for the group said German officials conspired to store, transport, withhold or dispose of at least 2,000 artworks looted from

Holocaust victims. A German official countered that since the war's end Germany had returned more than 1 million artworks to their owners or heirs, but still owned works insured for some \$73 million.

Holocaust memorial focuses on Sudan

The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum temporarily suspended its activities to focus on alleged genocide taking place in Sudan.

In a rare, 30-minute break Thursday from its daily educational activities, the museum hosted congressmen and a representative from the Darfur region of western Sudan, where tens of thousands of black Africans have been persecuted and killed by government-backed Arab militias.

New Keren Hayesod head

Keren Hayesod appointed a new director general.

The fund-raising umbrella for Israel of non-American Diaspora Jewish communities appointed Greg Masel on Tuesday to be its next chief professional. Masel, the group's Sydney director, will replace Gad Ben-Ari, former spokesman for Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. During his five-and-a-half year term, Ben-Ari increased the group's fund-raising campaign from \$96 million to \$126 million, Keren Hayesod spokesman Yehoshua Amishav said. Masel will take over the group in the fall, Amishav said.

Group wants Russian killing probed

A Jewish human rights group called on Russian authorities to investigate the murder of an expert on neo-Nazi groups.

Investigators said Saturday's killing in St. Petersburg of Nikolai Girenko, 64, could be connected to his work as a researcher and expert witness in a number of court cases involving neo-Nazis and extreme nationalists.

The Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union, a Washington-based advocacy group, appealed to the prosecutors not to underestimate this murder or extremist activity and xenophobic incidents in general.

MIDDLE EAST

Gaza infiltrations foiled

Israeli soldiers killed three Palestinians who tried to attack Gaza Strip settlements.

Two armed terrorists were shot by troops before dawn Thursday as they tried to cross the security barrier around the settlement of Dugit. A few hours earlier, another gunman was killed in the Gush Katif bloc.

There were no immediate claims of responsibility from Palestinian terrorist groups in Gaza.

In the West Bank, Israeli forces stormed Nablus in what commanders described as a sweep for terrorists.

Qurei pledges reform

Palestinian Authority armed forces will be unified by September to take over security in the Gaza Strip, Ahmed Qurei said.

In an interview with the Al-Ayyam newspaper published Thursday, the P.A. prime minister also said there would be a peace summit among the Palestinians, Israel, Egypt and the United States at an undisclosed location in October.

On Tuesday, visiting Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Suleiman gave the Palestinians two months to reform their armed forces. Fearing the ascendancy of Islamist groups, Cairo wants to help the Palestinian Authority take over Gaza after Israeli troops and settlers withdraw in 2005.

Israeli officials did not immediately respond to Qurei's comments.