

IN THE NEWS

3 soldiers killed in Gaza gunfight

Palestinian gunmen killed three Israeli soldiers outside a Gaza Strip settlement.

The infantry officer and two conscripts were ambushed Thursday while guarding Morag.

All three Palestinian gunmen were killed by Israeli return fire. Islamic Jihad, the Popular Resistance Committees and the Abu Rish faction of Yasser Arafat's Fatah group claimed joint responsibility for the attack. The clash at Morag continued sporadically over two hours, during which the army called a press briefing at the settlement.

A Yediot Achronot reporter was wounded in the leg by Palestinian shooting.

Shalom to U.N.: Drop anti-Semitic rhetoric

Israel's foreign minister called on the U.N. to end its anti-Israel rhetoric and take action against anti-Semitism in an address Thursday to the opening of this year's General Assembly.

Silvan Shalom also called on U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to convene a special session on anti-Semitism.

Powell: Palestinians are tiring donors out

Donors are growing weary of the lack of Palestinian political reform, Colin Powell says.

The U.S. Secretary of State described for reporters his impressions of this week's meeting of the Quartet — the United States, the United Nations, Russia and the European Union — that drives the "road map" peace initiative.

"We discussed the assistance that the Palestinian people continue to need from the international community," Powell said.

"But there is a weariness in the international community to continue providing the kind of assistance the Palestinian people so desperately need unless we see some sort of political reform and determination on the part of the Palestinian Authority to improve itself and prove itself."

WORLD REPORT

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Hillel

Kinney Zalesne, executive vice president of Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life.

As Jewish community changes, so does model of good leadership

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — Ask American Jews to name an American Jewish hero and they might say Steven Spielberg or Sandy Koufax.

Perhaps you'd get Sarah Jessica Parker — her mother's Jewish — or even Madonna, the Catholic superstar who has helped to make Kabbalah mainstream.

But ask an American Jew to name a Jewish communal leader, and you may well get a vacuous expression.

American Jews are towering figures that enliven secular fields from science to

entertainment, but leadership in American Jewish communal life has become lackluster, some say.

Others argue that today's communal leadership is quite effective — just less prominent and more facilitative, in keeping with the times.

For one thing, the American Jewish community has grown increasingly decentralized, with more groups and foundations taking on

special causes.

"I would not say that we have a leadership crisis; we have a diffusion of leadership," says Shula Bahat, associate executive direc-

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**LEADERS
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■ Today's Jewish leaders are working to adapt to a new set of challenges

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tor of the American Jewish Committee, where she is responsible for lay leadership development.

"The outcome is that it is hard to identify leaders of the community as a whole. Each leader functions in their own milieu," she says.

However, the decentralized leadership model fits the American Jewish community's size and multiplicity of organizations, Bahat says.

Furthermore, "The autocratic leader is not a desirable model today," she says. "Successful leaders use persuasion rather than edicts to inspire people to follow."

Bahat says American Jewish communal life has shifted toward inclusiveness and team leadership. For example, the AJ-Committee has instituted myriad committees to allow members to "own a certain niche in the organization."

■ In a culture where American Jews are thoroughly assimilated, persuasive leadership is necessary to compel them to donate to Jewish causes over non-Jewish ones, practice Judaism or marry Jewish. At stake, observers say, is the future of a thriving American Jewish community.

But in trying to rally a community of independent-minded Jews with multiple and even conflicting identities, today's American Jewish leaders face a daunting task.

In an era of individual empowerment, are American Jewish leaders adapting to the community with the right leadership model? The answer varies from organiza-

tion to organization.

In general, "leadership has to be fueled by a purpose" beyond mere organizational survival, says Richard Joel, the longtime, charismatic president of Hillel who last year became president of Yeshiva University.

"Do we as a people have a driving dream that fuels us? I worry that that's in short supply," he says. Ignorance about "who we are and what we are about is a major informing factor in this."

"Leadership," says Joel — often cited in the community as the model of a dynamic leader — "is vision plus an implementation strategy."

By that standard, just being head of a Jewish group does not necessarily make someone a leader. In fact, many leaders are emerging outside the mainstream organizations.

Some say Jewish institutions themselves handicap their leaders: Many Jewish groups are highly bureaucratic organizations that hamper leaders' impulses to innovate or be entrepreneurial.

And some institutions cling to outdated mandates, says Larry Moses, president of the Wexner Foundation, a premiere training program for Jewish leadership.

"Because the pace of change is so rapid and relentless, Jewish organizations need to thoughtfully assess and reassess their relevance to the challenges and opportunities of the times," Moses says.

■ Shifting Jewish demographics — from intermarriage and single-parenting to the emergence of gays and lesbians, dual-career families and increased mobility — have created new challenges for synagogues, he says.

Federations must shift from an "Israel-centric and 'rescue-and-relief' mission to a broader concern with American Jewish education, identity and affiliation," he says.

Increasing competition among Jewish groups calls for strategic change in function and vision, Moses says.

Due to poor compensation in entry- and mid-level jobs, and lack of professional

development, Jewish groups also wrestle with professional recruitment and retention — which, in turn, dampens the potential to attract top lay leaders.

In addition, it's a tough time to lead in this country.

Like their fellow Americans, Jews have become focused more on individual than communal needs.

Jewish professionals and activists say Americans still live in the era of "Bowling Alone" — a reference to Robert Putnam's 2000 book that documents the loss of community in America and the lower membership in

'The autocratic leader is not a desirable model today. Successful leaders use persuasion rather than edicts to inspire people to follow.'

Shula Bahat
American Jewish Committee

civic and community organizations.

In addition, the rise of the baby-boomer generation has bred a certain suspicion of authority and institutions, says Rabbi Irwin Kula, president of CLAL: the national Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership.

Trends such as customizing one's Passover Haggadah or putting charitable dollars towards one's own pet project, rather than a communal funding pool, attest to the changed psychology, Kula says.

■ Still, some say there's not a crisis of leadership — just a shift in leadership style to empower a group's membership, again, in keeping with the times.

"A change in the style of dominant leadership is being understood as a crisis of leadership," says John Ruskay, executive vice president and CEO of the UJA-Federation of New York.

"People look for strong leaders who have clear answers, and yet so much of contemporary life leads to nuance and ambiguity," he says.

"We're in a much more participatory, consensual process in which people seek to be heard," he says. "That does not lend itself to strong rabbis from the pulpit giving 40-minute sermons every Saturday."

In fact, Ruskay says, there currently may be more "excellent, first-rate facilitative leadership in the Jewish community than we ever had."

Rabbi Richard Block exemplified the shifting leadership style when he took over

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the pulpit three years ago at The Temple — Tifereth Israel in Cleveland, where the Zionist giant Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver held court for 46 years.

When he first took over, Block says, he joked with the Reform congregation that “this time around, God sent you a rabbi that wouldn’t readily be confused” with God.

The way Block sees it, “leadership has to be experienced through the strength and the voice of every participating individual.”

Kehilat Hadar, an egalitarian minyan popular with young adults on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, follows a similar ethos: Organizers intentionally lead from behind.

“There’s no one figure who’s always conducting things in a public way. That empowers people to lend their own voice to prayer — and that’s my goal,” says Elie Kaunfer, one of Hadar’s co-founders. “This generation likes the empowering model.”

Joel, of Yeshiva University, sent that message in his inaugural speech at the school last year. Known for redefining paradigms with the turn of a phrase, Joel said his purpose at the flagship institution of modern Orthodoxy was “to ennoble and enable” students.

■

Many cite the American Israel Public Affairs Committee as an organizational leadership model: It gives volunteers a clear course of action and empowerment — not just through donating money, but through basic grass-roots activism in lobbying legislators.

AIPAC’s executive director, Howard Kohr, says the group has had a “tremendous amount of success” drawing and sustaining various levels of activists.

“It’s a cause they care deeply about, but it’s also demonstrably shown that their actions can make a big difference,” Kohr says.

But the leadership and success of many organizations is hindered by their consensus-driven processes, observers say.

Constantly shuttling between lay leaders and professionals to arrive at consensus takes away from time and energy that could go toward innovation, says Yosef Abramowitz, CEO of Jewish Family & Life!, a nonprofit that aims to build Jewish identity as a major provider of online Jewish content.

“Innovation is linked to risk taking, with the understanding that there are going to be some failures, but most Jewish communal organizations are not allowed

to fail because of the fear that it will affect fund raising,” he says.

Abramowitz says his group uses a “venture philanthropy” model that has “fewer people involved, but they roll up their sleeves and are much deeper into governance as full partners with the professionals, rather than just consulting or rubber stamping.”

Success will come for the community as a whole when the consensus builders partner with the innovators, he says.

That was the case with birthright Israel, a landmark program that provides free Israel trips for 18- to 26-year-olds who have never been to the Jewish state on a peer tour.

The idea emerged from the New York-based philanthropic foundations of Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhart, and eventually found a partnership with the Israeli government and the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella organization of the North American federation system.

The case underscores a trend in which many Jews are taking leadership paths outside organizational ranks.

The philanthropic world is witness to a growing number of personal foundations, and sweeping communal change increasingly has come from their doors.

“Foundations can do things some of the establishment don’t dare do” because of the public scrutiny of a broad donor base, Bronfman says.

■

According to Shifra Bronznick, a New York-based consultant to Jewish groups, “Organizations have to find a way to elicit leadership from people at every rank. Our institutions still tend to be hierarchical, bureaucratic, risk-averse and fearful of healthy conflict.”

Stephen Hoffman, who has just stepped down as CEO of the UJC, says, “The challenge is to marry that ideal with the reality of operating within large bureaucracies that seek to deal with competing visions by volunteers in a voluntary system.”

He also defends the consensus-driven nature of Jewish organizations.

Criticism of the decision-making process is “a lament of the people who think they have a lock on wisdom,” Hoffman says.



Photo courtesy office Rabbi Richard Block

Rabbi Richard Block of The Temple — Tifereth Israel in Beachwood, Ohio.

“Consensus-driven processes don’t always yield the most creative way to attack an issue,” he says, but “that means the leaders have to articulate vision and build support and take the time to do so.”

■

The AJCommittee’s Bahat says a collaborative process between professionals and lay leaders is enriching — and produces better results.

Lay leaders “often have a better sense as to where the community is, the broader Jewish community and the general community, than the professionals” steeped in the Jewish world, she says. They “enable us to put our ear to the ground.”

In the meantime, there seems to be an untapped well of interest in Jewish life in the community. The trick in attracting activists comes back to the theme of empowerment.

“I find that there are really wonderful people, young and old, who are really desirous today of getting involved. The question is finding the vehicles for that,” says Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chairman of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations.

“They don’t want to just be seen in terms of what they can give,” he says, but care more about the “substance of the involvement.”

■

Candidate list short for top Jewish jobs

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — Two high-profile executive searches in the Jewish community this spring illuminated one dark fact: the shallow pool of candidates for top jobs in Jewish organizations.

The six-month search to find a new CEO for the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group of the federation system, centered on a handful of male directors of large federations. It was the same group visited for the job many times before.

And when Hillel sought a replacement for Richard Joel, its longtime CEO who took over the helm of Yeshiva University — whose own presidency search took nearly three years — the group ultimately decided to hire an interim director while it kept looking.

Both searches spoke volumes about the state of recruitment and retention in Jewish communal life, observers say.

■
If prestigious, well-paying jobs at the helm of Jewish organizations struggle to attract personnel, what does that say about the prospects for drawing talent to middle management and entry-level positions?

Recent studies and interviews with JTA suggest that not enough is being done to draw young Jews to careers in Jewish organizations, nor is there adequate training, mentorship or compensation to keep them on a Jewish professional job track, which itself is not clearly delineated.

At stake is the current American Jewish organizational infrastructure, which depends on a fresh supply of volunteer and professional leadership as well as the potential for promising careers in Jewish communal service.

"If leadership development is a continuum of moving people through different stages," from the initial recruitment to motivating people to reach new levels of leadership, then "the whole system is a bit broken," says Laurie Blitzer, 40, a Jewish activist in New York, where she is a partner at the consulting firm McKinsey & Company.

The issue applies to lay leaders too, she argues.

There is "a lot of lip service about making room for young Jewish leaders, much more than it's actually happening," says Blitzer, founder of Kol Dor, Hebrew for Voice of a Generation, a new international network to connect and empower young

Jewish leaders. Several respected leadership programs do exist, but there is a lot of renewed talk these days about Jewish leadership, and the beginnings of serious action — particularly in the realm of boosting the reservoir of and rewards for Jewish professionals.

Among the new initiatives is the Professional Leaders Project, launched with \$1 million apiece from Jewish philanthropists Lynn Schusterman, Michael Steinhart and Bill Davidson.

The project — consisting of two surveys on Jewish professional leadership and two workshops to draw young Jews into Jewish jobs — found in its first survey a "persistent undersupply of well-trained and experienced Jewish educators and communal professionals." Reasons cited include low pay and status, tension between professionals and lay leaders and a lack of professional development.

■
Jewish communal leadership also is afflicted by a lack of professional standards and accountability, which would promote high performance and allow for smooth transitions, the survey found.

Those same reasons are believed to contribute to the steep attrition rate at Jewish organizations: Up to half of Jewish professionals at some organizations leave their jobs within five years, says the report, authored by sociologist Gary Tobin.

Another effort at redress comes from the UJC, which acknowledged a serious gender gap in its leadership ranks: Federations largely are staffed by women, but few — including none of the 20 largest federations — are led by them.

The UJC and a group called Advancing Women Professionals and the Jewish Community commissioned a plan earlier this year to crack the glass ceiling.

For Hannah Rosenthal, executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs — the only female head of a major Jewish organization that isn't specifically oriented toward women — the issue has personal relevance.

"I have two daughters, and whether I

would encourage them to go into Jewish communal life is still an unanswered question," she says. "I want them to know financial independence. I want them to figure out a successful and efficient way to make the world better."

"They have me as a role model," she continued, but as far as leadership, "they don't see a lot of women when they look around the organized Jewish world."

According to Rabbi David Silber, dean of New York's Drisha Institute for Jewish Education, the Jewish community is "paying the price of telling our kids, one way or the other, we want them to be doc-

Young girls don't see a lot of women when they look around the organized Jewish world.

Hannah Rosenthal

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

tors and lawyers."

But there are other factors.

"Leaders burn out," says Art Paikowsky, a consultant for nonprofits who headed the Jewish Federation of Greater Phoenix for more than five years and worked for federations in Washington and Philadelphia.

Fund raising amid a growing number of competing charities — including campaigns run by the federation's own agencies — can be a pressured and thankless job, he says.

Others bemoan the task of rallying a group of independent-minded constituents.

"Being an exec in the federation system is a job that requires skills that are common among cat herders," joked Jon Friedenberg, former head of the Jewish Federation of Greater San Jose in California.

Leading a federation is "not perhaps as simple and straightforward as other kinds of positions that are equivalent in terms of salary and stature," he says, and advancement often requires federation hopping, which means uprooting family.

One key to retaining professionals is providing mentorship and a career path that gives them skills to take on top jobs, observers say.

Zev Hymovitz, a longtime Jewish professional and co-author with Tobin of the professional development survey, says some Jewish groups invest in professional development, while others do not.

"I think it's going to take time before they really make it into a priority issue," he says. "Many of them are involved in trying to keep their organizations afloat." ■

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Lay-professional tensions pose problems

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jews fighting is hardly news — after all, the joke about two Jews and three synagogues is familiar to Jewish communities around the world.

But when the quarreling Jews also work together, it makes their jobs difficult.

That's often the case with the lay-professional relationships at the top echelons of American Jewish organizations.

"Given the fact that this relationship is so central to our operating system, it's extraordinary that we do so little to prepare volunteers and professionals to work together effectively and to address some of the challenges, inequities and tensions that are inherent in this relationship," says Shifra Bronznick, a New York-based consultant for many Jewish groups.

Volunteers and professionals often misunderstand their roles, resulting in simmering tension or outright feuds.

Both parties have been known to complain of a lack of respect for their time and expertise, compromising their potential to work effectively.

An uneasy relationship in lay-professional leadership can destabilize the groups that set the course for the American Jewish community, many involved in these organizations say.

Often it's a key reason for professional turnover in Jewish communal life.

The lay-professional relationship long has been a struggle, but several factors have exacerbated the problems in recent years.

As organizations have become increasingly complex and driven by professionals, many lay leaders have told JTA they feel sidelined from decision making and kept out of the loop.

Both parties can become mired in a bureaucratic process that leaves professionals feeling undermined and lay leaders spent.

The relationship is complicated by the fact that a lay leader's influence often is a product of his or her wealth, prompting professionals to mince words to avoid losing donations or even their jobs, observers say.

Choosing leaders on the basis of money not only excludes less wealthy candidates, but also may result in the choice of a lay leader who is otherwise ill-suited to the task or who feels that his wallet should allow him to dictate the group's course,

community activists say.

In trying to strike the right balance, communication and mutual respect are key, according to a recent survey on Jewish communal professional leadership authored by sociologist Gary Tobin.

But the "power differential" can get in the way, he says.

Lay-professional relations are the "real elephant that's in the living room," says Jonathan Schick, a Dallas-based leadership consultant who works primarily with private schools.

"When boards don't understand their roles as trustees of the organization," they "have a tendency to get more involved in the day-to-day, the here-and-now, and they don't have the long vision," Schick says.

The issue is universal in the nonprofit world, he says, but stakes are raised in faith-based institutions where passions run high.

Indeed, ethnic ties can allow a sense of family ties, and their consequent sensitivity and volatility, to override professionalism, observers say.

But without professional standards, a board member can fire a professional on little more than a whim.

According to Daniel Allen, executive vice president of American Red Magen David in Israel and president of the Association of Jewish Communal Organizational Professionals, "I think there is a mutually visceral distrust, which unfortunately is

all too often real, in terms of how people treat each other."

Close observers say volunteers and professionals can harness their governing power and avoid professional clashes by clearly defining their roles. It's up to the professional to define those roles at the outset, says Shula Bahat, associate executive director of the American Jewish Committee, who is responsible for the group's lay leadership structure.

"When it's not done, things are tested through crisis and there's no model to follow," she says.

At the same time, professionals must give lay leaders room to lead — and not waste their time.

The professional must "involve the lay leader in a constructive way," Bahat says.

Howard Rieger, the new president of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella group for the North American Jewish federation system, said in a recent interview that "there's too much of a sense of trying to fit every volunteer into some kind of cookie-cutter mold," like "putting every word in their mouth so they can deliver the message."

Making lay leaders into "window dressing" — without the power to make real decisions — only infuriates them, says Rieger, who served for years as president of the United Jewish Federation of Pittsburgh.

Professionals also must empower themselves, he says.

LEADERS OF THE TRIBE



Photo courtesy of Yeshiva University

Yeshiva University President Richard Joel, second from left, talks with students.

Jew vs. Jew conflict escalates in Lithuania

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — A dispute that has pitted Jew against Jew in Lithuania may be headed to the courts.

Simonas Alperavicius, the president of the Lithuanian Jewish community, told JTA that he was going to file a lawsuit this week to have the authorities remove a group of Jews from the synagogue yard, where they have been holding an around-the-clock vigil in support of one of the candidates for chief rabbi.

The threatened lawsuit is just the latest blow in a months-long power struggle over who controls Jewish life — and Jewish property expected to be returned to the Lithuanian Jewish community — in this former Soviet republic.

The crisis has escalated to the point where North American Jewish officials are being dragged into the dispute.

Chabad Rabbi Sholom Ber Krinsky and his followers, who are holding the vigil, said they would not abandon their attempts to have the synagogue re-opened months after Alperavicius ordered it shut amid a dispute over the post of Lithuania's chief rabbi.

■

The only synagogue in Vilnius — known before World War II as a center of Jewish scholarship — remained closed for Rosh Hashanah and is likely to remain closed throughout the end of the High Holidays, Alperavicius said.

Chabad says that 400 Jews were "forced to conduct Rosh Hashanah services in the cold" on the footsteps of the shul that remained empty on the holiday, according to a story posted on Chabad-Lubavitch's Web site.

But critics of Chabad in Vilnius said the claim of 400 people is "nonsense," mainly because the yard can barely accommodate one half that number.

Meanwhile, those who oppose Krinsky celebrated Rosh Hashanah at a Jewish community hall, which can accommodate 150 people and where a Torah scroll from the synagogue has been stored since it was closed earlier this year.

Chabad also has a separate hall in Vilnius where its followers can meet.

Vilnius' only shul was closed in May by Alperavicius, who said the step was a temporary measure intended to restrain supporters of Krinsky, a longtime community rabbi and Chabad emissary, from tak-

ing control of what belonged to the entire Jewish community of Vilnius.

Krinsky, a nephew of a prominent leader of the world Chabad organization, Rabbi Yehuda Krinsky, has until recently been Vilnius' only resident rabbi since 1994.

As the only Jewish religious authority permanently involved in Jewish life in this country, which is now home to an estimated 5,000 to 8,000 Jews, he has been responsible for most Jewish religious activities in Lithuania.

Opponents of Krinsky say that it was his desire to become Lithuania's chief rabbi that led Jewish leaders to select a non-Chasidic Orthodox rabbi to serve as chief rabbi of the small Lithuanian community.

The controversy has turned especially nasty in the last few weeks.

Officials with Chabad and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which backs Alperavicius, have confirmed that Chabad has gone to the United Jewish Communities, which funds the JDC, to present Chabad's point of view.

UJC put out a statement, saying it was concerned about the internal strife going on, and that officials of the JDC are discussing the matter with Chabad.

"We remain in close contact with JDC, in whose judgment we place the highest degree of confidence," the statement said.

■

Ever since the crisis began, Krinsky's supporters have accused the JDC of backing the organized community and Alperavicius.

Those aligned with Krinsky claimed that it was the JDC that paid the salary for Chaim Burshtein, a Russian-born Israeli Orthodox rabbi and former Soviet refusenik, whom local Jewish leaders invited to serve as chief rabbi and take Krinsky's position at the Vilnius shul.

JDC denies it has paid any salary to Burshtein.

An official statement circulated on Monday by the JDC's New York office said Lithuanian Jews have found themselves "under aggressive attacks by a person who attempts to coerce them to make him, against their choice, their chief rabbi."

"The attacks now target the Joint Distribution Committee, demanding that we curb all our relief and welfare assistance to the community until they accept him as their rabbi."

The letter continued: "JDC supports the principle that a Jewish community is sovereign to decide on its spiritual leader.

As in all Jewish communities in the free world, the members of the Lithuanian community have the right to select the rabbi they desire, rather than a rabbi deciding that he is taking over a community by force," the JDC statement said.

In the meantime, some local Jewish leaders outside of Vilnius who work with both parties said they got caught in the middle of a community dispute that ultimately hurts Jewish life in their communities.

In an interview with JTA, Hertz Zak, chairman of the Jewish community in Kaunas, Lithuania's second largest city, called Krinsky "our rabbi" and Alperavicius "our president."

■

"I don't really care who is calling himself chief rabbi," Zak said. "Krinsky has been helping us all along, Alperavicius is also doing a huge job. This split in the community is hurting us. It makes non-Jews around us wonder how such things can happen between Jews."

Zak said despite the row, a recent New Year celebration in his community was attended by both Alperavicius and foreign Chabad students sent by Krinsky.

"As chairman of my community I have always been able to find a common language with both of them. Now I have found myself between the devil and the deep blue sea," Zak said.

Lithuania is expected to adopt restitution legislation to enable the Vilnius Jewish community to receive dozens of properties seized by the Soviets when Lithuania was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940.

Each of the sides in the conflict is accusing the other party of trying to benefit from the pending restitution process, an argument especially sensitive for Chabad, which owned little property in traditionally non-Chasidic Lithuania.

The conflict places local Jews between the 'devil and the deep blue sea,' a Lithuanian Jew says.

Sukkah might need duct tape, but it's a holy place

By JANE ULMAN

ENCINO, Calif. (JTA) — What is a sukkah?

To Rabbi Akiva, the sukkah represents the actual huts that housed the Israelites during their 40-year trek through the wilderness.

To Rabbi Eliezer, the sukkah symbolizes the Clouds of Glory, encompassing God's presence, that accompanied and protected the Israelites.

To my four sons, who are not talmudic rabbis, the sukkah represents a pile of redwood boards and lattice-work panels that have to be extricated from the garage rafters, hauled out to the backyard and assembled.

"Not again," Jeremy, 15, complains. "The Israelites didn't have to deal with broken bungee cords and splinters that never come out of your hand."

"Or an inverse proportion of duct tape to redwood," my husband, Larry, adds.

But to answer the question, a sukkah — which seems to have more requirements regarding height, width and acceptable roofing material than California's building code — is both physical and metaphysical, natural and supernatural. It represents the frail, impermanent huts of the Israelites, leaving them exposed and unprotected. And it simultaneously represents the Clouds of Glory, providing security and guidance.

The Torah says, "The Lord went before them in a pillar of cloud by day, to guide them along the way, and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light, that they might travel day and night." (Exodus 13:21)

And that sheltering presence is available even today for, according to the Jewish mystics, "when a person sits in his sukkah, the Shechinah — God's divine presence — spreads its wings over it." The sukkah is holy space. Which is why we're supposed to decorate it as beautifully as possible with fruits, pictures and New Year's cards, for example, and to bring out our good dishes and tablecloths.

(Jane Ulman is a freelance writer in Encino, Calif. She is the mother of four sons.)

Stationed abroad, Jewish GIs

By URIEL HEILMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — While it's unlikely that a hurricane like Ivan will ever sweep through Balad, Iraq, Chaplain Capt. Shmuel Felzenberg says he thinks his desert sukkah — built for him near Balad by soldiers of the U.S. Army — likely could withstand the storm.

Felzenberg, a rabbi, is one of a handful of Jewish chaplains stationed with U.S. forces deployed in the Arab world during the Jewish holidays. There are an estimated 1,000 Jewish GIs in Iraq, Kuwait and Afghanistan, and the military and a variety of Jewish organizations have gone to great lengths to help them celebrate Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Sukkot overseas.

"As for an actual sukkah — my battalion's own Army engineers built me one, which could likely withstand a hurricane!" Felzenberg wrote in an e-mail to JTA from Iraq. "And am hoping our welders can do me a nice display-size menorah for Chanukah," he added.

Celebrating Jewish holidays on the battlefield is not always an easy — or possible — feat. But Jewish soldiers say the army goes to great lengths to enable such celebrations — ferrying soldiers to hubs where they can attend prayer services, shipping Torahs and kosher holiday food to those gatherings and dispatching chaplains from halfway around the world to lead services.

When chaplains are not available, Jewish soldiers often step up to the task, leading services, guiding soldiers in using the lulav and etrog in prayer on Sukkot and helping create a Jewish atmosphere in the desert sands of the Middle East.

"There are some posts where there are very, very few practicing Jews," said Capt. Estee Pinchasin, a 29-year-old company commander in the 249th Engineering Battalion. "You end up having to do your own thing and find your own way."

Originally from Long Beach, N.Y., Pinchasin is based in Fort Belvoir, Va., but spent Rosh Hashanah last year in Kuwait. This year, she expects to be in Kuwait for Yom Kippur and Sukkot.

"It was one of the best services I ever attended in my life," she said of last year's holiday services in Kuwait, which were led by Chaplain Col. Jacob Goldstein, who lives in Brooklyn. "I was very impressed. I couldn't believe the efforts the army put forth for this."

The commanding general in the area put out an alert saying any Jewish soldier who wanted to participate in the services should be afforded the opportunity to go, she said.

"People from all over Iraq were transported. It was a special pass," Pinchasin said. "They had lodging set up for them and machzorim and tallises, and books and little classes."

Organizations like the Aleph Institute, the JWB Jewish Chaplains Council and the Jewish Soldier Foundation help fill in the blanks, sending extra kosher food, holiday ritual objects and prayer books for the soldiers.

Felzenberg, who lives in Hawaii, said he found the diversity of those who attended his Rosh Hashanah service this year unique.

"I always find an interesting blend of persons who attend, across a wide demographic," he said, including U.S. Army and Air Force personnel — "infantry guys, aviators in flight suits, medical folks" — civilian contractors, and even a couple of non-Jews who came out of curiosity.

There were no Iraqis, however.

"To my husband, this is a really important time to be in Iraq," the chaplain's wife, Dini Felzenberg, told JTA in an interview shortly before the holidays began.

"Partly, I feel it's bad that he's not here with us — of course, it's hard for the kids to not have your daddy here," she said. "On the other hand, I and the kids are extremely proud of what he's doing. He's not here because he's doing something we are honored by. When he read Megillah in Saddam Hussein's palace" last Purim "he wasn't here but he was in the next-best place."

As for this holiday season, she said, "When you're deployed to that area, it's very important for Jewish soldiers to have their needs met for the High Holidays."

**You end up
having to do your
own thing and find
your own way.**
Capt. Estee Pinchasin

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

State Dept.: Palestinian claim 'outrageous'

A claim by a top Gaza Strip security official that he knows who killed three U.S. officials last year is "unacceptable and outrageous," the U.S. State Department said.

Gen. Musa Arafat told Reuters this week that he knew the identities of those who attacked a U.S. diplomatic convoy in Gaza last October, but that the Israeli occupation hampered attempts to arrest them.

"We find Musa Arafat's statement, if he was correctly quoted by Reuters, to be totally unacceptable and outrageous," a State Department statement said.

"If it is true that the Palestinian Authority knows the identities of the murderers, we expect immediate action to be taken to arrest, prosecute and convict them."

The State Department had dismissed as a sham the arrest earlier this year of several Palestinians on charges related to the attack.

ADL campaigns for withdrawal

The Anti-Defamation League is circulating a statement of support for Israel's planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip.

The ADL hoped such a statement would be forthcoming from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations — the usual avenue for broad statements of support for Israeli policy — but was stymied by the conference's standards of consensus.

A number of national Jewish organizations are influenced by resistance to the withdrawal from within the settlement movement and Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's own Likud Party.

The ADL's national director, Abraham Foxman, said popular support in Israel for the plan demanded back-up from U.S. Jews.

Poll: Muslims back Kerry

U.S. Muslims, who backed President Bush in 2000, overwhelmingly support Sen. John Kerry in 2004, a new poll says. Muslims would back the Democratic senator from Massachusetts by 68 percent to 7 percent, with Ralph Nader picking up 11 percent of the vote, according to the poll conducted by Zogby International.

In 2000, Bush garnered 42 percent of Muslim votes to 31 percent for his Democratic challenger, Vice President Al Gore.

Lawmakers complain about NPR

A U.S. lawmaker is complaining about the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's oversight of National Public Radio and its coverage of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Rep. Brad Sherman (D-Calif.) joined the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America on Tuesday in addressing the annual public meeting of the corporation, which oversees NPR. Eric Rozenman, CAMERA's Washington director, suggested the corporation must do more to review NPR's broadcasts on the Arab-Israeli conflict to ensure they meet the legal requirement of "strict adherence to objectivity and balance."

Kerry offers Yom Kippur wishes

John Kerry wished Jews a safe inscription for Yom Kippur, commemorating the lives of those who died in Iraq and in terrorist attacks this past year. The Democratic presidential candidate and Massachusetts senator singled out the holy day's Yizkor commemorative service in a statement.

"This year, we all remember those who have died heroically for our country in the line of duty and those brave citizens of Israel murdered in cruel acts of terror," Kerry said.

"Yizkor teaches us that their memory endures through our deeds and our prayers."

What would Koufax do?

A Jewish baseball slugger says he'll sit out at least one game during Yom Kippur.

Shawn Green of the Los Angeles Dodgers says he may sit out both of his team's games against the San Francisco Giants that fall on the holiday. He said he wanted to consult with his wife and parents before making a final decision about the Friday night and Saturday afternoon games.

The two teams are battling for first place in the National League West, but Green said he thinks the standings will not play into his decision.

MIDDLE EAST

Israel ups alert for female bombers

Israel will step up scrutiny of Palestinian women at its checkpoints. Israel's acting internal security minister, Gideon Ezra, announced the new measures Thursday in an interview with Yediot Achronot.

"Police have a problem when it comes to women. To my regret, as a result of this attack, all of Jerusalem's Arabs are liable to suffer from recurrent searches, including women," he said, referring to a female suicide bomber who killed two border policemen in Jerusalem on Wednesday.

Security, he added, now "demands special attention to women as well as men."

Hezbollah blasts friendliness

Hezbollah criticized Iraq's prime minister for shaking hands with Israel's foreign minister.

The Lebanon-based Shi'ite militant fundamentalist group said in a statement that Tuesday's handshake between Silvan Shalom and Ayad Allawi at the United Nations in New York is a "real affront to the Iraqi people and their history, culture and Muslim and pan-Arab commitment," The Associated Press reported.

The group added that the pleasantries between the two men were also an affront to the Palestinians.

Israel threatens to boycott nuke forum

Israel threatened to boycott an international conference on a nuclear-free Middle East.

Israel said it would boycott the January 2005 conference sponsored by the International Atomic Energy Agency if a resolution calling Israel a nuclear threat is not removed from the agenda, Ha'aretz reported.

The conference will be attended by representatives from several Middle Eastern countries including Iran, as well as nongovernmental organizations and a number of independent experts.

The conference has no binding powers.

Israeli trade with Arabs up

Israel's trade with Arab states rose more than 47 percent in the first eight months of 2004. The trade amounted to \$169.7 million, the Israeli newspaper Globes reported. Trade with Jordan and Egypt led the way.

WORLD

Berlin Muslims support banning of forum

Some Arabs and Muslims in Berlin are applauding the banning of an extremist conference.

In an open letter to Mayor Klaus Wowereit, printed in the Welt am Sonntag newspaper this week, some 60 Berliners, including many of Arab and Muslim background, declared their support for the banning of an Islamist extremist congress scheduled for October in Berlin.

The Interior Ministry canceled the event and sent its organizer, Fadi Mahdi, back to Beirut.