



IN THE NEWS

In blessing Bush, rabbi invokes God's will

A Chabad rabbi alluded to the place of religion in government in blessing President Bush.

Rabbi Levi Shemtov delivered the invocation Wednesday night at a pre-inaugural dinner attended by Bush and Vice President Dick Cheney.

"Dear God, the president has, during the years of his first term, and even before, publicly, yet humbly, expressed his sentiment from deep in his heart that the world — and certainly he — rise and fall, live and die, succeed and fail, face challenges and arrive at destiny, ultimately according to your will," Shemtov said.

9/11 victim buried in Israel

An American victim of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks was buried in Israel.

Nancy Morgenstern, a bond trader with Cantor Fitzgerald, was buried in Beit Shemesh on Wednesday after her remains were identified recently.

Morgenstern, who was 32 when she died, was an Orthodox Jew and avid cyclist.

Cheney fears Israel might strike Iran

Vice President Dick Cheney expressed concern that Israel might strike Iran to take out its incipient nuclear capacity.

"If, in fact, the Israelis became convinced the Iranians had significant nuclear capability, given the fact that Iran has a stated policy that their objective is the destruction of Israel, the Israelis might well decide to act first, and let the rest of the world worry about cleaning up the diplomatic mess afterwards," Cheney said in an interview aired Thursday on MSNBC.

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WORLD REPORT

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'It was skin and bones': Soldiers remember Auschwitz

By HEATHER ROBINSON

NEW YORK (JTA) — When they were young, they fought the Nazis, and then bore witness to the extreme depravity of which human beings are capable.

Now in or nearing their 80s and 90s, the Allied soldiers who liberated the concentration camps of Europe are recounting their memories of the horrors. Approaching the Jan. 27 anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, many of those still living feel urgency to testify about what they encountered.

Anatoly Shapiro, 92, has never forgotten what he saw at Auschwitz on Jan. 27, 1945. That was the day Shapiro, who says he is the first Russian officer to enter the infamous concentration camp, led his battalion to liberate it.

60 YEARS AFTER LIBERATION

In a recent interview in his apartment in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn, he sits alongside his wife, Vita. His tall, thin form is upright and his eyes are clear as he describes, through a translator, the things he says he still sees in nightmares 60 years later.

"We saw German soldiers, and when we opened the gate, we saw one barrack, then the next, on and on for a hundred barracks," he recalled.

"When I saw the people, it was skin and bones. They had no shoes, and it was freezing. They couldn't even turn their heads, they stood like dead people."

"I told them, 'The Russian army liberates you!' They couldn't understand. Some few who could touch our arms and said, 'Is it true? Is it real?'"

As a commanding officer, his task was to direct his men. Half his battalion — originally



Heather Robinson

Anatoly Shapiro, who entered Auschwitz with the Russian army, now lives in Brooklyn, N.Y.

900 men — had died in battle. But nothing they had endured had prepared them for what they found inside Auschwitz.

His men pleaded with him to let them leave.

"The general told me, 'Have the soldiers go from barrack to barrack. Let them see what happened to the people,'" he recalled.

He ordered them to accompany him, and they went from barrack to barrack. He remembers, "In German, it said, 'damas,' — women. When I opened the barrack, I saw blood, dead people, and in between them, women still alive and naked.

"It stank; you couldn't stay a second. No
Continued on page 2

■ Jewish liberators remember entering the camps

Continued from page 1

one took the dead to a grave. It was unbelievable. The soldiers from my battalion asked me, 'Let us go. We can't stay. This is unbelievable.'

"We went to the barracks for men; it was the same as the barracks for the women.

"People in the barracks were naked, or [had] just thin clothes, no shoes, in the freezing cold; it was January. Only a few people could talk; they didn't have energy. But a few people were able to talk, so slowly. [They told us] once a day they got a little water, no bread, no anything. If someone died, they took the clothes, to get a little warmth, anywhere. They died from hunger and cold.

"I was shocked, devastated."

Shapiro remembers two barracks for children.

"Outside it said, 'kinder.' Inside one, there were only two children alive; all the others had been killed in gas chambers, or were in the 'hospital' where the Nazis performed medical experiments on them. When we went in, the children were screaming, 'We are not Jews!'"

It turned out that they really were Jewish children and were afraid they were about to be taken to the gas chambers.

He remembers the Russian Red Cross trying to feed the people. "Immediately they started cooking chicken soup, vegetable soup, but the people couldn't eat because their stomachs were like" — instead of using words, he shows his clenched fist.

After the Red Cross had removed survivors, Shapiro continues, he directed his soldiers to begin cleaning the barracks to prevent disease from spreading.

Because of the repression of Judaism in the former Soviet Union, Shapiro says he did not know how many Jews the Nazis had killed until he and his family immigrated to the United States in 1992 and he learned the figure was 6 million.

Shapiro has been asked to speak after the president of Poland at the Jan. 27 ceremony in Krakow commemorating the liberation. As it turns out, he cannot be at the ceremony, but he feels it is crucial to speak about what he saw so that future generations will remember. He is particularly gratified to be able to talk about what he witnessed because he was not able to do so in the former Soviet Union.

"If I had spoken of what I saw, I would have been sent to jail," he said. "Today, I never forget what happened in Auschwitz and in the war to our 6 million, and to all [those who died at the hands of the Nazis]."

Auschwitz was one of the first camps that the Allies reached, so the anniversary of its liberation prompts reflection by the liberators of other camps as well.

Marvin Josephs, 81, of Phoenix, helped liberate Ohrdruf and Buchenwald in Germany. As a master sergeant with Ace Corps headquarters, 3rd Army, Josephs' unit entered Buchenwald on April 12, 1945, with a military chaplain, Rabbi Herschel Schachter.

"Rabbi Schachter announced with a bullhorn, 'You're free,' and the survivors 'came and tried to kiss his boots,'" Josephs said. "They were emaciated, starving."

One man in particular, who said he had been a professor at the University of Prague, showed the camp to Josephs, the rabbi and several other American soldiers. The tour included the crematoria and the home of the commandant and his wife, Ilse Koch, whose brutality earned her the nickname "Beast of Buchenwald."

"It was so terrible; it was hard for the mind to absorb it."

Shortly after Josephs' unit arrived, Gen. Dwight Eisenhower ordered the entire U.S. 4th Armored Division to tour Buchenwald so they could see the Nazis' brutality.

"He didn't want people to ever deny what happened," Josephs said.

Eugene Cohen, 89, of Pittsburgh served under Gen. George Patton as chief investigating officer of Mauthausen, a conglomeration of concentration camps including Gusen, in Austria.

He supervised an investigating team of 13 men, including six interpreters and several photographers whose documentation was later used to convict Nazi war criminals, including Franz Ziereis, at the Nuremberg Trials.

Cohen was among the first officers to enter Mauthausen in May 1945. He recalls that he and his men posted signs that read, "Maj. Eugene Cohen is here to investigate crimes against humanity."

"When the Jewish people saw the name Cohen, they came rushing to me," he recalled, tears in his voice.

Day after day, he and his men took depositions. His many indelible memories include the time, several days after he had begun his work, when his chief interpreter, Jack Nowitz, summoned him to hear a man's deposition.

"I saw a man sitting there and Jackie said, 'This man sitting before you was to die two weeks after we came to liberate the camp.'"

"The Germans kept these things called tote books, in which it was marked down who was to die on such and such a day. Here was a man who was to die, and he was living because we were there. This man came crying to me, and I cried with him."

Cohen said he felt a kinship with the survivors as fellow Jews.

"Of course, being of the Jewish faith, we did the best we could to get as much evidence as we could," he said.

At the Nuremberg trials, there were more war criminals charged from Mauthausen — based at least in part on the depositions he and his men gathered — than there were from some of the larger concentration camps. As recently as 2001, the FBI gained access to Cohen's personal records to gather evidence to support the deportation of a Nazi war criminal.

"We looked him up, and sure enough, he was there in my report," Cohen said. "We're dying off now; there are only a few who witnessed what took place. The most important thing is never to forget." ■

'Here was a man who was to die, and he was living because we were there. This man came crying to me, and I cried with him.'

Eugene Cohen
U.S. Army

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In Sderot, fear, anger, resignation all grow

By GIL SEDAN

SDEROT, Israel (JTA) — They called it a “day of mourning,” but in downtown Sderot a group of Breslav Chasidim danced around a truck equipped with loudspeakers playing Chasidic music at full volume.

The Chasidim came here in solidarity with the people of Sderot, who have been the target of almost daily Kassam rocket attacks from Gaza, and their music represented a change from the menacing call of “Red Dawn” — the alarm broadcast over the town’s public-address system 20 seconds before a rocket falls.

The scene reflected the mood in a town torn between the natural need to get on with life and the painful fact that the town is the prime target for rocket attacks from Gaza.

A development town northwest of Beersheba in the Negev, on the Israeli side of the Gaza border, Sderot has lost seven residents in the past seven months — four in Kassam rocket attacks and three last week in a terrorist attack at the Karni border crossing into Gaza.

Nothing makes Sderot look like a battle scene — until the rockets actually fall. On Monday, a warm, soothing sun embraced the bruised town, tempting residents to take to the streets to enjoy springlike weather. There were babies being pushed in their strollers, people eating hummus in the center of town, people out enjoying life.

It’s hard for an outsider to imagine that just the words “Red Dawn” from the public-address system can sent people rushing to the nearest shelter.

But Ella Abuksis, 17, was still in critical condition at a Beersheba hospital as a result of wounds suffered Saturday as she walked downtown with her 10-year-old brother, Tamir. As a Kassam landed nearby, Ella saved her brother by lying on top of him, sparing him from the full force of the blast. She took shrapnel to the head.

“Don’t call it a day of mourning,” pleaded Ella’s father, Jonathan, as he spoke to hundreds who gathered in the city square demanding that the government “do something” to get rid of the Kassam rockets. “Call it a day of prayer for my daughter.”

Mayor Eli Moyal called for the day of mourning. Most businesses were shut down, children did not go to school and giant black flags and pictures of those killed at the Karni crossing were spread across the square.

President Moshe Katsav joined the mourner-protesters in a surprise visit. Legislators from the Likud and National Religious Party were there as well, enjoying the attention of scores of reporters. The reporters themselves were new to town; for years Sderot has gotten little public or media attention.

Most of the rage was directed at Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, whose farm is just outside Sderot. But Sharon wasn’t there.

“If I were Sharon, I would have held the weekly Cabinet session in Sderot,” Moyal said.

Of course, Moyal acknowledged, Sharon would not be warmly welcomed.

“So he would suffer the rage of the people,” the mayor said. “So have I. So what? I am sick and tired of being their scapegoat.”

Sharon called Moyal on Sunday night and assured him that the army would do its utmost to put an end to the situation.

Moyal was not appeased. He said that if the government could not guarantee residents’ security, “then this is not a country



Brian Hendler

Mourners grieve for two Sderot children killed during a rocket attack from Gaza at a funeral on Oct. 1.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

‘If they sound the Kassam alarm I just keep on walking, unless my mother is with me, and then I have no choice but to go into hiding.’

Ephraim Safanayev
Sderot resident

he wanted to live in,” a statement that was widely quoted.

Sderot was not an attractive place to live even before it became the target of Palestinian rockets. It suffers from chronic unemployment, and many residents carry with them frustrations stemming from the town’s creation, 50 years ago, when new Sephardic immigrants were bused to small towns to help settle Israel’s periphery.

As evening fell on Sderot, the president’s motorcade sped north and the visiting legislators left town. Sderot seemed peaceful; it seemed as if the talk about rocket attacks had been about somewhere else, a long time ago.

Two 10-year-olds with strong Russian accents walked past a local movie theater, enjoying the evening.

“I am not afraid, not at all,” Ephraim Safanayev said. “If they sound the Kassam alarm I just keep on walking, unless my mother is with me, and then I have no choice but to go into hiding.”

Survivors grateful but struggle with poverty

By E.B. SOLOMONT

NEW YORK (JTA) — Simon Unger lived every day at Auschwitz thinking it'd be his last.

"It was day to day. If you die today or tomorrow, you knew you were going to die because that's what Auschwitz was," he said.

But in fact, Unger not only survived the war but has lived 60 years since its end.

In 1995, 50 years after being liberated from what he calls a "living hell," he gathered nearly 80 friends to mark a "celebration of life."

"I am alive," the 81-year-old said Sunday in a telephone interview with JTA from his home in Florida. "When I lived to the 40th anniversary, 'I didn't think I'd see the 50th. You never think you'll see it, but you live with hope."

At last count, there were 122,000 Holocaust survivors living in the United States, according to the United Jewish Communities' National Jewish Population Survey 2000-01.

The survey paints a picture of the survivor population in America: As a general rule, survivors' median age is higher and they are frailer and in greater need of financial or social assistance than other elderly Jews, it found.

In a 20-page report, "Nazi Victims Residing in the United States," the NJPS reports that non-survivors are more than twice as likely as survivors to be working;

23 percent of survivors are disabled and unable to work compared with 5 percent of non-survivors; and survivors are five times more likely to live in poverty than non-survivors, with 25 percent of them falling under the federal poverty benchmark.

But many survivors, especially those who came to the United States in the years immediately following World War II, have done well financially.

"We have actually risen from ashes and made lives for ourselves. We pulled ourselves up, educated our children and raised families," survivor Joe Sachs said.

David Mermelstein, 76, a survivor and president of the Coalition of Holocaust Survivors in South Florida, explained that it wasn't always this way.

But "as age started to catch up, there were a lot of older people who got sick and the little money they had was used up," he said.

There's also the ongoing psychological pain.

Mermelstein, who was 11 when the war started and 15 when he was sent to Auschwitz, said a survivor can never shed the Holocaust's shadow.

"You cannot forget because when it comes to a holiday," there is always some-

body missing, he said.

In addition to NJPS data, a special report by the UJA-Federation of New York, The Jewish Community Study of New York: 2002, analyzes a group of Holocaust survivors in the New York area, which is estimated to be a community of about 55,000.

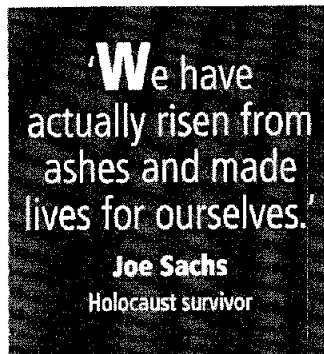
This data assists groups that help survivors, including the Claims Conference, in allocating restitution funds.

"I think over the last few years, studies in the United States and in other places in the world have helped in the planning and allocation

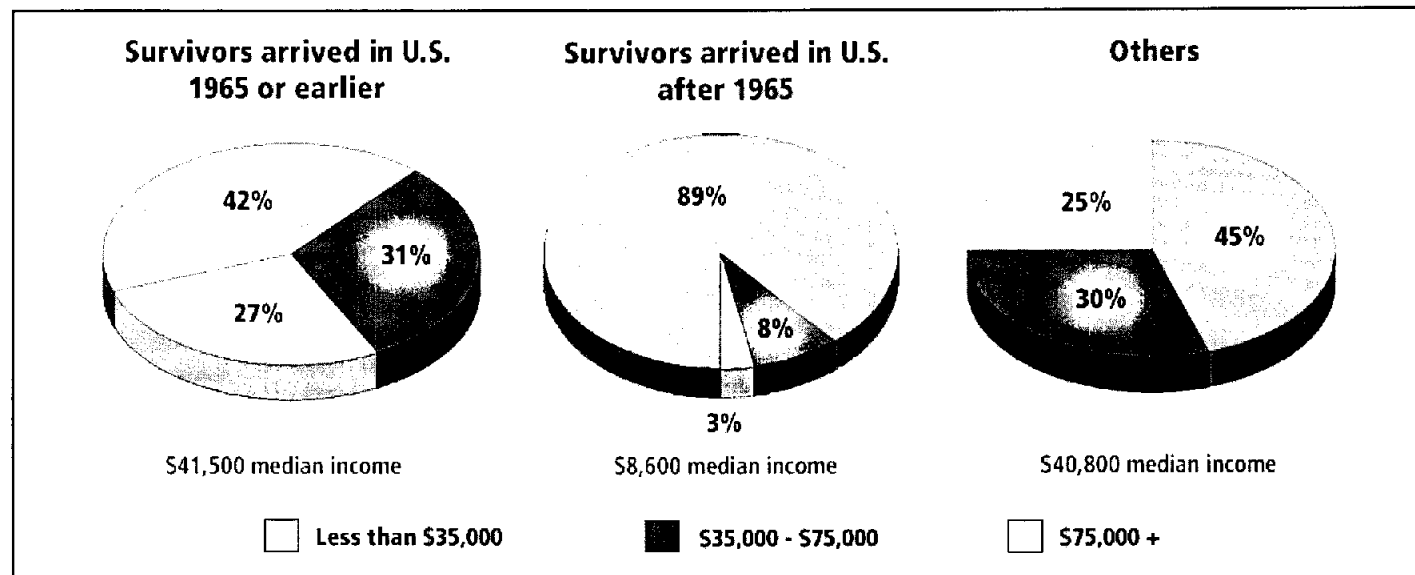
of resources to help the needy survivors. Knowledge is a critical element in trying to deal with problems in a thoughtful way," said Gideon Taylor, executive vice president of the Claims Conference.

But statistical surveys are unable to capture a final changing aspect of survivors in the 21st century: survivors' increased need to leave behind a legacy.

"I think the focus of survivors after liberation was to start a new family immediately. Fifteen, 20 years ago they were working, raising families. Now the focus as they retire is the grandchildren who they are telling their story to because they realize time is of the essence," said Avi Mizrahi, executive director of the Holocaust Memorial Committee. ■



**60 YEARS
AFTER
LIBERATION**



JTA Graphic

While income levels of Nazi survivors who moved to the United States in 1965 or earlier have kept pace with other Americans their age, Nazi survivors who arrived in the United States after 1965 are much poorer, with an annual median income of only \$8,600, according to findings in the NJPS 2000-01.

Teachers learn how to teach about the Holocaust

By HEATHER ROBINSON

NEW YORK (JTA) — One by one, the seventh-graders entered the classroom, each telling a story about someone whose life had been touched by Kristallnacht.

Next, one of the children read the order, signed by Heinrich Himmler, calling for the murder of Jews throughout Germany and the destruction of their property throughout Germany and Austria in 1938.

"It's important for them to know that the Holocaust happened," said Maureen Marullo, a teacher who assigned the exercise to her students at Loggers' Run Middle School in Boca Raton, Fla., "and that some of the people who resisted — who hid Jews and others — were ordinary people."

Marullo was among some 20 teachers chosen to attend a seminar over the weekend in Elizabeth, N.J., that offered in-depth study of the Holocaust and discussions about teaching the subject to middle and high school students. The advanced seminar was coordinated by the Jewish Foundation for the Righteous, a nonprofit organization dedicated to identifying, honoring and supporting those non-Jews, known as Righteous Gentiles, who risked their lives to save Jews during the Holocaust.

The foundation also partnered with New York City's Department of Education to coordinate an intensive daylong seminar for 60 city public high school teachers.

The seminar was held slightly more than a week before the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz is commemorated on Jan. 27.

Although the centerpiece of the foundation's mission is distributing more than \$1.3 million to nearly 1,600 Righteous Gentiles, many of whom are poor and live in Europe, the organization also works with Holocaust centers across the United States and promotes Holocaust education, according to its executive vice president, Stanlee Stahl.

"We work to educate teachers about the Holocaust because that's what we feel will make the most difference in terms of preventing such horrors from occurring in the future," she said.

To be chosen by the foundation to participate in the advanced seminar in New Jersey, teachers must be recommended by Holocaust centers with which the foundation has a relationship. They also must have attended the Alfred Lerner Fellowship program, during which the foundation brings Holocaust scholars to Columbia University each June to instruct selected teachers during a weeklong intensive course of study.

Such professional development enables the foundation to "train a cadre of teachers who can work with Holocaust centers in their respective communities and with students in their respective schools," Stahl said.

Scholarly in its approach, the seminar exposed teachers to several world-renowned Holocaust experts, she added.

One of those experts, professor Deborah Dwork of Clark University in Worcester, Mass., taught about children's lives during the Holocaust, and how some of them were rescued.

Coming from areas as diverse as Georgia, New Hampshire, Florida and Washington state, the teachers invited to participate in the advanced seminar work in a broad range of schools.

Dwork, who has lectured at many foundation seminars, said teachers have approached her with questions about teaching the Holocaust to various groups of students. They have asked her for help on teaching the Holocaust to African-American students and others not used to thinking of Jews as an oppressed group.

"The Germans saw Jews as a separate race, but today Americans don't," she said. "I've lectured in schools where black students have come to me and said, 'Could those white people really have been that stupid?' in believing that Jews were sub-human.

"I tell them first of all, that yes,

they were that stupid, and then branch out into discussion of how race is a made-up categorization. At different times over the centuries, people had different ways of defining categories, but these distinctions are always made up."

Dwork also has helped teachers in Catholic schools face unique challenges in teaching the Holocaust.

Although she says she has "nothing

good to say" about the role of the Vatican during the Holocaust, she discusses the role of individual priests and nuns among the Righteous Gentiles.

Glenda McFadden, who teaches theology to seventh- and eighth-graders at Nashua Catholic Regional Junior High School in Nashua, N.H., was among the teachers at the advanced seminar. Last summer, she participated in the foundation's semiannual European study program in Germany and Poland, an intensive two-week journey that includes visits to concentration camps and ghetto sites and meetings with Holocaust survivors and rescuers.

She incorporates slides of the places she saw, including Auschwitz and the Warsaw Ghetto, and the people she met through her teaching.

"The rescuers and survivors are primary sources," McFadden said. "And instead of just reading about the Warsaw Ghetto, to see a photograph of me touching the wall brings this history alive for the kids."

She does not sugarcoat the failure of leaders of the Catholic Church.

"I'm honest about how the Catholic Church promoted anti-Judaism, which led to anti-Semitism," she said. Ultimately, she teaches from a humanitarian perspective.

"I don't want the kids to just know a number, I want them to understand that there are generations of people who were lost," she said. ■

The Germans saw Jews as a separate race, but today Americans don't.
Professor Deborah Dwork
 Clark University

**60 YEARS
 AFTER
 LIBERATION**

Eco-conscious school offers new take on kashrut

By LOOLWA KHAZZOOM

BERKELEY, Calif. (JTA) — As Jewish children around the world prepare to celebrate Tu B'Shevat by eating fruit and planting trees, students at the Jewish Community High School of San Francisco will take the holiday one step further.

They'll spend Tuesday's holiday at a science symposium called "The Green World," where they'll work on projects that explore the impact of plant life on the earth's ecosystems.

This unusual holiday celebration reflects the school's mission to combine academia with Jewish and ecological values. The mission also is reflected in the school's eco-kosher lunch service, which offers an organic, vegetarian, kosher meal every school day.

"We wanted to offer quality, healthy food, particularly in light of studies on teenage obesity," says the school's head, Rabbi Edward Harwitz. "As Jews, we have to think about the educational component of everything we do. Eating is a primary activity of our lives; we do it at least three times a day. In our school, we didn't want our lunch service to just be a food vending program, or for students and faculty just to get something to eat. We wanted them to understand this

is not merely an opportunity for us to stuff our faces."

He continues, "It's a principle as old as the Mishna: When three people sit together, there must be a spirit of Torah. A wonderful context for that is breaking bread together."

At a school assembly when the new lunch program began, students learned about the importance of eating healthy food and of recycling. The lunch program, students were told, would have a no-waste policy: Everything from plates to cups to utensils would be 100 percent biodegradable.

There would be no need for trash cans in the lunch room, which instead would be furnished with bins for recycling and compost.

It's a Maimonidean approach, Harwitz says, bringing Torah values into daily life.

"Utilizing the composting facility properly is not hard, but it does raise consciousness," he said. "A week ago a student asked if we could think about using recycled paper, recycled paper towels.

Students and I are now doing research on the cost effectiveness, and presenting our findings to the director of finance and operations."

According to Noam Dolgin, associate director of the New York-based Teva Learning Center — one of several national programs spearheading the Jewish ecological movement — the JCHS lunch program is on the cutting edge of growing

environmental activism in Jewish day schools.

"No other school has anything as extensive," he says.

Through its Bring It Back to Our Schools program, Teva helps students and teachers across the country develop ways to be more environmentally conscious, both at school and at home.

"Each student, each school, each class makes a commitment to make changes in their personal lives or in their school — to turn off lights when they leave a room, to turn off water when they brush their teeth, to bike instead of drive," Dolgin said. "They sit down with us and figure out what they can do to make their school a greener place — composting projects, getting rid of Styrofoam, using washable mugs instead of disposable cups, recycling paper, planting gardens."

Most students seem more concerned about the taste and variety of the food than its ecological sustainability.

"I think it's nice that the school is being environmental and organic, yet offering good food at the same time," says Eliana Greenberg, 14. "I relate to it more as tasty and healthy food."

"It's more of a mystery, more of a surprise," agrees Daniel Porton, 16. "We don't know what" food service director Jesse Alper "is going to bring out.

"Every day he has a different food thing. One day we have sushi, sometimes we have burritos, Spanish-style food. Other times we have salads and sandwiches, falafel," Daniel says. "Every time it's just different, and we don't know what to expect. That's the joy of it."

A Jewish school in the Bay Area offers an organic, kosher vegetarian meal every day.

HOLIDAY FEATURE



Courtesy of Jewish Community High School of San Francisco

Students and faculty fill their plates at the Jewish Community High School of San Francisco's organic salad bar.

ARTS & CULTURE

U.S. libraries offer talks on Jewish books

By PENNY SCHWARTZ

NEWTON, Mass. (JTA) — The dense fog that enveloped much of Massachusetts on a recent evening created an eerie made-for-Hollywood backdrop for the kickoff of a five-session program called, "Demons, Golems, and Dybbuks: Monsters of the Jewish Imagination."

The Jan. 13 discussion in Newton is part of a national literary program, Let's Talk About It: Jewish Literature, a joint venture between Nextbook and the American Library Association.

ALA's Let's Talk About It is a 20-year-old reading and discussion series that has reached hundreds of libraries and more than 4 million people across the country. The focus on Jewish literature is in partnership with Nextbook, a 2-year-old national initiative to promote 3,000 years of Jewish literature.

"We're trying to get a lot of people around the country reading and talking about Jewish books so that they can come to a better understanding of Jewish history and culture," said Nextbook's Matt Brogan.

"We are getting an enormous number of applications from places you wouldn't expect — like Moscow, Idaho, and places in Alabama," he added. "Many have said there is a level of intolerance in the country they are worried about, and they feel this is an opportunity in places where there aren't a lot of Jewish people to foster an understanding of other cultures."

Each of Nextbook's Let's Talk About It sections highlights the works of five different Jewish writers.

"It's not Jewish literature 101," Brogan said. Instead, it's a focus on specific areas of Jewish literature, featuring writers ranging from the well-known to the less familiar. The program is set up to attract a wide reading audience, he added.

Other themes are sex and love in Jewish literature, stories of estrangement and homecoming, and fathers and daughters in a changing world.

The writers whose work will be read include Grace Paley, Phillip Roth, Saul Bellow, Sholem Aleichem, Franz Kafka, Cynthia Ozick and Tony Kushner. ■

Jews meet, thank pope

By RUTH ELLEN GRUBER

ROME (JTA) — Despite ups and downs over the years, Pope John Paul II has made bettering relations with Jews a key platform of his 26-year papacy.

On Tuesday, an international group of more than 100 rabbis, cantors and other Jewish leaders from all streams of Judaism thanked him for his efforts during a special private audience at the Vatican.

Dressed in white and seated in an upholstered wheeled chair, the 84-year-old pontiff gave the group an enthusiastic welcome in the ornate Clementine Hall of the Apostolic Palace. In his remarks, the pope noted that this year marks the 40th anniversary of the Vatican's landmark Nostra Aetate declaration, which rejected the charge that Jews collectively were responsible for the death of Jesus.

"May this be an occasion for renewed commitment to increased understanding and cooperation in the service of building a world ever more firmly based on respect for the divine image in every human being," he said. "Upon all of you, I invoke the abundant blessings of the Almighty and, in particular, the gift of peace. Shalom aleichem."

The group — which organizers said was the largest Jewish delegation to have a private audience with a pope — came to the Vatican under the auspices of the Pave the Way Foundation, a New York-based nonprofit organization that promotes interfaith understanding.

"You have defended Jewish people at every opportunity, as a priest in Poland and during your pontificate," Pave the Way president and founder Gary Krupp of New York told the pontiff.

Krupp has had earlier dealings with the Vatican and was awarded a papal knighthood in 2000 for his support of a Catholic health care facility in Italy.

Most members of the delegation were from the United States, but there also were Israeli rabbis and officials, including the Israeli ambassador to the Holy See, as

well as Jews from various other countries including France, Italy, India, Canada and Croatia. ■

The rabbis collectively blessed the pope, and the dozen cantors in the group — who had given a concert in Rome's Great Synagogue the night before — chanted the Shehecheyanu prayer as the delegates and their family members moved forward to shake the pope's hand. Each guest received a special medal emblazoned with the word "shalom."

Tuesday's long-planned audience coincided with ongoing controversy over the

Holocaust role of Pope Pius XII, and in particular over recent revelations that the Vatican tried to keep hold of some Jewish children who were baptized to save them from the Nazis. None of this debate, however, marred the festive atmosphere of the audience.

"This is the first time in history that rabbis representing

all branches of Judaism from all over the world have come together to collectively thank Pope John Paul II and the church for all they have done to build bridges of understanding and mutual respect between Jews and Catholics," Rabbi Jack Bemporad, director of the Center for Interreligious Understanding in Secaucus, N.J., said in a statement.

Bemporad noted that John Paul became the first pontiff to visit a synagogue, issued many condemnations of anti-Semitism and apologized for earlier church policy and sins against Jews carried out by Catholics. He presided over the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Israel and the Holy See, and in 2000 made an emotional pilgrimage to Israel.

"In the history of the world, the last 40 years will be seen as the most revolutionary and significant in terms of progress in the Jewish-Catholic relationship," Bemporad said. "No pope has done as much or cared as much about creating a brotherly relationship between Catholics and Jews as Pope John Paul II.

"For me, it's simply revolutionary," he said. ■

'Upon all of you, I invoke the abundant blessings of the Almighty and, in particular, the gift of peace. Shalom aleichem.'

Pope John Paul II

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Congressional reps to Auschwitz commemoration

A Jewish congressman will lead a congressional delegation to Auschwitz for the 60th anniversary of the camp's liberation.

Rep. Steve Israel (D-N.Y.) will lead the delegation to the Jan. 27 commemoration. Reps. Shelley Berkley (D-Nev.) and Thaddeus McCotter (R-Mich.) will join him.

Anti-Israel event in Toronto blasted

Activists in Toronto are protesting plans by a coalition of Arab groups to hold Israeli Apartheid Week on the University of Toronto campus.

The Canadian Coalition for Democracies is urging university donors and others to complain to the school's governing council.

Representatives from the Arab Students Collective, International Solidarity Movement, Solidarity for Palestinian Human Rights and other groups are scheduled to speak during the week-long event, which has been promoted by the university's Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Studies and is slated to begin Jan. 31.

Camp guard loses citizenship

A man living in Ohio was stripped of his U.S. citizenship for his World War II-era activities but will not be deported.

The settlement involving Ildefonso Bucmys was filed in a U.S. court Tuesday.

In exchange for dropping the lawsuit the Department of Justice's Office of Special Investigations filed against Bucmys, 84, in September 2002, alleging that he failed to disclose his role as a prison guard at Majdanek on his immigration application, Bucmys agreed to testify against anyone who also may have served at the death camp in 1943.

Rice: Russia should release Chabad library

Condoleezza Rice said she would press Russia to return precious documents belonging to the Chabad movement.

Chabad recently sued the Russian federation after discovering that the bulk of the Chabad library — 12,000 books and nearly 400 manuscripts left behind in Warsaw in the 1940s when the movement's leader, Rabbi Joseph Isaac Schneerson, fled the Nazis — had been seized by the Soviets.

"We will very much push on those issues and issues of the Schneerson documents," Rice said Tuesday in Senate confirmation hearings for her nomination to the post of U.S. secretary of state.

"We need to pay attention in Russia to what is happening to individual rights as well as religious freedom."

Reich named group's president

Seymour Reich was named president of the Israel Policy Forum.

The New York lawyer and former two-term president of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations will succeed Judith Stern Peck.

A former president of B'nai B'rith International and the American Zionist Movement, Reich will bring a Jewish establishment imprimatur to the IPF, which advocates greater U.S. involvement in Middle East peace-making.

Canadian Muslim paper gets off hook

Prosecutors in Canada will not press hate crimes charges against a newspaper that ran an article some saw as anti-Semitic.

After a yearlong investigation, prosecutors in British Columbia declined to press charges against *The Miracle*, a Muslim newspaper that ran the article in December 2003.

Written by a notorious Idaho-based Holocaust denier, the article accused Jews of a litany of malicious deeds including pedophilia, fabricating the Holocaust, committing the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks

and instigating both world wars.

Stan Lowe, a spokesman for the province's criminal justice branch, said the article qualified as "hate literature," but said the province had to prove that the publisher had an intention to incite hatred.

MIDDLE EAST

Hamas talks tough

Hamas refused to disarm under any truce deal with the Palestinian Authority. "We will not drop our arms, whatever the circumstances," Mahmoud Zahar, the undeclared leader of the Islamic terrorist group, said at a Gaza Strip prayer rally Thursday.

But he signaled that Hamas could suspend its attacks if Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas guarantees that Israel will scale back military operations in Gaza and the West Bank.

Palestinian boy carrying toy gun killed

Israeli troops reportedly killed a Palestinian boy who was carrying a toy gun during a West Bank clash.

Palestinian witnesses said soldiers shot the 12-year-old during a confrontation with stone throwers near Jericho on Thursday. Military sources said troops targeted a gunman.

According to witnesses, the boy was carrying a plastic rifle that could have been mistaken for a real weapon.

WORLD

Stalin statue protested

Jewish activists are protesting a decision to erect a new statue of Stalin in Moscow.

"To erect Stalin's monument in Moscow is absurd and a crime against Russia," said a statement released Wednesday by a group of Jewish and human rights leaders.

The idea that Stalin won World War II and thus deserves a monument is a "shameful myth and a disrespect toward the heroism of Russia's own people and its multimillion victims" of Stalin's repressions, the statement said.

A member of Russia's upper house of Parliament, Oleg Tolkachev, told the media on Wednesday that a new monument will be unveiled this year inside a wartime memorial park in Moscow.

The monument will commemorate the three leaders who participated in the 1945 Yalta Conference — Stalin, President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

Poland to honor Berlin rabbi

A Berlin-based rabbi will be honored for his work in Jewish-Polish dialogue.

Walter Rothschild, who was born in England and serves several liberal congregations in Germany, will receive the Knight's Cross of the Republic of Poland from Polish President Aleksander Kwasniewski.

The ceremony will take place in the Presidential Palace in Warsaw on Jan. 26, one day before ceremonies marking the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz by the Soviet army.

Stamp features Auschwitz victim's drawing

The Czech Republic has a stamp featuring a drawing made by a Jewish boy who died in Auschwitz.

The drawing by Petr Ginz features a view of the earth as seen from the moon.

Ginz, who was sent to Theresientadt in 1942, died in Auschwitz in 1944.

Israeli astronaut Ilan Ramon took Ginz's drawing on the ill-fated Columbia space shuttle in 2003.

The stamp was unveiled Thursday.