

IN THE NEWS
U.S. envoy meets Sharon

Foreign donations to the Palestinian Authority must be monitored to ensure they're not used for terrorism, Ariel Sharon said.

The Israeli prime minister met Thursday with Lt. Gen. William Ward, a U.S. envoy sent by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to help implement a cease-fire the Israeli prime minister declared with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas earlier this month.

Charges ordered against Sharon's son

Israel's top legal adviser exonerated Ariel Sharon in a fund-raising case, but ordered criminal charges against the prime minister's son.

Attorney General Menachem Mazuz said there is enough evidence to indict legislator Omri Sharon for fraud, breach of trust and perjury for his alleged role in arranging foreign funding for Sharon's campaign to head the Likud Party in 1999.

U.S. Jewish officials learn about Gaza Strip

A delegation of American Jewish officials met with a high-ranking Israeli army official to discuss the Gaza Strip.

At an Israeli military camp Thursday at the Erez checkpoint, officials from the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations heard an overview of the Gaza security situation.

The leaders also traveled to a military outpost overlooking Gaza's northern edge to meet with Jewish settlers and the father of a 17-year-old girl killed by a Kassam rocket last month in the southern Israeli town of Sderot.

The representatives will meet with Prime Minister Ariel Sharon before the annual mission ends Sunday.

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Reminder: The JTA World Report will not be published on Monday, Feb. 21.

WORLD REPORT

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Courtesy of B'nai B'rith

B'nai B'rith Covenant House in Pittsburgh is a senior housing unit owned by B'nai B'rith, which is also the largest Jewish sponsor of federally subsidized housing.

Tackling U.S. domestic policies: Jews look for best approach

By MATTHEW E. BERGER

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The Bush administration's plan to slash the budget and transform major institutions such as Social Security, Medicaid and the tax code has sharpened a debate already under way about the role of the organized Jewish community in tackling domestic policy issues.

On one side are longtime liberal activists who believe that Jews must maintain their historic role in promoting domestic programs that provide a safety net for those in need.

On the other is a growing chorus of Jewish communal leaders and donors who suggest that it is time to abandon the longtime Jewish advocacy for social welfare programs, and focus exclusively on Jewish needs.

The Jewish federation system, in particular, is especially concerned about sustaining current levels of state and federal support — between \$5 billion and \$7 billion — that is funneled annually into the federation system.

In unveiling his budget last week, Bush called for a 1 percent cut on domestic spending not related to security, and proposed that 150 programs be greatly reduced or cut

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BEHIND THE HEADLINES

■ Jewish groups look for balance as they take on U.S. domestic policy

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entirely next year.

The \$2.57 trillion budget proposal also called for additional belt-tightening for many Jewish programs that aid the community's poor and elderly.

Morton Plant, chairman of the executive committee of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella body for North American federations, questioned whether lobbying manpower should be spent on issues that don't specifically concern the Jewish community, like health care, senior issues and immigration care. "I think we try to do too much," said Plant. "My personal feeling is we ought to concentrate on several things and really do a great job on it."

Others believe that while the federation system should be fighting for the Jewish piece of the budget pie, other policy organizations should continue to focus on issues that affect others as well.

Martin Raffel, the associate executive director of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, said, "We need to harmonize our two Jewish impulses — to take care of the tribe and to take care of the broader world."

How the top umbrella bodies involved in domestic policy face these challenges will become clearer as both the UJC and the JCPA seek new professional leaders.

Charles Konigsberg was fired last month as UJC's vice president for public policy, and Hannah Rosenthal announced she is leaving her position as executive director of the JCPA to head the Chicago Foundation for Women.

One line of thinking is that the Jewish

community should rethink some of its priorities, if only to avoid being marginalized by an administration that has different priorities.

There is always concern when Jewish groups take positions opposing White House policies. That can hurt access, especially in an administration known for side-stepping opposing viewpoints, and could hamper efforts to lobby for other priorities, including Israel.

There are already signs that some groups are tamping down their positions on issues.

Instead of staking out an explicit position on Bush's planned Social Security reforms, both the UJC and the JCPA are reissuing resolutions from the late 1990s that call for continued universal access to the program with minimal administrative costs.

Those resolutions, although at least 5 years old, align the groups with critics of the reforms, who say Bush's plan to privatize Social Security could substantially hike administrative costs and could create unequal payouts.

But the decision not to add any current commentary underscores the degree to which the community is eager to sit out this fight.

The reluctance to engage stems in part from a diversity of opinions within the community.

While many Jewish professionals who deal with the elderly and the poor oppose Bush's proposed reforms to Social Security and Medicaid, some lay leaders and donors share some of Bush's economic policy perspectives.

As Jewish demographics shift, look for more such "diversity of opinion," say community leaders.

"I think you'll find UJC may illuminate some of the potential impact from different proposals without saying which way to go," said Stephen Hoffman, the former president and CEO of the UJC, who has returned to his previous post as president of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland.

"A smart organization knows where it has a consensus of values and where it doesn't."

Michael Kotzin, executive vice president of the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, says there is a growing dialectic between what he dubs "particularism" and "universalism" in the Jewish community.

Jews still care about broader issues such as battling poverty, he said, but some prefer to channel those energies into general, non-Jewish organizations.

Reflecting that shift, the UJC is increasingly focused on cuts to Medicaid, which is the largest funding source for Jewish nursing homes and hospitals, providing more than \$2 billion a year.

And it began a push last year to garner homeland security money for the protection of high-risk Jewish sites.

UJC officials say they were pleased with the organization's focus on securing dollars for the federation system under Konigsberg, and will seek someone with experience in lobbying for appropriations.

The JCPA has traditionally taken a broader approach, seeking to support policies that further Jewish values, rather than Jewish institutions.

But it must find consensus among the community relations councils across the country and national organizations it represents, and some, including UJC, which is its primary funder, have been questioning the broad scope.

Not everyone sees a radical shift immediately in the offing.

Michael Bohnen, JCPA's immediate past chair, who will lead the search for Rosenthal's replacement, said he did not envision the organization dropping a broad social agenda.

"There's always debate over what is a Jewish issue," he said. "When someone disagrees with a particular position we're taking, they couch their opposition by saying it's 'not a Jewish issue.'"

A longtime proponent of social justice issues, Rabbi David Saperstein, the director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism, said, "There is an overwhelming consensus in the Jewish community that Jewish values require us to take positions on broad and specific concerns."

"We have a religious obligation as a moral community to be a light of morality and apply moral values to the issues of the day." ■

'We need to harmonize our two Jewish impulses — to take care of the tribe and to take care of the broader world.'

Martin Raffel

Jewish Council for Public Affairs

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Russian Jews worried, but not panicky

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — Recent events in Russia, including an anti-Semitic letter signed by 20 lawmakers, reminded Mirra Gitlina of a troubling time more than a half-century ago.

"Of course, you can't compare this to 1953, but I have to say that was my first thought when I heard of this letter a few weeks ago. Here it comes again," said Gitlina, referring to a vicious anti-Semitic campaign unleashed by Stalin that ended only with his death.

Gitlina is not alone.

The letter and the subsequent debate about Jews and anti-Semitism in Russia that spread into the mainstream media have triggered a sense of nervousness among many Russian Jews.

"Many Jews, especially the better educated ones, the intellectuals, the elites, are very much concerned by the situation," said Boris Maftsir, head of the Jewish Agency for Israel in Russia. "It reminds them of the 'doctors plot,' of something that seemed to be gone forever."

He was referring to an incident in 1953 in which several Jewish doctors were falsely accused of murdering Soviet leaders.

Nor was the letter the only incident.

A television show last month in which callers supported a notorious anti-Semitic politician over his opponent caused some Jews to reflect on their own encounters with anti-Semitism in Soviet days.

Some shared their stories with the younger members of their families — something they had avoided doing before.

Maria Schneid, a 22-year-old Jewish studies major at the Maimonides State Classical Academy, a Moscow college, said her father told her recently how decades ago he could not enter the college of his choice because of his Jewish background, and her mother, who is not-Jewish, shared with her a story of how her own life became more complicated when she married a Jewish man and took his Jewish-sounding last name.

"To me this whole story was a shock," Schneid said of the letter and the show last month. "I'm not afraid; I don't think that something bad can happen to us — but to my parents this definitely had a different connotation."

Despite some sense of a sudden discom-

fort, nervousness or indignation that many Jews share today, there are no signs of panic within the Jewish community.

"This wasn't big news to me that 20 deputies signed an anti-Semitic document," said Mark Goldin, the Jewish leader in Izhevsk, an industrial city 500 miles east of Moscow. "This is one-twentieth of the Parliament, and perhaps the same percentage in society in general share anti-Semitic feelings."

Goldin said his community continued to enjoy "constructive and even relations" with the local authorities, and there have been no major anti-Semitic incidents in response to the recent developments.

But Jewish leaders in areas away from Moscow and St. Petersburg, like Goldin, appeared to be reluctant to go into much detail when describing the situation on the ground, apparently fearing that this might irritate the local officials whose favor they always seek and value.

At least three of the local leaders interviewed for this article said there have been many minor anti-Semitic incidents in the last few weeks in their communities. They decided not to publicize them to avoid "fomenting hysteria, and not to scare people too much," as one of those leaders told JTA.

"In the current situation, if we start crying wolf, we will end up with people afraid of leaving their homes," said the leader, who asked not to be identified.

The Jewish Agency's Maftsir said there's been an increase in the number of people inquiring about how to get an Israeli passport.

"But there is no real follow-up to these inquiries" his agency has been receiving lately, he said, adding that some time must pass before it will be possible to see whether the community's mood translates into higher emigration numbers.

In the meantime, community leaders are fighting back against the politicians who signed the anti-Semitic letter, which urged authorities to ban Jewish organizations and Judaism as an extremist faith.

This week, the chief rabbi of Moscow

sent a letter to Dmitriy Rogozin, leader of the nationalist party Motherland. Most of the lawmakers who signed the letter belong to his party.

Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, also head of the rabbinical court in the former Soviet Union and the Baltics, put together a detailed response to all the accusations against Jews in the letter.

Earlier this month, Rogozin, who did not sign the letter, asked rabbinical authorities to explain the basics of the *Kitzur Shulchan*

Aruch, a collection of the principles of Jewish law. This Jewish tract was frequently quoted in the letter to prove "Jewish extremism." Rogozin said it was that Jewish text that could "cause manifestations of xenophobia in the country."

In his commentary, which was released Wednesday, Goldschmidt wrote that the quotes used in the anti-Semitic letter were either misquoted or taken out of their historical context.

Goldschmidt wrote that many of the arguments used in the letter were taken directly from a 90-year-old anti-Semitic manifesto that was compiled during the Beilis trial in 1911. That infamous blood libel case ended with a full acquittal of Mendel Beilis, a Kiev Jew falsely accused of ritual murder.

A public anti-Semitic letter and a controversial TV debate put Russia's Jewish community on edge.

ACROSS THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

EDITOR'S NOTE: A Feb. 8 JTA story on the slow response of Jewish groups to the Bush administration's new push for the Palestinians described Jewish organizations, including AIPAC, as being "silent" on resolutions that were adopted by the House and Senate. This assessment was based on what AIPAC, other organizations and sources on Capitol Hill told us at the time. In light of new information, we now believe AIPAC had more input into the congressional resolutions behind the scenes than what our story led readers to believe. We stand by the central contention of the story, which is that Jewish groups have been less than enthusiastic about the administration's new stance toward the Palestinians.

Czech Orthodox rabbi vows secular community

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — Like many rabbis all over the world, Moshe Chaim Koler likes to tell jokes with not-so-hidden messages.

Asked about how he, as an Orthodox rabbi who is a convert to Judaism, fares in a mostly agnostic community, he answered with a joke.

"There's this guy in Israel who just bought a Ferrari and he wants to know if he should put a mezuzah in the car. So the Conservative rabbi tells him, 'Well, this is something we must discuss and research. There could be many answers, let me get back to you.'

"So he goes to a Reform rabbi, and the Reform rabbi looks at the car and says, 'What's a mezuzah?'"

The joke might be offensive coming from someone other than the 37-year-old Koler, whose warmth often disarms skeptics.

It is Koler's openness, and his ability to reach out to those who do not share his passion — yet — that have made him a success within the largely secular Jewish community in Brno, one of 10 officially registered Jewish communities in the Czech Republic.

There were 12,000 members of Brno's Jewish community in 1938. The vast majority were murdered in the Holocaust.

The community now counts about 300 members, and Koler says few of them know much about halachah, or Jewish law.

"My chief priority is to be a teacher, not to convince people of things," he said.

Koler, who has been in Brno for only a year and half, is the first rabbi the community has had in 33 years. Until his arrival, community members had to rely on visiting rabbis for occasional holiday services. When he first got there, he started with the basics — Friday night services and a crash course in how to celebrate major holidays.

Recently, at a Chanukah celebration, he and his wife danced in a circle with parents and their children, some of whom were learning their first Hebrew melodies.

An Orthodox rabbi presiding over mixed dancing?

"In my approach, I must be modern Orthodox, even though I am haredi in my heart," he said. "I have to be practical, and the gain is bigger than the loss."

The gain was hard-won.

The community was understandably suspicious of Koler when he first arrived, he said, because people feared he would turn out to be an "intolerant religious freak."

He knew that he would have to earn their trust slowly.

"The community was not religious at all, but mainly served as a social club, whose members did activities together, particularly sports. So I played squash with them, I went skiing with them, and they could see I was quite normal," he said.

Community member Martin Mandl said, "I was against an Orthodox rabbi in our community because I knew that our members do not live according to such rules. But I must that say after the rabbi came, I changed my mind. He is a very friendly person with a great sense of humor, interested in all aspects of community life."

About a dozen community members regularly attend Koler's weekly two-hour lectures on Judaism, which he aims at "people who don't know too much about Judaism."

Mandl said the rabbi understands that "Czech atheism" is the rule after more than 40 years of communism, not the exception. Nonetheless, many community members like to come to Koler's lectures "because he is the only person they know who is educated in Jewish thought, and they can consult him on Jewish questions. His presence is very positive to us."

Koler is running conversion classes for about 10 pupils. He also writes about the weekly Torah portion, trying to describe its universal implications outside its religious context.

"I am immensely satisfied doing this work, and I think the community loves me," he said.

Seventy-five percent of the respondents in a community survey conducted after Koler had been in Brno for a year gave him a highly positive evaluation, according to the chairman of Brno's Jewish community, Pavel Fried.

Fried praised the rabbi's ability to engage community members based on their individual needs and said that perhaps the only way to revive a community that has been without a religious life is to get back to basics.

"To be reminded of what was commanded to us, and what was forbidden — if this is fundamentalism, I don't mind it and it won't do the community any harm," he said.

'In my approach, I must be modern Orthodox, even though I am haredi in my heart. I have to be practical, and the gain is bigger than the loss.'

Rabbi Moshe Chaim Koler
Brno, Czech Republic

Koler, who was not born Jewish, grew up in Pilsen, Czechoslovakia. It was during the Communist period, and neither Judaism nor Hebrew were permissible subjects to study, at least openly. But he was curious, learned what he could, and decided that Judaism held the answers for which he had longed. He moved to Israel and converted to Judaism.

During most of the 1990s, he studied Hebrew and talmudic thought at a yeshiva in Jerusalem.

The Czech Republic has a shortage of rabbis who can speak Czech, so the country's head rabbi urged Koler to go back to his native land.

Koler's role in Brno has not been without controversy. He opposed the community's recent move to allow people whose mothers were not Jewish, and so themselves are not halachic Jews, to become full members.

On the other hand, his view about the role of women in Judaism has not caused him any problems, according to several community members.

It is clear that he has no problem talking to women, and during the Chanukah festivities, his wife, who was dressed with traditional modesty, played an important role as an educator.

"The Orthodox philosophy does not speak about women as second class," he said. Instead, men and women are given different mitzvot. They have different roles to fill.

That doesn't upset anyone in the community, according to Koler. "And Czech women are not American women. They are not particularly worried about feminist matters," he added.

**AROUND THE
JEWISH
WORLD**

Old ritual bath unearthed in Czech town

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — The discovery of an ancient mikvah in the Czech Republic has further enhanced the reputation of the town of Mikulov as a treasure trove of Jewish culture.

Petr Kubin, an archeologist with the Regional Museum of Mikulov, recently unearthed the ritual bath site as he conducted routine excavations in the town's one-time Jewish ghetto before planned housing construction was set to begin.

Next to where one of the town's major synagogues once stood, Kubin discovered a set of stairs clearly meant to be underwater, along with wells paneled with stones.

Arno Parik of the Jewish Museum of Prague, one of the country's most renowned historians of Jewish sites, believes the mikvah dates back to the 18th century.

"Mikulov is very special due to its significant Jewish heritage. Sadly, much of it was destroyed in post-World War II reconstruction. But this ancient mikvah is surprisingly preserved and should prove easy to protect," Parik said.

Mikulov, a stunning town full of Baroque architecture not far from the Austrian border, was one of central Europe's largest centers of Jewish learning for several centuries. It boasted 11 synagogues in the early 1800s.

City authorities plan to spend about \$65,000 to preserve, protect and display the mikvah. They hope to complete construction of a protective wall and a visitor information display by the end of the year.

The Mikulov mikvah will be only the second mikvah in the country open for public viewing: One was discovered and preserved in Boskovice a few years ago.

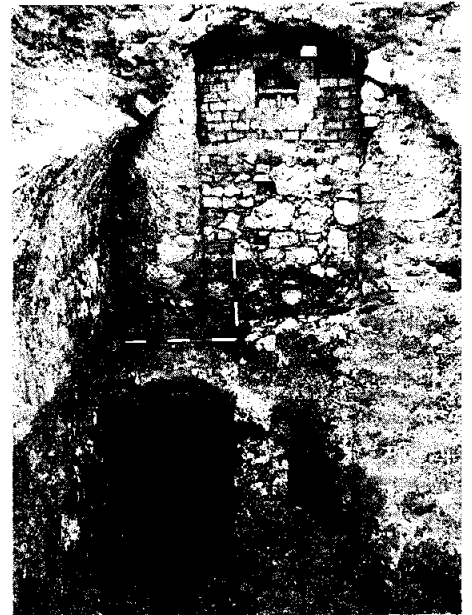
"We have great respect for the town's Jewish heritage and want to safeguard it for the generations to come, especially since so much of it was destroyed under the previous regime," said Josef Hromek of the Mikulov City Hall's heritage conservation office.

In addition, because it was more or less forbidden to practice or study Judaism during the Communist era, private homeowners who might have discovered Jewish artifacts on their property had no way of knowing what they were, Kubin said.

And although the town residents are aware that their Jewish sites — a synagogue and one

of Europe's largest Jewish cemeteries — attract visitors, Kubin is sure they have no idea what a mikvah is.

"Part of the people welcome discovery, saying it makes Mikulov exceptional and more attractive to visitors, offering yet another chapter from the town's history of Jewish culture," said Kubin. "But most people feel negative about the excavations



Petr Kubin

A recently discovered ancient mikvah in Mikulov, Czech Republic.

and see archaeologists as those who delay construction and add to its costs."

He said that still other residents worry the mikvah would attract too many tourists and disrupt life in the relatively tranquil town of 7,000.

Mikulov is part of what is referred to here as the Sudetenland, the region of then-Czechoslovakia that Hitler invaded and annexed in 1938.

After the war, the German-speaking population was forced into exile by the new Czechoslovak government and Czechs resettled the area. ■

'Mikulov is very special due to its significant Jewish heritage.'

Arno Parik

Jewish Museum of Prague

Town in Czech Republic home to proud, historic Jewish past

By DINAH A. SPRITZER

PRAGUE (JTA) — Expelled from Vienna and Lower Austria in 1421 by a duke's decree, Jews seeking to stay along the commercial route between Vienna and Brno found refuge in Mikulov, the closest town right across the border.

The expulsion of Jews from the Moravian royal cities of Brno and Znojmo set off a further wave of emigration to Mikulov — Nikolsberg in German — in 1454.

Records show that for centuries most of the city's Jewish residents made their living in the retail trade — playing an active role in the wine business cultivated by the ruling Dietrichstein family, which took the rare step of encouraging Jewish settlement — and as grocers, butchers, tailors, cobblers and bookbinders.

For three centuries, until 1851, Mikulov was the seat of Mora-

vian Jewry and rabbis came from all over Europe to study at its yeshiva.

The Jewish population slowly declined and most of those who remained fled in 1938, when Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia.

In 1941, the Nazis deported 39 Mikulov Jews to the Terezin transit camp.

"The few Jews who returned after the war met open hostility from the gentiles who were occupying their houses and left," according to "Synagogues Without Jews," a book by Rivka and Ben-Zion Dorfman.

The synagogue dates to 1550, but was rebuilt after a devastating fire in 1719.

As for the Jewish ghetto, most of the picturesque houses in the Jewish quarter were pulled down and destroyed in the 1950s. A tiny part of the Jewish quarter has been preserved next to the synagogue in Husova Street. ■

Scrutiny focused on circumcision rite

By JOANNE PALMER

NEW YORK (JTA) — The death of one infant boy from herpes and the infection of two others has focused attention on an ancient practice that is still used in some fervently Orthodox communities as they circumcise babies.

New York City health officials are investigating whether the mohel who operated on the three boys had infected them. The city's legal department has been granted a temporary restraining order against Rabbi Yitzchok Fischer until the investigation is complete.

Fischer practices a custom called metzitzah b'peh — loosely translated as oral suction — that is considered an integral part of the brit milah in parts of the Jewish world, though it is met with shock and distaste in others.

It's not known if Fischer carries the herpes virus, but the restraining order forbids him from practicing metzitzah b'peh, and demands that he wear surgical gloves when he performs a circumcision.

The Talmud describes the process of removing the baby boy's foreskin in three steps: The foreskin is cut, the mucous layer underneath is removed with a flick of the mohel's fingernail and then the blood is removed through oral suction.

Often the first two steps are combined, and the fingernail motion is abandoned in favor of a surgical clamp.

In the third step, the mohel traditionally takes a sip of wine in his mouth, quickly sucks the blood off through the wine and spits the mixture into a bowl to be discarded. That's metzitzah b'peh.

In some parts of the Orthodox world — mainly but not exclusively among Chasidim — metzitzah b'peh is still practiced.

Among other Orthodox Jews, however, metzitzah b'peh is considered unacceptable, and among more liberal Jews it's unthinkable.

Fischer can do the brit either way, said his lawyer, Mark Kurzmann. He can use his mouth directly or he can suck the blood through a thin glass pipette.

"It depends on the preference of the parents, and that depends on their particular religious community," Kurzmann said.

He added that "tens of thousands" of circumcisions using metzitzah b'peh have been done in the last seven years, with very

few adverse results. Not true, concluded researchers writing in the August 2004 issue of the medical journal Pediatrics.

"Ritual Jewish circumcision that includes metzitzah with direct oral-genital contact carries a serious risk for transmission of HSV" — herpes simplex virus — "from mohels to neonates," the article said. "Oral metzitzah afer ritual circumcision may be hazardous to the neonate."

Signed by 12 medical doctors and researchers with doctorates, the paper examined the cases of eight young babies who had developed herpes within two weeks of their circumcisions.

The only disease vector shared by all the babies was the mohelim, all of whom had performed metzitzah b'peh. All the mohelim who were tested were positive for the herpes virus.

One of the researchers was Rabbi Moses Tendler, who holds a doctorate in biology and teaches biology at Yeshiva University, teaches rabbinical students at Y.U.'s seminary, specializes in Jewish medical ethics and also is a pulpit rabbi.

Tendler minced no words when discussing metzitzah b'peh.

"What people don't understand is how widely disseminated the herpes virus is. Statistics say that 80 percent of the adult American population carries it, as you well know from how many people in their lives acquire a cold sore," he said.

Rabbi Daniel Korobkin, rabbi of Kehillat Yavneh in Los Angeles, is Orthodox and a mohel.

"I will perform a routine brit only with completely antiseptic material, making sure that I never come in direct contact with a child's blood," he said.

"The only exception was my own children. If a parent asks me to do it, I refuse," he continued. "I do give the father the option of doing it himself, though. Most are too squeamish, but a few want to do it."

Korobkin said the precedent for avoiding direct contact with the baby's blood can be traced to an outbreak of disease in the early 19th century; until then the practice was widespread. Then the great sage known as

the Chatam Sofer decreed that such contact could expose the child to danger.

The Shulchan Aruch — the authoritative medieval compendium of Jewish law — "takes great pains to instruct every mohel to make sure that his utmost priority is the safety and welfare of the child," said Rabbi Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, executive vice president of the Orthodox Union.

"I think it's fair to say that there are a substantial number of Orthodox rabbis who find nothing objectionable whatsoever" in using a pipette, Weinreb said.

As an umbrella organization, the Orthodox Union doesn't have an official policy on ritual or religious matters. If pressed for a personal recommendation on which method to use, however, Weinreb said that for safety's sake he would suggest following Korobkin's lead.

Rabbi David Zwiebel, executive vice president for public affairs at Agudath Israel of America, a fervently Orthodox umbrella group, said his organization is dedicated to supporting the range of religious expression found among its constituent groups.

He added that it hasn't been proven that the babies had contracted herpes from Fischer, suggesting that other means of transmission were possible.

Tendler said that in his Monsey, N.Y., community the practice of metzitzah b'peh is spreading, as is cutting the foreskin and removing the mucous layer in two discreet actions. The use of the surgical clamp is coming under fire as well, he said.

"It's seen as the frum" — or observant — "thing to do," he said. "Being 'frumer than thou' is now the sign of personal piety. At certain life-cycle events, people are afraid to take a lenient approach."

There is a religious requirement to perform a brit milah painlessly, which means as quickly and as antiseptically as possible, Tendler said.

"This is a requirement of Jewish law, not of medicine only," he said. "Metzitzah is strictly medieval medicine, and it should have given way to modern medicine."

"We have a tradition that says that when it comes to medicine, you don't look into the Talmud. You seek the most competent physician to tell you what to do."

The practice is 'strictly medieval medicine, and it should have given way to modern medicine.'

Rabbi Moses Tendler
Jewish medical ethicist

FOCUS
ON
ISSUES

FIRST PERSON

Polish Jew fled from boxcar, lived to tell story

By EDWIN BLACK

WASHINGTON (JTA) — A few days ago, a 79-year-old Polish Holocaust survivor died in West Palm Beach after a long illness.

Born in Bialystok with the name Ethel Katz, her story was known all over the world, having been told over four decades in newspaper and magazine articles, books, documentaries, TV presentations and lectures in 60 countries.

Ethel's intersection with history began long ago in August 1943 in the terrifying darkness of a boxcar, as a train swayed rhythmically on its way toward the Treblinka death camp.

The thin 13-year-old girl nicknamed Edjya sat on the floor listening to the thudding rail ties, trying to understand the terrible events befalling her family.

Her mother nudged her and whispered, "You're a skinny one, Edjya, always a skinny one," as she eyed the tiny vent at the top of the boxcar.

"Quickly, up there," she said. "Edjya, go through. Quickly, I said. We'll let you down slowly. Hold onto the towel."

Edjya inched out of the vent and down the horizontal wooden slats of the boxcar's exterior until her elbows and finally her wrists cleared. Hanging onto the towel against the wind, with one foot resting on an exterior bolt, Edjya cried out, "Take me back up! I can't do it!"

"Get ready," her mother instructed. "When you hit the ground, run, Edjya, run. And tell someone!"

Edjya jumped. On the ground, she was shot by militiamen and then buried in a snowy mass grave. But when Herschel, a teenage Polish Jewish fighter living in the forest, came upon Ethel's leg protruding from the snow, he pulled her out to life and survival. They lived in the woods for the next two years. Later, the couple married.

The Polish survivor born Ethel Katz inspired me. In America, her name was Ethel Black, and she was my mother. See, I'm still telling her story. ■

(Edwin Black is the author of five award-winning books and scores of articles.)

Arthur Miller and the Jews

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Arthur Miller will be remembered for his deft dramatic rendering of the American everyman, yet his writing was infused with Jewish characters and themes, both explicit and implicit.

But those works dealing most clearly with Jewish issues never received acclaim or recognition equal to that garnered by his earlier work, and have not found as exalted a place in the American theatrical canon.

"This is a dimension of Miller's work which is all too frequently overlooked," said Ellen Schiff, a scholar of Jewish theater and editor of the anthology "Awake and Singing: Six Great American Jewish Plays," which includes a play by Miller.

Miller died Feb. 10 at age 89. A Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright and author, he reached his greatest professional fame with the creation of Willy Loman, the doomed protagonist of 1949's "Death of a Salesman."

Though Loman was not specifically identified as a Jew, heated debate ensued through the decades over whether or not he was in fact Jewish, with many insisting he was a composite of Jewish characters Miller had known as a young man.

Whereas Jewish authors like Chaim Potok were able to achieve a universality in their work through the depiction of highly specific worlds — Brooklyn Chasidim in Potok's case — Miller's work can be viewed through the opposite lens, scholars say: In addressing American themes, Miller gave audiences occasional glimpses into his Jewish core.

"In some of his great works, he made Jewish life American life by blurring the focus," said Jeremy Dauber, a professor of Yiddish language, literature and culture at Columbia University. "How many of us in high school were told that Willy Loman was everyman? What's interesting is to find how the universal can really be specific."

"Broken Glass" was Miller's first play to deal explicitly with the American Jewish experience, Schiff said.

The play deals head-on with two different American Jewish experiences.

"One is the experience of the insecure Jew trying to make it in a dimension of American life where Jews rarely tread — in a corporation and in the military. It is the experience of a man who is ashamed of his Jewishness," she said.

"It is also the experience of his wife, who is paralyzed by her repressed husband and unsatisfactory marriage, but is literally paralyzed

by reading about the fate of Jews in Europe, particularly after Kristallnacht," the 1938 pogrom that signaled the upcoming destruction of German Jewry.

Miller was born on Manhattan's Upper West Side in 1915. As a young man whose family was deeply affected by the Great Depression, he worked as a clerk in an auto-parts warehouse and as a truck driver.

Miller had a bar mitzvah in 1928. After finishing high school, he left for college at the University of Michigan.

In 1944, Miller saw the first Broadway production of one of his plays, "The Man Who Had All the Luck," close after just a handful of performances.

But in 1947, "All My Sons" opened on Broadway and was a great success. Two years later, "Death of a Salesman" opened, winning the Pulitzer Prize, the Tony Award for best play and the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award. Miller wrote the play in just six weeks.

The poet and writer Honor Moore, who was a friend of Miller's, told JTA that Miller viewed himself as an atheist and saw religion as "the opiate of the people."

Miller wrote from a humanist perspective born of his experience living through the Depression and a "post-war optimism about the possibilities of democracy," Moore said.

"He saw his task as to write, to portray those people in real American life." ■

'In some of his great works, he made Jewish life American life by blurring the focus.'

Jeremy Dauber
Columbia University

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Negroponte named intelligence chief

President Bush named a supporter of Israel at the United Nations as his first director of national intelligence.

John Negroponte served as U.S. ambassador to the United Nations from 2001 before becoming America's first post-war ambassador to Iraq last year.

Negroponte will oversee 15 U.S. intelligence agencies and will brief the president on intelligence threats each day.

Bush, Europe to talk about Syria

President Bush will consult with European leaders about what to do about Syria.

Bush has joined European nations in supporting an international investigation into the assassination this week of Rafik Hariri, the former Lebanese prime minister, who was spearheading a movement to end Syria's occupation of his country.

The Bush administration recalled its ambassador from Syria and is considering further sanctions.

Bush wants Syria to crack down on terrorist groups operating against Israel and Iraq from territory it controls.

He said he would raise the issue during his European tour, which starts next week.

Don't believe everything on the news

The BBC apologized for running an unsubstantiated column about a Muslim soldier allegedly imprisoned by the Israeli army.

The apology concerned a contribution by the Rev. John Bell to Radio 4's "Thought for the Day" about the soldier, who allegedly was conscripted into the Israeli army and then jailed for refusing to shoot unarmed Palestinian children, the Scotsman newspaper reported.

After receiving complaints from British Jews about the column — listeners pointed out that most Israeli Arabs are exempt from the army — the BBC investigated and found no evidence to support the allegation.

The pastor acknowledged factual errors and apologized for any offense he may have caused.

NORTH AMERICA

Sen. Specter has cancer

Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) has been diagnosed with Hodgkin's Disease.

The senior Jewish Republican in the Senate announced his diagnosis Wednesday, and will begin chemotherapy in Philadelphia soon, according to a statement from his Senate office.

Specter, 75, was elected to his sixth term in November.

PETA launches another offensive

An animal rights group called on members of Congress to return money donated by the owners of a kosher slaughterhouse under investigation.

People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals called on Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), Rep. Tom Latham (R-Iowa) and Rep. Katherine Harris (R-Fla.) to return donations from the Rubashkin and Balkany families, which are linked by marriage.

The Rubashkin family owns AgriProcessors, a kosher slaughtering plant in Iowa that the U.S. Department of Agriculture is investigating following the release of a PETA-produced video that appeared to show violations of U.S. slaughter law.

Holocaust denier fights Canada

Holocaust denier Ernst Zundel completes his second year in a Canadian prison this week as he continues to fight deportation to Germany.

As David Tkachuk noted in the Canadian Senate, Zundel has filed a complaint with the United Nations Human Rights Commission over his treatment and is suing the federal government on the grounds that his detention has violated his human rights.

Tkachuk asked Senate government leader Jack Austin whether Zundel would be removed immediately if the security certificate issued against him is upheld by the courts, or whether the deportation would have to wait for the other court proceedings, but Austin could give no answer.

Are there atheists in foxholes?

Separate prayer spaces for Jews and Muslims will be added at a U.S. military base in Germany.

The 4,000-square-foot addition to the South Side Chapel at Ramstein Air Base will cost \$535,000, Stars and Stripes reported.

The addition will include one room each for Jews and Muslims that allows worshipers to face east toward their holy cities as they pray — the Jews to Jerusalem and the Muslims to Mecca.

The rooms will be connected by a classroom that can be used by either group.

Some 20 to 30 people typically attend Jewish services at the base and some 40 to 60 people generally attend Muslim services, the paper reported.

MIDDLE EAST

Down with razing

Israel halted its policy of demolishing the homes of Palestinian terrorists.

Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz ordered the halt Thursday on the recommendation of an internal review.

"The Israel Defense Forces has in the past exercised its legal authority to demolish terrorists' houses," the military said in a statement. "The necessity of this tactic as part of the fight against terror is often re-evaluated."

According to Ha'aretz, the Defense Ministry panel determined that the demolitions' deterrent effect was offset by the hostility the destruction bred among Palestinians, which could perpetuate more violence.

The Israeli human rights group B'Tselem said that since demolitions were launched in 2002 in an attempt to deter Palestinian suicide bombings, 675 dwellings in the West Bank and Gaza Strip had been razed.

Arab man eyes Gaza settlements

An Arab billionaire reportedly offered to buy Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip.

Mohamed Ali Al-Abbar, chairman of the Dubai-based real-estate conglomerate Emaar, offered Israel \$56 million for the Gush Katif settlement bloc, which is to be evacuated this summer, Channel Two television said Thursday.

Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has said the Gaza settlements will be razed after the withdrawal. But according to Ha'aretz, Vice Prime Minister Shimon Peres has urged Sharon to consider Abbar's proposal.

Tsunami toll felt

Remains of a man believed to be the last Israeli victim of the Asian tsunami were identified.

The body of Uzi Saguy, 28, was identified in the Thai resort of Phuket on Thursday using DNA samples, and was expected to arrive in Israel for burial by the weekend.

Saguy and his girlfriend Aya Shapira went missing during the Dec. 26 seismic ocean wave that devastated parts of Southeast Asia.

Remains of Shapira and five other Israelis already have been identified and laid to rest in the Jewish state.