


IN THE NEWS
Catholics, Jews to work together

Following a meeting with the pope, Jewish leaders expressed hope in expanding interfaith relations.

Israel Singer, chairman of the World Jewish Congress, said after Thursday's meeting with Benedict XVI that joint humanitarian initiatives undertaken by the church and the Jewish community would be expanded, including "much-needed relief and education aid to Africa, a continent suffering from the plague of AIDS."

The meeting between the pope and a 25-member delegation from the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations was Benedict's first official audience with international representatives of another faith.

Israeli court OKs withdrawal plan

Israel's top court rejected 11th-hour appeals against the Gaza withdrawal plan.

Twelve petitions arguing that the plan violates settlers' human rights or provided insufficient funds for their relocation in Israel were thrown out Thursday by the High Court of Justice.

Annan meets Jewish leaders

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan addressed a wide range of issues in a meeting with Jewish organizational leaders.

Wednesday's meeting with representatives of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations was frank and warm, in contrast to past meetings, said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

Foxman, one of about a dozen leaders of the umbrella group participating in the meeting, attributed the change in tone to several initiatives Annan has undertaken to promote Jewish concerns.

■ **MORE NEWS, Pg. 8**

WORLD REPORT

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Courtesy of Rabbi Ari Israel/Maryland Hillel

Students with Hillel at the University of Maryland spin 1,708 dreidels in 2004 as they seek to set a record for dreidel spinning.

Hillel developing new guidelines for students of intermarried families

By SUE FISHKOFF

PACIFIC GROVE, Calif. (JTA) — In an effort to strengthen outreach to students from intermarried homes, Hillel, the nation's largest Jewish student organization, is compiling a set of national outreach guidelines for its campus directors.

The guidelines should be in place this fall.

It's not a completely new direction for an organization that already prides itself on being "accessible, welcoming and inclusive," says Clare Goldwater, director of Hillel's Joseph Meyerhoff Center for Jewish Learning.

What is new, she says, is "trying to coordinate the conversation" on a national level.

In March, Goldwater convened an internal consultation for campus directors and other Hillel professionals at the group's Washington headquarters to explore the idea of national guidelines.

The "best practices" guidelines will be for internal use, she says, and will deal with things like "the do's and don'ts of working with students from intermarried homes."

A rough draft of the document cautions Hillel directors to recognize that every intermarried family is different, so there is no single model of such students. Another section suggests they provide learning opportunities that are low-key and unthreatening.

A third section urges directors "to be care-

Continued on page 2

**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

■ Hillel develops guidelines for students of intermarried families

Continued from page 1

ful about branding, to help the students pick names for themselves in a way that's appropriate for them," Goldwater says, noting that students at two Hillels have formed separate groups called "the Half-Jews" and "the Goyim."

"Many of these students come with stereotypes and negative baggage from their childhood," she says. "They have particular needs in terms of accessibility. Hillel tries to show them they're welcome, they can belong, they can have a positive Jewish experience."

According to the 2000 National Jewish Population Study, 45 percent of college students who identify as Jewish come from intermarried families.

Of those, 65 percent "feel very positive about being Jewish." But just 15 percent of them participate in Hillel activities, in contrast to 36 percent of students with two Jewish parents.

Hillel, Goldwater says, wants to reach the rest.

Not everyone believes this should be Hillel's goal.

Brandeis University professor Sylvia Barack Fishman, an interfaith expert who spoke at the March meeting, notes that Hillel originally was created by B'nai B'rith as a way to bring young Jewish men and women together, presumably to meet and marry.

"I am very concerned that Hillel not abandon its mandate to encourage in-marriage," she says.

Fishman also questions the amount of negative stereotypes these students bring with them. She believes it is less than what

their parents experienced a generation ago.

"One could argue that the cultural norm has switched around," she says. "In some cases, the intermarried families are the dominant model."

Hillel campus directors interviewed for this article disagree.

"Some people think Hillel is like JDate, that everyone I meet there will be someone I'd take home to meet my parents," says Rabbi Joseph Topek, who has been the Hillel director at Stony

Brook University in New York, for 23 years.

Why hold Hillel responsible, he asks, for making sure your kid dates Jews? "Come on, you send them to a secular university, they live in the dorms, of course there are going to be non-Jews there," Topek says with a laugh.

"Non-Jewish students participate in Hillel activities. Their friends go and they want to check it out. It's not as ghettoized as when we were in college."

Still, he supports the push for a more coordinated outreach. "There's an emerging population of students with one Jewish parent or grandparent who feel a connection to the Jewish community. It may be strong, or they may be ambivalent, but there are more of these students on campus, and they're more interested."

Michelle Blumenberg, Hillel director at the University of Arizona in Tucson, says, "There is a need to be sensitive to our language, how we welcome people."

She says that a 2002 demographic study of Tucson's Jewish community found that 46 percent of married Jews in the city were intermarried — a typical finding in the West, and one that Blumenberg feels Hillel directors need to recognize.

"Should we be saying, you want your children to come to Hillel so they will marry Jewish, when half the population to whom we're speaking probably isn't?" she wonders.

Or Mars, Hillel director at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, says the only way he knows which students come from intermarried backgrounds is if they choose to tell him.

"It's not an issue unless they make it

one," he says. "In terms of coming to Hillel, if you say you're Jewish, you're Jewish, and we want to interact with you."

He does say, however, that "some students struggle with it" on a personal level. "Sometimes it comes up when they want to become observant, or want to make aliyah, and their status becomes an issue. Some want to figure out how to honor both their parents and their own identity."

While Mars isn't sure about the need for any overarching

"engagement mechanism" for Hillel directors, he likes Goldwater's use of the phrase "coordinated conversation."

"If it means one Hillel professional will learn from another about this delicate phenomenon, then that's great," he says.

One thing that might make a coordinated approach more difficult is the fact that Hillel directors span the denominational spectrum, from Orthodox rabbis to Reform rabbis to people who are themselves intermarried. Some wonder how an Orthodox rabbi could be expected to welcome non-halachically Jewish students with the same enthusiasm as a non-Orthodox director.

For some directors, there could be a distinction between children of intermarriage who have a Jewish mother, which makes them halachically Jewish, and those with only a Jewish father, who can be Jewish according to the Reform and Reconstructionist streams.

But Goldwater says that different observance levels don't affect campus outreach.

"Even for those directors who have a halachic problem with intermarriage, I don't know one who wouldn't want to be accessible, welcoming and inclusive," she says. "They don't check family connections at the door. If they did, they would not be Hillel directors."

Rabbi Avi Orlow took up his position as assistant director of Hillel programs at Washington University in St. Louis, Mo., a year ago, just after his Orthodox ordination. While he says he would be "all too happy" if Jewish students joined synagogues, he feels it's not his job to promote Orthodoxy, but to help students engage Jewishly and find a "model for Jewish living that will work for the next 10 years after college." ■

'Some people think Hillel is like JDate, that everyone I meet there will be someone I'd take home to meet my parents.'

Rabbi Joseph Topek

Director, Hillel at Stony Brook University

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At OSCE meet praise for steps, hope for more

By JEROME SOCOLOVSKY

CORDOBA, Spain (JTA) — At first the challenge was to get people talking about the problem. Then it was to turn words into actions.

This year, the effort at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe conference was on maintaining the focus on anti-Semitism.

Ever since the OSCE began dealing with the challenge of anti-Semitism in the world today, Jewish organizations have faced an uphill battle.

This year's meeting in Cordoba — which drew delegations from 55 governments — was the third sponsored by the OSCE.

The first gathering, in Vienna, set the precedent of a conference devoted to anti-Semitism. Last year, in the German capital, delegates issued a "Berlin Declaration" calling for concrete action.

But this year's meeting was different: As its title makes clear, the Conference on Antisemitism and Other Forms of Intolerance included other types of discrimination, though the precedence given to anti-Semitism was more than implicit.

Gov. George Pataki (R-N.Y.), who headed the U.S. delegation, considered it "a positive step" to include categories such as discrimination against Muslims, Christians, Gypsies and other groups.

"But we cannot lose the fact that the whole concept of this conference began as an effort to elevate public awareness, governmental awareness, in response to and to eradicate anti-Semitism. That still has to be the primary focus," Pataki told JTA.

"To me it's quite obvious that anti-Semitism, not just currently, is frightening and damaging and horrific," the governor said. "When you look at its history, we've never seen the inhumanity to man that we saw during the course of the Holocaust."

Representatives of Jewish groups said one of the greatest challenges at the Cordoba meeting was to acknowledge the suffering of others, while reminding Europeans that their continent has a particular duty to focus on anti-Semitism because of the Holocaust.

"It is not our intention to prove that anti-Semitism comes first in some hierarchy of oppression," said Rabbi Andrew Baker of the American Jewish Committee. "But one has to be blind not to recognize

that anti-Muslim sentiments are prevalent in Europe today."

Still, striking the right balance was no easy task.

"Islamophobia has replaced anti-Semitism as the new, sharp end of racism in the world, wherever you go," Abduljalil Sajid, an imam and adviser to the Commission on British Muslims, declared from the podium.

Another difficult issue was keeping the Israeli-Palestinian conflict separate from the anti-Semitism discussions.

Gert Weisskirchen, the OSCE's special representative for combating anti-Semitism, said hatred toward Jews in Europe is "nourished by pictures that are not fair" about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Reasonable criticism of Israel is fine as long as it doesn't cross a red line, as it has a number of times in European press and political debate, Weisskirchen said.

"If you compare Sharon with Hitler, than this red line is crossed," he said.

Ed Morgan, president of the Canadian Jewish Congress, objected to an assertion by an Arab speaker that anti-Semitism will disappear only when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is resolved.

"If I were to say that hatred of Arabs won't end until Arab countries come to terms with the State of Israel, that would be a racist statement," he said.

Some other non-Jewish organizations presented moderate stances.

"We can't make this a competition of who's more a victim. That's childish," said Yusuf Fernandez of the Spanish Federation of Religious Islamic Entities. "If Muslims had lived in Europe at the time of the Holocaust, then both Jews and Muslims would have ended up in the gas chambers."

Many participants felt that having members of different groups at the conference was an opportunity.

"I have tremendous hope from the fact that we are sitting in the same building, and some of us in the same room, as Muslim organizations," said Israel Singer, chairman of the World Jewish Congress.

He recalled Jewish-Catholic relations just a few decades ago, "when we were like that famous Michelangelo painting on the Sistine Chapel ceiling — almost touching, almost touching with the hands reaching out to each other, and the synapse not being made.

"The Catholics today are our closest allies from having been our greatest enemies over 2,000 years," he added.

Delegates discussed new national programs to raise Holocaust

awareness and collect data on racist organizations.

The OSCE cited the FBI's cooperation with German police in investigating German-language Web sites registered with American Internet addresses. France also was mentioned because its judges can sentence perpetrators of hate crimes to racism-awareness education.

But the chairman of the conference, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel, criticized many countries for not implementing the Berlin recommendations.

"Unfortunately the findings fall short of expectations, as only 29 out of the 55 OSCE states provided statistical information relevant to hate-motivated crimes," Rupel said.

The OSCE noted that only a few countries have appropriate mechanisms in place to respond to anti-Semitism.

And in those countries where statistical information has been gathered, the trends remain disturbing. The ADL presented findings of a 12-nation survey, which found that "Europeans continue to question the loyalty of their Jewish citizens."

It also found "alarmingly high levels" of the belief that Jews are too influential. Fifty-five percent of Hungarians and 45 percent of Spaniards polled more or less agreed with the statement that "Jews have too much power in the business world."

Behind the scenes, some countries expressed reservations about continuing the annual OSCE meetings.

Pataki said there was "a greater reluctance among some countries than I expected."

"It's shocking to even have to raise the possibility that there are those who would even look the other way," he said. ■

'We can't make this a competition of who's more a victim.'

Yusuf Fernandez
Spanish Muslim leader

BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

Bug juice and diversity at Jewish summer camps

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Jody Bartone's kids had outgrown day camp a few years back, and she was looking to find a sleep-away camp where they could spend the summer.

That's when she happened upon an ad for Camp Welmet — while leafing through a gay lifestyle magazine.

"I was attracted by their ad," she recalls. "First of all it was in *The Life*" magazine, which she considered a good sign. "Also, I was looking for some diversity."

Most of the camps near her home in Westchester County, N.Y., are "all white, all wealthy, all tending to revolve around" themes like sports or theater, says Bartone, a lesbian who shares custody of her two teenage children with her former husband.

That's not the type of camp experience she wanted for her children.

Camp Welmet, founded in 1998 with the specific aim of attracting a more diverse camper population, seemed attractive to her.

"Our goal was to bring a diverse group of people together, breaking stereotypes and breaking down walls," says Rita Santelia, assistant executive director of the camp, which comes under the umbrella of the Foundation for Jewish Camping. The group wanted campers to "come together, respecting the differences and appreciating the differences."

Today, Santelia says, the camp — located at the Mosholu Montefiore Community Center, which is located in Putnam Valley, N.Y., and is a beneficiary of the UJA-Federation of New York — has about 200 campers.

About 30 of them have gay parents or guardians, and some 50 children come from interracial and interfaith couples, usually with one Jewish member of the pair. The rest of the campers are white, black, Asian, Latino, Jewish and of other ethnic backgrounds.

The camp also works to hire counselors who are gay or of different ethnicities. Two years ago, for example, the camp hired a young Muslim woman of Egyptian descent.

Camp Welmet is part of what some see as a growing push to provide a more diverse experience for Jewish children at summer camps.

Camp Tawonga, a nondenominational Jewish camp near Yosemite National Park in California, hosts occasional "family

camps" for the families of same-sex couples, in addition to weekends for families with intermarried, interracial and gay parents.

The combination weekends are reflective of a new trend in Jewish camps, says Jerry Silverman, president of the Foundation for Jewish Camping.

"More and more, you're seeing programs not being geared from a sense of segregating and isolating, but programs of integration and celebration," he says.

Over the past two to three years, says Ann Gonski, Tawonga's associate director, an increasing number of campers have come from families with same-sex parents.

"We try very hard in all of our literature to make our language as inclusive and as welcoming" as possible, she said.

For example, Gonski says, "Information forms never say 'Mother/Father;' they say 'Contact Parent One,' and 'Contact Parent Two.'"

Both Tawonga and Welmet offer staff members training that stresses inclusiveness, awareness of diversity and sensitivity to language.

As a counselor in training and a member of Welmet's swim staff, Nikki Jaffe underwent such training. Jaffe, 20, who comes from a white, straight Jewish family, spent time as a camper at a more traditional Jewish camp — one where, she says, "every single person looked just like me" — before switching to Welmet, first as a camper then a staff member.

Jaffe says that one of her best friends, whom she met at the camp, is half-Jewish and half-black. Another friend has a heterosexual father and a mother who has been in a relationship with a woman for several years.

"I feel like I wouldn't be nearly the person I am today without having had this experience," says the Cornell University senior. "It has shaped me more than anything else I have done in my life."

Camp Ramah, a Conservative movement camp, has made its

own efforts at inclusion, says its national director, Rabbi Mitchell Cohen. The camp has reached out to Israeli families that have been affected by terrorism; to poor families; to Jewish families in Europe and to Jews from the former Soviet Union. Ramah, he says, is now looking to begin outreach to the Jews of Latin America.

Cohen says he's not aware of any specific programs aimed at

reaching out to the children of gay couples. Recently, though, he has been involved in talks about creating a family camp, outside the framework of the traditional camping experience, for intermarried families "where there's a supportive spouse" in an effort to "encourage greater Jewish identification."

Welmet and Tawonga are not alone in their efforts, according to those involved in Jewish camping. Indeed, many Jewish camps are working to increase their appeal to a broad array of Jewish families.

Still, Silverman says, "There's a significant amount of work to be done from a sense of outreach and welcoming and recruiting."

In that vein, the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation recently provided a grant of \$1 million over five years to help the Foundation for Jewish Camping reach out to underaffiliated and intermarried families.

Some camp information forms now say 'Contact Parent One' and 'Contact Parent Two.'

FOCUS ON ISSUES



Courtesy of Camp Welmet

Campers celebrate the Fourth of July at Camp Welmet in Putnam Valley, N.Y., in 2003.

Summer time — and the livin's political

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — Summer for students once meant lazy days for swimming, reading or playing sports.

But for many of today's Jewish youth, summer is a key time for rigorous training in Israel advocacy and Jewish leadership.

Since the start of the Palestinian intifada nearly five years ago, scores of Jewish groups rolled out or beefed up programs for Jewish students to promote Israel on college campuses, site of the most heated debate in the United States on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

As part of the increased programming, summer has become an increasingly popular time for groups to hold workshops and missions to Israel.

From Hillel: The Foundation for Jewish Campus Life — which will bring hundreds of its activists to Camp Ramah Darom in Georgia for six days of leadership training — to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which will convene hundreds of its student activists for political training, Jewish groups are gearing up to squeeze the most education they can into students' summer vacations.

"The summer is a key time for Israel programming, and in some ways a more significant time to be able to create and/or energize student activists," said Mara Suskauer, director of the Jewish National Fund's college-activists department.

The JNF will coordinate seven trips this summer for birthright Israel, the free, 10-day trip to Israel for Diaspora youth who have never visited the Jewish state, and a mission to Israel with Caravan for Democracy, an Israel advocacy group the JNF co-sponsors.

"We've seen that these students take the experiences from a more relaxed yet ultimately empowering summer Israel education environment and return to their campuses in the fall with a unique combination of passion, the desire to make a difference, and with the skills and tools to do so," Suskauer said.

For Avi Spielman, an incoming sophomore at Vanderbilt University, the Caravan for Democracy mission will provide on-the-ground training.

"It's not just learning how to be an advocate but experiencing how to be an advocate," he said. "We're meeting the people, going to the places that we're advocating

for, that we're representing on campus. We're inside the mold of what we're trying to portray to everyone else."

Elana Lichtenstein agrees.

The recent Brandeis University graduate got so much out of her winter 2002 trip to Israel with Hasbarah Fellowships that next month she'll start working for the organization, a pro-Israel program for North American college students sponsored by Aish HaTorah and the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

Lichtenstein, 22, who grew up Orthodox, said the trip allowed her to meet a slew of high-level Israeli officials and see the diversity of Israeli political ideology.

"It was really interesting to be exposed to people who had different political perspectives, but we all cared about Israel the same amount," she said.

Hasbarah Fellowships has steadily increased its number of two-week missions to Israel each year. Entering its fourth summer, the group will send 175 students on four trips, up from 100 students on three trips last summer.

Birthright Israel also continues to grow exponentially in the variety of programs it offers and the number of young people taking part.

This summer, 10,000 youth will travel to Israel on birthright programs, some 8,500 of them from North America. The same number of students traveled last year, but more people are applying this year — 16,000, up from 12,000.

Birthright, which is funded by the Israeli government, the North American Jewish federation system and a group of Jewish philanthropists, says more funding would allow it to accommodate more students. The group credits the rise in applicants to renewed optimism about the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Programming also is growing for Jewish teens.

B'nai Brith Youth Organization has expanded its batch of summer programs, reaching out to non-BBYO members.

Among them are Passport to Israel trips, which include an outdoor adventure program, a Jewish education trip and a basic tour of Israel. Nearly 350 students have enrolled in the program, six times the number that attended last year.

Julie Krause, 16, who will soon finish her junior year at New Jersey's Cherry Hill High School East, is hooked on BBYO summer programs.

This summer, she is adding two more to the four programs she already has attended, with a two-week "Connection to Israel" program — comprised of one week at a Pennsylvania camp and one week in Israel — and a two-week community service program in Chicago.

"The first time I went it was just because I was bored. I had nothing to do," Krause said.

But she liked that she formed friendships with people she might not otherwise get to know, and learned leadership skills.

"You're rooming with people and you have to work with them on a daily basis just to make it through the day," she said.

The summer is a significant time 'to create and/or energize student activists.'

Mara Suskauer
JNF official

FOCUS ON ISSUES



Courtesy of BBYO

Students on a BBYO Israel Program gather for a group photo atop Masada.

Sharansky seen as unlikely to get post

By RACHEL POMERANCE

NEW YORK (JTA) — Natan Sharansky may have made waves in Israel by announcing his candidacy for the helm of the Jewish Agency for Israel after the organization nearly had secured its support for Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's nominee.

On this side of the ocean, Sharansky's candidacy is making some ripples, but he seems unlikely to gain much support.

A former Soviet-era refusenik and Israeli minister of Diaspora affairs, Sharansky would seem to have a broad network of contacts among Diaspora Jewry to help support him in his run.

But Diaspora leaders seem unlikely to abandon their support for Zeev Bielski, the popular mayor of Ra'anana, who was nominated by Sharon and approved by the Jewish Agency's advise-and-consent committee.

"I don't believe there will be a shift" in support, said Stephen Hoffman, president of the Jewish Community Federation of Cleveland and past president of the United Jewish Communities, the umbrella body of North American Jewish federations.

"I just think there's a lot of enthusiasm for Zeev and his working with the Diaspora in a very tachlis," or nuts-and-bolts, "way within the Jewish Agency, and I believe that people won't switch just because somebody else says they're interested," Hoffman said.

The Jewish Agency is a \$350 million organization dedicated to promoting and overseeing aliyah, as well as Zionist education programs worldwide. Its chairman also chairs the World Zionist Organization, which has a small budget but represents Diaspora and Israeli political parties and comprises half of the Jewish Agency's board of trustees.

U.S. Jewish officials are skeptical that Sharansky's bid to chair the agency will succeed.

Sharansky resigned from the Cabinet last month because he opposes the government's plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank, a plan that has widespread backing among American Jews.

Given the ideological clash on one of the most critical issues facing Israel

today, it's unlikely Sharansky can win more support than Bielski, who supports the withdrawal, observers say.

Several Diaspora officials view the candidacy as a political feud between Sharon and Sharansky.

Others say the move reflects internal Likud politics: Likudniks who oppose Sharon's withdrawal plan, and who feel insulted that they weren't consulted about the choice of Bielski, put Sharansky up to the bid, several sources said.

Sharansky has submitted his nomination to World Likud to head the World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency.

On Thursday, World Likud officials petitioned the party's top internal court against Bielski's nomination, asking for a restraining order to force Sharon to support the candidate who wins the June 19 race for the World Likud's candidacy.

Sharansky is competing against Gideon Patt, past president and CEO of Israel Bonds and a former Israeli tourism minister, as well as a little-known candidate involved in Likud in Beersheba.

It's considered highly unusual for the prime minister's candidate to be challenged.

The Zionist General Council, which meets in Jerusalem from June 21-24, will select the new Jewish Agency chairman. Any candidate would need approval from both the Jewish Agency's advise-and-consent committee and Sharon, and then from the agency's assembly, an enlarged governing body.

Ari Harow, national executive director of American Friends of Likud, believes Sharansky has a good chance of becoming head of the WZO.

"He's a Jewish hero. He's someone who is recognized as such all over the world," Harow said. "I would like to believe that they definitely will consider him seriously. I can't think of many people who

could do a better job for the Jewish people than Natan Sharansky."

The conflict could result in an unprecedented split of the joint chairmanships of the WZO and the Jewish Agency, with Sharansky heading the former and Bielski the latter, Harow said.

Others think that's unlikely.

"It would be like having a president of the United States for foreign affairs and a president of the United States for

domestic affairs," said Dr. Mandell Ganchrow, former executive vice president of the Religious Zionists of America and a member of the WZO's governing board.

Splitting the jobs would be a "recipe for disaster," Ganchrow said. "They're interlocking; they're related. It's the same people, the same bureaucracy, the same building."

While Sharansky would make a "wonderful choice," he has a slim chance of winning the job, Ganchrow said.

"It's not likely such a decision will be made on the floor of a convention," he said. "The prime minister is going to be the prime force in making the choice."

Carole Solomon, who chairs the Jewish Agency's board of governors, called the dispute "kind of a nonissue." Solomon said she hadn't been informed of any candidate other than Bielski.

Even if Sharansky becomes World Likud's nominee, some say Diaspora Jews won't back such a challenge to the sitting prime minister of Israel.

Sharansky's candidacy puts the agency "in the middle of a political process in which it doesn't belong," said Richard Wexler of Chicago, who heads the Jewish Agency's North American Council.

"The prime minister has made his recommendation. The recommendation has been accepted by all the governance areas of Diaspora Jewry, and that's the process that is supposed to be followed," he said.

While Sharansky would make a wonderful choice, 'he has a slim chance of winning the job.'

Dr. Mandell Ganchrow
Member, WZO governing board

BEHIND
THE
HEADLINES

SHAVUOT FEATURES

Family helps with inking of new Torah scroll

By JANE ULMAN

ENCINO, Calif. (JTA) — “See that aleph in ‘asher’?” Gabe, 18, asks.

He points to a piece of parchment that is securely taped to a drafting table and that contains the first seven verses of Genesis in carefully calligraphed Hebrew letters.

“That’s my aleph.”

My husband, Larry, and I, along with three of our sons — the oldest, Zack, is studying at Tel Aviv University this semester — are fulfilling the Torah’s 613th commandment — to write a sefer Torah.

The commandment is derived from Deuteronomy 31:19: “Therefore, write down this poem and teach it to the people of Israel.”

We were present on the sixth day of the month of Sivan 3,317 years ago, along with every Jew who would ever be born, when, amid thunder, lightning and the sound of the shofar, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, as well as, many believe, the entire written and oral Torah. That day marks the holiday of Shavuot, the giving of the Torah, which begins this year at sundown on Sunday.

And we are present on this night, along with several other families in the beit midrash at Milken Community High School in Los Angeles, where, amid solemnity, joy and awe, we are carrying out the Torah’s final commandment.

Well, maybe we aren’t each writing a complete sefer Torah, a project that generally takes 2,000 hours, or a full year, but we are each writing a letter.

“A letter qualifies,” says Neil Yerman, an observant Reform Jew who has gained certification as a sofer, or scribe. He is one of the few scribes to allow women and children to inscribe letters in the Torah.

The entire school community will have a turn at writing in the first three columns of Bereshit, Genesis, on a new piece of parchment. That entails about 3,600 letters. A full Torah contains 304,805 letters.

Yerman then will restore the remainder of the Torah, which was rescued from Poland. Next, Yerman will bind the scroll to a new set of atzei chaim, the wooden spindles that are called trees of life. ■

Holiday gets a little hip

By SUE FISHKOFF

PACIFIC GROVE, Calif. (JTA) — Shavuot, which begins Sunday, may be one of Judaism’s three major festivals, but it’s never caught on in America like its more popular cousins, Passover and Sukkot.

Orthodox Jews have kept the tradition of tikkun leil Shavuot, the all-night study session that marks the commemoration of God’s giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai.

Many Conservative congregations also have Shavuot study sessions.

But for most unaffiliated and many non-Orthodox Jews, the tradition of study associated with the holiday has gone fairly unnoticed.

That appears to be changing.

During the past few years, there’s been a resurgence of interest in tikkun leil Sha-

vuot. Of all the holidays in the Jewish calendar it’s this one, with its focus on intellectual exploration and spiritual self-examination, that is being seized upon by a new generation as a day — or, rather, night — ripe for reinvention.

It’s been happening in the synagogues. Rabbi Daniel Frelander, vice president of the Union for Reform Judaism, says the upsurge of interest in tikkun leil Shavuot is a “six- to eight-year phenomenon” in the Reform movement, with 200 to 300 Reform congregations now holding such sessions.

“Our goal is to reclaim Shavuot for adult study,” he says. ■

But beyond the synagogue walls, something even more interesting is taking place: Large-scale alternative Shavuot night happenings are being held in clubs and JCCs on both coasts, where participants prepare themselves for the morning’s revelation with sunset-to-dawn smorgasbords of text study, lectures, music, film, discussion groups, folk dancing, performance art, and, of course, cheesecake.

In other words, Shavuot’s becoming hip.

Last year, close to 300 people showed up at the Whispers Club in San Francisco for Dawn, a Shavuot event billed as an “all-night multimedia arts experience.”

In New York, more than 1,500 came to Alma Tikkun, an all-night study and cultural extravaganza held simultaneously at the Manhattan JCC and 92nd Street Y.

These two Shavuot celebrations, both being held again this year, share an exuberant, culture-centered approach to what has traditionally been an intimate, text-centered ritual, while seeking to maintain the holiday’s focus on exploring the connection between Jewish identity and Torah. ■

Their program schedules read like street festivals, with multiple events taking place simultaneously. Alma Tikkun will feature an Israeli rock band, Middle Eastern jazz, sex talk with Dr. Ruth, and screenings of the new documentary “Watermarks” and Woody Allen’s “Crimes and Misdemeanors,” with separate spaces set up for Orthodox Torah study, as well as Israeli dancing and sing-alongs.

Dawn 2005, the brain-child of musician and record producer David Katznelson and avant-garde performer Amy Tobin, is more consciously aimed at the young, alter-

native set.

“My generation likes to stay up all night and watch the sun rise, and we want progressive ideas, we want to learn about the environment and what’s going on politically,” says Katznelson, a self-described agnostic. “Especially in San Francisco, we’re very willing and active participants” in social action projects, he says.

A focus on social justice is also a moving force behind a late-night Shavuot celebration at the Westside Jewish Community Center in Los Angeles sponsored by the Progressive Jewish Alliance and Ikar, a year-old non-affiliated congregation described by its spiritual leader, Rabbi Sharon Brous, as “politically active, traditional yet progressive.”

In contrast to the San Francisco and New York events, there won’t be any drag queens or performance artists in L.A. — just text study, with a focus on translating what Brous calls “the redemptive message of Shavuot” into political and social action. ■

Shavuot as
an ‘all-night
multimedia arts
experience.’

NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Mombasa bomb suspects cleared

A Kenyan court acquitted four men in the bombing of an Israeli-owned hotel.

The High Court in Nairobi ruled Thursday that there is insufficient evidence to link the defendants, all Muslims, to the 2002 suicide attack in Mombasa that killed 12 Israelis and three hotel staffers.

Al-Qaida claimed responsibility for the bombing and for a simultaneous botched attempt to shoot down an Israeli airliner taking off from the nearby airport.

No one has been charged in the latter case.

Survivor's tune hits playlist

A band remix of an interview with a Czech Holocaust survivor recalling her wartime experiences, as well as her condemnation of contemporary anti-Semitism, is a popular song on Prague's Radio 1.

"I Can't Understand," a five-minute recording, is by a band called Tchendos.

Members of the band said their aim is to preserve the words and memory of the survivor, whose identity is anonymous.

British Jewish cemetery desecrated

A Jewish graveyard in England was desecrated for the ninth time.

Police launched an investigation into the incident, in which some 70 gravestones were pushed over and vandalized at the Rainsough Jewish Cemetery in northern England, causing an estimated tens of thousands of dollars worth of harm.

NORTH AMERICA

Amendment requires terrorist financing report

A U.S. House of Representatives panel approved an amendment requiring the State Department to list countries of concern regarding terrorist financing.

The amendment, added to the foreign aid bill Wednesday, would mandate documentation in the State Department's annual Patterns of Global Terrorism report of countries that may finance terrorism.

Group calls appointment 'appalling'

The National Council of Jewish Women called the U.S. Senate's confirmation of Justice Janice Rogers Brown "appalling." Brown was confirmed Wednesday for a seat on the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals, more than two years after being nominated.

NCJW's president, Phyllis Snyder, said that given Rogers' views opposing abortion rights, affirmative action and anti-discrimination laws, the confirmation is a "blow to justice we will long regret."

AJCongress weighs in on Sabbath work

The American Jewish Congress filed a brief in a federal appeals court supporting a religious person's right to not work on the Sabbath.

The United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in New York is hearing a case brought by Bradley Baker, who says he was denied full time employment at the Home Depot in Henrietta, N.Y., because he refused to work on Sunday, the Christian Sabbath.

Baker was offered either time off for church or part-time employment, and a district court ruled that the store had satisfied its accommodation of his religious beliefs.

Controversy over Canadian honor

B'nai Brith Canada urged present and prospective holders of the Order of Canada to protest the refusal to revoke the order from a

native leader on trial for an anti-Semitic tirade.

B'nai Brith called on Order of Canada recipients to put a strip of black tape over their pins to signal dissatisfaction that David Ahenakew still holds his order. Ahenakew is in the midst of a hate-crimes trial in Saskatchewan for his anti-Semitic tirade in December 2002.

Ahenakew has "unashamedly dishonored the order and its truly deserving recipients," B'nai Brith's executive vice president, Frank Dimant, said.

Wal-Mart official resigns over ad

A top Wal-Mart official resigned following the publication of an ad comparing a local zoning law to Nazi book burning.

The Washington Post reported Thursday that Peter Kanelos, Wal-Mart's community affairs director for Arizona and Southern California, oversaw publication of an ad in the Arizona Daily Sun that was part of a campaign to defeat a ballot initiative in Flagstaff seeking to halt Wal-Mart's expansion.

The ad, which featured a 1933 picture of Germans tossing books on a bonfire, sparked criticism from the Anti-Defamation League and members of Congress.

Veterans group calls for USS Liberty inquiry

A veterans group called for a government investigation of the Israeli attack on the USS Liberty during the 1967 Six-Day War.

The USS Liberty Veterans Association filed a report Wednesday with the Department of Defense that it says proves Israel deliberately attacked the American ship, killing 34 sailors, and therefore is guilty of war crimes.

The group says the Defense Department is obligated to initiate a formal inquiry into the incident, something the American government has not done. Israel has said the attack was an accident, asserting that it mistook the ship for an Egyptian vessel.

Intercepts dealing with the attack, released several years ago by the U.S. National Security Agency, support the Israeli claim that the attack was accidental.

MIDDLE EAST

Abbas talks to terrorists

Mahmoud Abbas convened leaders of Palestinian terrorist groups in a bid to prevent a flare-up of violence with Israel.

The Palestinian Authority president met leaders of 14 armed factions in Gaza City on Thursday, and was expected to urge them to keep to a cease-fire he declared with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in February.

The number of Palestinian attacks has fallen since the February truce, but this week Hamas and Islamic Jihad resumed rocket and mortar barrages against Israeli targets in and outside Gaza.

Rabbi: Don't refuse orders

Soldiers should not refuse orders to evacuate Gaza settlers from their homes, a former Israeli Sephardi chief rabbi said.

"Do not refuse orders," Mordechai Eliyahu said, according to Ha'aretz.

"It's preferable for believing Jews to go among the houses and evacuate settlers while crying — in tears and with a broken heart — than for all kinds of evil people to come and joyously remove the settlers from their homes," he said in comments appearing in a fervently Orthodox magazine and broadcast Thursday evening on Israel's Channel Two television.

Israel's withdrawal from the Gaza Strip is set to begin in mid-August.