

## IN THE NEWS

**Iran prez: Move Israel to Europe**

Iran's president suggested that Israel be moved to Europe.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who in October called for Israel's destruction, said on a visit to Saudi Arabia that Europeans "should give some of their provinces in Europe — like in Germany, Austria or other countries — to the Zionists and the Zionists can establish their state in Europe."

He also said some "European countries insist on saying that Hitler killed millions of innocent Jews in furnaces and they insist on it to the extent that if anyone proves something contrary to that they condemn that person and throw them in jail."

**Payments seen for victims of Holocaust**

The dismissal of a lawsuit against Austrian businesses is expected to expedite payments to Austrian victims of the Holocaust.

A U.S. federal judge on Wednesday dismissed a case brought by Austrian Jewish victims. The Austrian government had sought "legal peace" before paying \$210 million in compensation negotiated in early 2001 with the Claims Conference.

**Avi Dichter sued in the U.S.**

Two pro-Palestinian groups sued a former Israeli security chief who is in the United States on a fellowship.

The Center for Constitutional Rights and the Palestinian Center for Human Rights served papers Wednesday night in New York in a class-action lawsuit against Avi Dichter, former director of Israel's Shin Bet security service, on behalf of the families of Palestinians killed or injured in a 2002 air strike in the Gaza Strip.

The groups allege that Dichter provided the intelligence necessary to carry out the bombing, which killed Hamas kingpin Salah Shehadeh but also killed eight children and seven adults and injured 150 people, the groups said in a statement.

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# WORLD REPORT

PUBLISHED WEEKDAYS BY JTA—THE GLOBAL NEWS SERVICE OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE • WWW.JTA.ORG



Sue Fishkoff

Before presenting the Conservative movement's new outreach initiative, United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism Executive Vice President Rabbi Jerome Epstein, right, talks with incoming USCJ president Ray Goldstein at the group's Boston biennial on Dec. 6.

## At convention, Conservative Jews wrestle with movement's identity

By SUE FISHKOFF

**B**OSTON, Mass. (JTA) — There were two separate minyans at this week's biennial convention of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism: a large egalitarian minyan, where most of the women as well as the men wore kippot, that prayed with gusto three times a day in the main conference hall; and a much smaller, heavily male, non-egalitarian minyan that davened more soberly down the corridor.

The dual prayer services may symbolize a movement in crisis, split by divergent opinions on key issues such as the role of women, the ordination of gay and lesbian rabbis and

the status of non-Jewish family members in synagogue life.

But they also demonstrate that the Conservative tent is large enough to encompass a variety of views and practices, and that the leadership is willing to take a certain amount of flak from members that want it to take a stand one way or the other.

"The United Synagogue is neither egalitarian nor not egalitarian; we are pluralistic," Rabbi Jerome Epstein, the United Synagogue's executive vice president, told the 560 delegates at a plenary session, responding to criticism that conference organizers should not have scheduled space for a non-egalitarian minyan.

"It's not a sign of ambiguity or weakness

*Continued on page 2*

**BEHIND  
THE  
HEADLINES**

## ■ The Conservative movement ponders its identity

*Continued from page 1*

to say we're respectful of divergence," Epstein said. "We have two equal services at the convention because we believe both are equally valid, both are equally authentic, both should be respected and both should be cherished."

The Conservative movement may have lost its pre-eminent position on the American Jewish scene, but instead of the breast-beating one might have expected at this convention, there was a lot of serious introspection and confidence, if not celebration.

Movement leaders unveiled a detailed plan for keruv, or outreach, to intermarried families and new converts, and speakers and participants spent a great deal of time talking about what they want from a movement to which most remain deeply committed.

Words like passion, sensitivity, openness and honesty were used liberally throughout the four-day gathering in Boston, which was devoted to deciding where the movement is headed and rolling out a more proactive approach to integrating intermarried families into Conservative congregational life.

In Monday's keynote speech, Rabbi Neil Gillman, a philosophy professor at the movement's Jewish Theological Seminary, urged Conservative Judaism to "abandon its claim that we are a halachic movement," which he called "irrelevant to the vast majority of our lay people."

Gillman proposed a new definition for the movement based on "living with ambiguity," which he said more precisely describes a movement that may be guided by halacha, or Jewish law, but evolves according to aggada,

or changing social and cultural norms.

"Our approach to halacha is a sublime example of living with tension," said Gillman, positing that Conservative Judaism continually re-evaluates its concept of the God-human relationship. "The hallmarks of our belief are relativity, uncertainty and tension."

Gillman's examination of the movement's theological wrestling act resonated with many conference participants, but some said they did indeed see their movement as based in halacha, and most lay people interviewed said the constant struggle with tradition gave Conservative Judaism an intellectual honesty they liked.

"I believe we're a halachic movement," said Linda Tillinger of Savannah, Ga. "The rules are there for a reason."

Rabbi Amy Eilberg, the first woman ordained by the Conservative movement 20 years ago, agreed with Gillman's proposal, but admitted, "it's a message many in the movement do not want to hear."

She suggested that "what we need is a unifying aggadic vision, a narrative. I would prefer we think of ourselves as God-wrestlers, standing with God face-to-face, arguing, protesting, loving, embracing." That understanding, she said, would be "a radical change from the positivist" claim of being a halachic movement.

There was no formal discussion at the convention of the hot-button topic of whether or not to ordain openly gay rabbis, a decision that will be made by the movement's Law Committee or by the next JTS chancellor, and not by the United Synagogue.

But that didn't stop people from talking about the gay ordination issue. Most said it will and should happen — and, as University of Judaism Rector Rabbi Elliot Dorff put it, "it won't split the movement" the way the decision to ordain women did.

Even two decades after the movement began ordaining women, egalitarianism remains a touchy subject in some corners of Conservative Judaism, notably the corner of this downtown Boston hotel where the non-egalitarian minyan was praying. The men in that group said they felt marginalized and "humiliated" by conference speakers who proclaimed egalitarianism

one of the movement's central values.

"Just because I favor a non-egalitarian, traditional Judaism doesn't make me immoral and a misogynist," said Sheldon Serota of Richmond Hill, Ontario. "I was taught the Conservative movement had room under its tent for all forms of Conservative Jewish expression."

Warning that a closer embrace of liberal values "will cost the movement congregations," Rabbi Philip Scheim of Toronto said that "without halacha we are lost. If we want to be sustained by ambiguity, we have no future."

Many people described their attachment to Conservative Judaism in aesthetic terms, such as the "musicality" of Conservative services or the fact that most prayers are said in Hebrew. They feel such touches give Conservative Judaism a more authentically Jewish feel.

"I prefer services in Hebrew and I keep a kosher home, and you don't find that in Reform," said David Brotman of Westfield, N.J.

Judy Gatchell of Portland, Maine, was one of several women laying tefillin during morning prayers. She said she'd like to see the movement focus on turning congregations into warm communities.

"There's a real hunger among people to find communities," she said. "We tend to stay in our own home and space and not reach out as well as we could."

Brotman wants to see a greater emphasis on ritual observance, but says that has to come from a place of understanding and education.

"I'd like to see the leadership reignite a commitment to religious practice among Conservative Jews of my generation," he said.

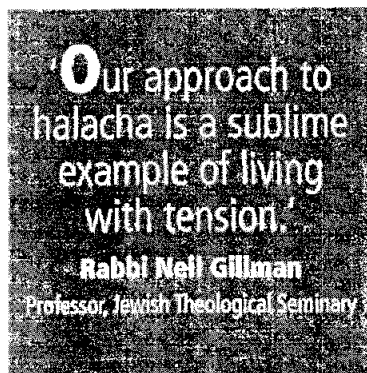
Rabbi Dorff agreed.

"We have to do much more work on worship," he said, picking out Hebrew literacy as an area for the movement to focus on.

In general, though, the main reason most participants gave for affiliating with Conservative Judaism was familiarity.

One elderly Louisiana woman who declined to give her name said she didn't understand all the fuss about trying to come up with a new definition of Conservative Judaism. It's just where she feels right.

"It's what I grew up with, and it's just where I go," she said firmly. "I think most of the people here feel that way."



### JTA WORLD REPORT

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JTA WORLD REPORT is published five days a week, except holidays, by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency Inc., 330 Seventh Ave., New York, N.Y. 10001-5010. For more information about how to subscribe by e-mail, fax or regular mail, call (212) 643-1890, or visit our Web site at [www.jta.org](http://www.jta.org).  
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# Conservatives reach out to intermarried

By SUE FISHKOFF

BOSTON, Mass. (JTA) — The Conservative movement needs to go beyond opening its doors to intermarried families and begin working actively to integrate them fully into congregational life, while continually suggesting to the non-Jews in those families that they consider conversion.

That's the crux of a new keruv, or outreach, initiative presented Tuesday evening at the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism biennial by the organization's executive vice president, Rabbi Jerome Epstein.

More than a year in the making, the initiative, which includes an explanation of the thinking behind the initiative as well as a detailed action plan for rabbis and congregations, includes input from all the major bodies in the Conservative movement. It's being mailed to every Conservative professional and lay leader in North America.

For too long, Epstein told conference delegates, the Conservative movement has at best "merely welcomed" intermarried families, and often has rejected them.

Instead, he said, Conservative congregations should work to bring the entire family into congregational life, encouraging the couple to raise Jewish children and encouraging the non-Jewish spouse to convert.

To that end, Epstein proposed using the word "edud," or "encouragement," rather than "keruv," to emphasize the movement's new focus — not just on converting the non-Jew, but on educating him or her to be a committed Jew.

"Too often we act as if being warm, welcoming and supportive is our goal, and it is not!" Epstein said in a veiled reference to the Reform approach.

While improving initial outreach to intermarried families is "a vital first step," he said, the ultimate goal of the new Conservative outreach is inspiring the intermarried non-Jew "to choose Judaism out of conviction that Jewish living will enrich their lives."

With the Edud initiative, the Conservative movement is suggesting a more active welcome to interfaith families just weeks after the Union for Reform Judaism at its biennial in Houston advocated openly suggesting to the non-Jewish spouse that he or she convert.

"If we believe that Jewish family life is important, let us say so sensitively but pas-

sionately," Epstein said. "We must begin aggressively to encourage conversions of potential Jews who have chosen a Jewish spouse. And if conversion is initially rejected, we must continue to place it on the agenda."

To bring children of mixed marriages into Jewish life, "special outreach" is needed to ensure their Jewish education, Epstein said. While not laying down rules for the movement's Solomon Schechter schools, youth programs and camps, the new initiative proposes special scholarships and extra attention for children of intermarriage.

At discussion sessions after the presentation, people talked about their experiences with intermarriage and tried to hammer out positions for their congregations to take.

In general, participants seemed to feel that the initiative was long overdue. Even though it would introduce even more complexity into a movement that already has an equivocal relationship to Jewish law, many people felt the keruv initiative was necessary.

"I don't know that we have to be happy about it, but we have to address it," Richard Price of Aberdeen, N.J., said of intermarriage, which, he noted "has touched my own family."

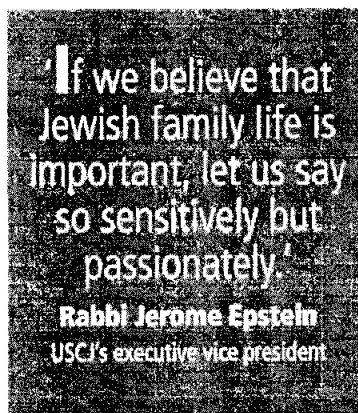
Price said he hopes the keruv initiative wasn't created simply because of the Conservative movement's declining numbers, but is "about addressing the human needs of the people involved."

The Conservative movement doesn't dictate outreach policy to member congregations, and some people were surprised to find out that not every Solomon Schechter school requires non-Jewish children to convert within a year of admission, as the movement recommends — or, on the opposite end of the spectrum, that not every supplementary school accepts non-Jewish children up until their bar or bat mitzvah.

Marilyn Feinberg of Kalamazoo, Mich., said non-Jewish children of intermarried families are accepted in her congregation's school without question.

"In adult conversion we educate first, so why not do that with the child?" she

said. "It doesn't make sense to wait until they're 13."



Some delegates wondered if new rabbis coming out of Conservative seminaries would be up-to-date on the more activist approach. Others spoke about their conflicted feelings about attending intermarriages, especially those of friends' children.

Some expressed relief that the keruv initiative seems to give them per-

mission to talk about conversion while still welcoming the intermarried couple.

"It needs some tweaking, but it's a very strong beginning," said Judy Kornblith of Pittsburgh, Pa.

Ed Case, director of InterfaithFamily.com, an outreach group based in Newton, Mass., said he welcomed the keruv initiative, but called its emphasis on conversion as the ultimate goal "disturbing."

"Many couples that are willing to explore and gradually get involved in Jewish life will be deterred if they think or are told that conversion is the synagogue's goal," Case said, adding that "most interfaith families will continue to affiliate with the Reform movement."

That may be true, Conservative leaders say. But the new approach is aimed at welcoming those non-Jews who have married Jews already in Conservative congregations, and focusing attention on the continued social and educational needs of new converts seeking affiliation with Conservative shuls.

"A lot of our young people are intermarried, and we lose almost all of them," said Rabbi Elliot Dorff, rector of the University of Judaism. "I'm not suggesting our rabbis do intermarriages, but we need to find more ways to make them welcome, so their children will be Jews and maybe down the road they'll convert."

The outreach document is called "al ha'derech," or "on the path," an indication that it's not meant to dictate policy but rather suggest a way to guide what the movement is now calling "potential Jews" toward greater Jewish involvement.

"It's a focus, indicating where we'll spend our time and energy," Dorff said. "We should have been doing this 10 years ago." ■

# Estonian community builds shul, and hopes

By YASHA LEVINE

TALLINN, Estonia (JTA) — Estonia's 3,000-person Jewish community has just broken ground on its first new synagogue since Estonia achieved independence from Soviet rule 16 years ago.

"This is a historic moment in which a disrupted link is being restored," said Alexander Bronstein, a major contributor to the project in the capital city of Tallinn. "For more than 60 years there has not been a proper synagogue in Estonia."

The construction project is seen by many as a mark of the cultural and religious rebirth of Estonian Jewry. But others wonder whether the community needs a synagogue at all.

Estonia has the smallest Jewish population of the three Baltic States. Latvia, its closest neighbor, has roughly 15,000 Jews, while Lithuania has 8,000.

Since the fall of communism, however, the Estonian Jewish community has seen an influx of funds and programs from foreign Jewish organizations.

The Jewish Agency for Israel, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and Chabad all run programs in Tallinn, mostly working out of one tightly-packed compound that also contains the Jewish Community Center and the Tallinn Jewish School.

Jewish religious life in Tallinn belongs

to Chabad, which sent Rabbi Shmuel Kot to the city five years ago at the behest of the local Jewish community.

"We had been without a rabbi for over 50 years," said Cilja Laud, head of the country's Jewish community. "The Jewish community is small and could not afford to support a rabbi on its own."

Members of the community contacted Chabad, which sent and pays Kot, who runs a small

synagogue on the second floor of the JCC. He is the only rabbi in Estonia.

A Progressive congregation had a fitful start in Tallinn under the guidance of the World Union

for Progressive Judaism. Though the congregation fell apart as a result of leadership problems, Alex Kagan, Jerusalem's WUPJ representative, says Estonian Jews regularly take part in WUPJ-sponsored seminars in the Baltic region.

Kot spearheaded the building of the new synagogue shortly after his arrival in Tallinn. The synagogue, which is being built next to the JCC, is slated for completion within a year. It will be of a modern, metal-and-glass design but will have a traditional layout — men and women will be seated separately.

The community greeted the project with great fanfare but many still doubt the future of Jewish religious life in Estonia. People are curious about their Jewish identity but community leaders say they may not digest Chabad-Lubavitch's brand of Judaism.

Unlike Latvia or Lithuania, "Estonia never had a Chasidic movement," Elhonen

Saks, a prominent figure in the Jewish community and author of a number of books on Jewish topics in Estonian, told JTA.

"I'm happy that he is here — bless him," he said of Kot. "But if he thinks that all these kids are going to be believers, I have my doubts."

"When I go to a Shabbat service and see 30 people, 28 of whom are over 50, I wonder," said Dmitiri Shmorgan, a recent college graduate who

works as a translator in Tallinn.

Bettina Ferman, a counselor at the Jewish Youth Center, echoes these sentiments. But she does see the possibility for a more secularized though still tradition-oriented Judaism of the type being promoted by the JDC-sponsored youth center, where she is a group leader.

Ferman supports the building of the synagogue and is intrigued by the mikvah it will house.

"I'd like to try it," she said. "I may even go there regularly."

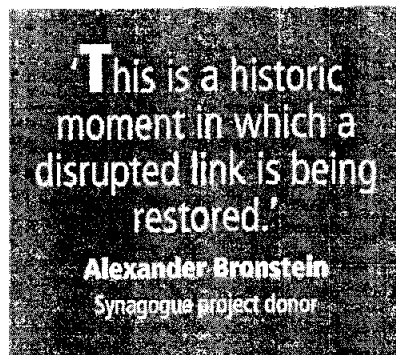
Yet some local Jews believe the synagogue's facilities — specifically the mikvah and kosher kitchen — will not be utilized and are being built only for the rabbi's own family and visiting observant Jews.

On a recent Friday night, for example, only four youths were present at Kot's Shabbat service. But one floor above the synagogue, at a meeting of a youth club at the Jewish Youth Center, more than a dozen kids met to act out humorous skits revolving around Jewish family life.

Despite the increased activity of foreign Jewish organizations in Estonia, Saks notes the country's high rate of intermarriage and worries that in a few decades there will be virtually no Jews left in Estonia. He says it's rare to find people with two Jewish parents.

That's where the JDC hopes its regional activities will come into play.

"To put it crudely, we are widening the marriage pool," said Andres Spokoiny, the Paris-based JDC country director for the Baltic states. "By bringing youth together for regional summer camps and retreats, we are no longer talking about a community of 3,000, but one of 30,000."



ACROSS THE  
FORMER  
SOVIET UNION



Yasha Levine

Rabbi Shmuel Kot, right, and building contributor Alexander Bronstein, left, attend the groundbreaking ceremony of Estonia's new synagogue in September 2005.

# Russian or Estonian? Language signals rift

By YASHA LEVINE

TALLINN, Estonia (JTA) — Parents are pulling their kids out of the Tallinn Jewish School, but not because they don't want them learning about their Jewish heritage.

And it's not because it's expensive — the school, which teaches Hebrew and Jewish history alongside secular courses to students in grades 1-12, receives municipal funding as part of the government's subsidy for cultural minority education.

No, parents say they're pulling their kids because they don't want them studying in Russian, the language of the hated Soviet overlords who dominated this nation for decades.

When the Tallinn Jewish School opened in 1990 in this former Soviet republic, 350 children enrolled for the first year; more than 10 percent of the 3,000 Jews living in the country. This year just 200 children are enrolled, down from last year's class of 250.

Marina Karboinova, the school's vice principal, says only that it's "possible" the recent drop in enrollment is a result of the school's language orientation. But the issue highlights a growing rift within Estonian Jewry that pits Russian speakers against native speakers of the local language.

As in many other former Soviet republics, Estonia's Jewish community is split along linguistic lines. No official statistics are available, but approximately one-third of the Jewish population are descendants of Estonian-speaking Jews who began arriving in the country during the 19th century.

The other two-thirds arrived during Soviet rule, between 1940 and 1990; they're not only relative newcomers, but Russian-speaking ones.

Because the Tallinn Jewish School holds classes exclusively in Russian, "most Estonian-speaking Jews do not send their children there," said Elhonen Saks, author of a number of Estonian-language books on Jewish subjects.

More and more Estonian Jewish parents are sending their children to secular Estonian schools instead. As a result, these children may be missing out on the basics of a Jewish education.

School and community officials are worried about the drop in enrollment.

"It is a problem that the school is trying to solve," said Jevgeni Plink, a member of

the school's board of trustees. "We are trying to develop a new educational program to attract and retain more Jewish students."

The school's dwindling numbers may affect other areas of Jewish life in Estonia, as the school is the main recruitment ground for local Jewish youth organizations. According to counselors from youth clubs sponsored by the Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Agency for Israel, the majority of those who take part in the clubs' activities come from Russian-speaking families.

"This is a major problem for the Jewish community," said Chabad Rabbi Shmuel Kot, 28, Estonia's only resident rabbi. "We need to give language skills to students that will enable them to find a job or receive higher education in Estonia."

Kot believes the Jewish school needs to offer more classes in Estonian, thereby attracting and keeping youth in Estonia and within the Jewish community.

But reforming the school may not be enough to draw youth to Jewish life.

In a time of heightened Estonian nationalism and a resurgence of Estonian-language use among the general population, it might seem problematic for the country's Jewish community to cling to its Russian-language identity.

The name plaques at Dor va Dor, Tallinn's Jewish center, are in Estonian, but the center's day-to-day operations and paperwork are conducted in Russian. The center's newspaper, Hashahar, is printed in Russian, and its Web site, [www.jewish.ee](http://www.jewish.ee), has yet to publish an Estonian version.

Though anti-Soviet sentiment abounds in this new European Union member-state, the Jewish Community Center's veterans' club still celebrates May 9, a Soviet-era holiday marking the official German surrender to the Red Army.

May 9 is officially celebrated in Russia and some other former Soviet republics, but not in any of the Baltic states, including Estonia. The fact that it's celebrated at the JCC may exacerbate the community's outsider status, critics fear.

Cilja Laud, chairwoman of the Jewish



Yasha Levine

Two 12th graders from the Tallinn Jewish School lead a Shabbat service for first graders at Tallinn's Jewish Community Center in November 2005.

Community of Estonia, explained that the JCC's language and cultural practices merely reflect the demographic makeup of those who use it.

"We'd celebrate the Estonian Day of Independence if enough people wanted it," Laud said.

But they apparently do not, as the majority of JCC members are pensioners who benefit from the center's social and welfare programs. They're older, more used to Soviet ways and — more often than not — are of non-Estonian origin.

"Estonian Jews are better integrated into Estonian society — they do not need the help of the Jewish community," school trustee Plink speculated. Unlike the Jews who came to Estonia during the Soviet period, the native Estonian Jews already had well-established social networks and didn't need the community's help to integrate into the fabric of the country.

Though Estonian citizenship requires knowledge of the Estonian language, many members of the Jewish community — some of whom have lived their entire lives in Estonia — do not see a need to learn it.

## ACROSS THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

**We are trying to develop a new educational program to attract and retain more Jewish students.'**

**Jevgeni Plink**  
Tallinn Jewish School trustee

# Acceptance of red diamond helps MDA

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Magen David Adom's longstanding effort to join the International Red Cross and Red Crescent movements has proceeded in fits and starts, so it should have come as no surprise that the latest attempt to clear the major barrier to entry didn't go smoothly.

In the end, though, it was a success: Early Thursday morning, Geneva Convention signatory countries adopted a neutral red diamond as an official protective symbol, to go along with the red cross and red crescent.

The move paves the way for MDA to gain full membership in the International Red Cross after nearly 60 years of exclusion due to opposition from Arab and Islamic countries.

"We are blessing the result and we are very, very encouraged by the achievement," said Reuven Azar, counsel for political affairs at the Israeli Embassy in Washington. "We think that it's a humanitarian issue and it should have been resolved 55 years ago. For political reasons it was prevented, but fortunately we found a way to advance on this."

Daniel Allen, executive vice president of the American Friends of Magen David Adom, called the vote "proof positive that humanitarian concerns can come first, even in matters related to the Middle East."

Syrian opposition nearly scuttled this week's effort. Syria demanded that MDA enter into an agreement with the Syrian Red Crescent Society similar to one MDA signed recently with its Palestinian counterpart concerning how the agencies would

operate in eastern Jerusalem.

Under the pact, in which MDA recognized the Palestinian Red Crescent as the national group in the territories, Palestinian ambulances are guaranteed speedier passage through the West Bank.

With support from some Islamic countries, Syria insisted that the Syrian Red Crescent be allowed to operate in the Golan Heights, which Israel conquered from Syria in the 1967 Six Day War. Participants said the demand was an obvious nonstarter for Israel, which doesn't consider the Golan occupied territory.

As the conference dragged on without consensus, concern grew that the protocol, thought to be a sure thing going into the meeting, might fail. It was Swiss Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey who finally pushed the measure through.

As guardian of the Geneva Conventions, Switzerland had hoped the measure wouldn't have to come to a vote: The Red Cross traditionally makes decisions by consensus, giving the appearance of unanimity.

However, after three days of intensive negotiations — in which Switzerland and Pakistan often acted as intermediaries for the feuding nations — it finally became clear that there simply was not unanimity, though there was the two-thirds majority needed to pass the measure.

Calmy-Rey finally put the issue to a vote at 2 a.m. Thursday. It passed 98-27, with 10 abstentions.

The MDA will continue to use the red Star of David when operating in Israel. When working abroad, MDA personnel will display the star inside the red diamond.

Jewish groups welcomed adoption of the red diamond and hoped that the development would lead to the MDA's full membership in the international organization.

A spokesman for U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said Annan was "delighted" by the decision and "hopes in particular that it will open the way for societies that are not yet formally part of the movement, such as the Israeli Magen David Adom, to be admitted as full members."

Adam Ereli, the U.S. State Department spokesman, called the decision a "historic

and significant" step toward "meeting the movement's goal of being truly universal."

Arab opposition has shut Israel out of the organization for decades. The Jewish state's candidacy was rejected during the 1949 Geneva Conventions, which insisted that new aid groups adopt the Red Cross emblem.

Among the major stumbling blocks has been Arab and Muslim states' refusal to accept the Star of David, arguing that the official symbols couldn't be changed — though the conventions indeed were changed to include the Islamic red crescent.

Backers of Israel had believed that the protocol would be approved easily this year. But trouble began on the first day of the conference when Syria — which demanded a deal like the Palestinians' — made clear it wasn't ready to move forward.

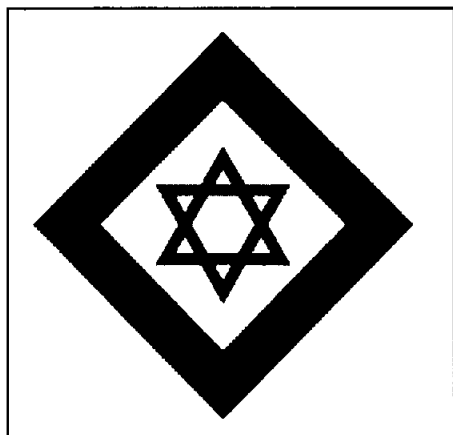
That set off three days of negotiations and sparked a series of proposed amendments from the Organization of the Islamic Conference that would, for example, have removed any mention of MDA from the measure.

Jewish officials commended the Swiss role in pushing through the red diamond, and said Pakistan's role as a facilitator was notable.

"They continued to be of help at a time when a number of Arab and Islamic states wanted to really turn this into an issue, using Syria's Golan issue as a pretext to challenge Israel's fundamental right to be treated as an equal nation," said Shai Franklin, director of international organizations for the World Jewish Congress.

A conference to admit MDA to the international movement is expected sometime in 2006. If accepted, MDA would be eligible to request funds from the international movement and would have access to training, information and forums from which it's now excluded.

"We are really thrilled by what happened," said Deborah Goldberg, spokeswoman for the American Red Cross, which since 2000 has withheld dues to the international body to protest Israel's exclusion. "It's a great day for MDA, but it's also a great day for the movement."



MDA/BP Images

The new crystal with a red Magen David Adom inside it as adopted by the Red Cross in Geneva on Dec. 7.



## FIRST PERSON

Recent oleh finds  
costs add up  
fast for newlyweds

By JONATHAN UDREN

**J**ERUSALEM (JTA) — After two years of single life in Israel, I looked forward to the new perspectives that marriage would bring to my Israeli immigrant experience.

I knew that the normal adjustments from bachelorhood were inevitable.

But I never imagined that marriage would force me to re-experience the entire immigration process.

My initiation began the day after our wedding in Pittsburgh, which was also the day before our flight to Israel. We sat in Dena's family's basement all night packing (I should say cramming) the majority of her personal items into four giant duffle bags.

But when we got to the check-in counter, three of the five were overweight. We worked frantically, exchanging the heavier items for lighter ones.

After twenty minutes of labor, every bag was about five pounds overweight, an amount the clerk was willing to overlook. But that was nothing compared to the work that awaited us upon arrival. While Dena filled out paperwork in the absorption office, I had the task of locating and dragging each enormous bag off the conveyer belt and loading it onto the cart.

We then had to load the five bags into a cab and, once in Jerusalem, carry them up four flights of stairs to our temporary apartment.

Since I previously had lived in a furnished apartment, the only household items I owned were a microwave, assorted plates and pieces of silverware, a pot for boiling pasta and a pan for frying eggs.

Over the next several weeks we tracked down all the necessary household items, some from Janglo, a kind of Craig's List for English speakers in Jerusalem.

Maybe the life changes that I'm experiencing have more to do with marriage in general than aliyah.

It may be that the only difference between my newly married friends in the United States and me is that I'm learning these lessons in Israel. But, that detail makes it all even more worthwhile to us.

## Narnia film raises questions

By JOE ESKENAZI  
*J. the Jewish news weekly of  
Northern California*

SAN FRANCISCO (JTA) — A potential mega-blockbuster film, financed by a fervent Christian and bursting with Christian overtones, is being mass-marketed to — guess who? — Christians.

Church groups are buying up whole theater showings just like Daddy Warbucks did for Annie. Advance screenings are being held for pastors and ministers, who have given the film their blessing, literally. Catholic publishing companies are putting out companion guides.

And the Jewish community is ... well, no one knows quite what to think.

That's because the film in question isn't

Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ." It's "The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe," the special-effects laden adaptation of British author C.S. Lewis' classic 1950 children's book.

The \$250 million film, which opens Dec. 9, was produced by the owner of the San Francisco Examiner, the right-wing evangelical billionaire Philip Anschutz, who also owns Walden Media. Walt Disney Co. also helped, especially on the distribution end. In fact, many of the same firms that so successfully recruited whole congregations to attend showings of "The Passion" have been contracted again for "Lion."

The re-oiling and firing up of the machinery that pulled Christians into theaters and made "The Passion" a huge hit, as well as "Lion's" Christian overtones, have given some Jews reservations.

Rabbi Judah Dardik was hooked on "Lion" when he read it years ago as a day-school student. He borrowed the entire series from his older sister and devoured them.

It was only years later that he was told it was steeped in Christian allegories. He was "surprised and embarrassed I hadn't realized. I felt duped," Dardik said.

Rereading the series, he saw more and more allegories and could never appreciate the books as mere fiction again. Now he

sees them as theology — beautifully written theology.

"Should Jewish children see this movie or read the books? I'm unsure. My personal jury is still out," said Dardik, the spiritual leader of Beth Jacob Congregation in Oakland, Calif. "I read them ... clearly it didn't affect my personal theology."

He added, "I haven't seen the movie, but I wouldn't be surprised if they fleshed out the Christianity a bit more to be satisfying to the Christian audience. That's the part that's most disconcerting to me. I also have concerns about the marketing. Hollywood has a way of being very in-your-face."

Like Gibson, Anschutz is a figure who makes many wary. Walden Media in recent years began creating Christian-friendly

films short on sexual content or profanity — drug abuse and philandering were trimmed from last year's Ray Charles biopic "Ray," for example.

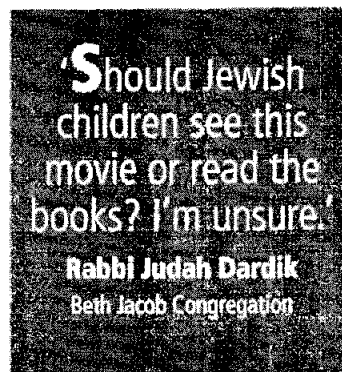
Anschutz also is an outspoken evangelical, who was attracted to the Narnia tales for the same reason others in the business were repelled — its Christian messages.

But "Lion" is no "Passion." Compared to the extremely negative reaction "Passion" garnered from Jewish organizations before, during and after its release, the marketing of Christian allegory as popular entertainment in "Lion" has created hardly a ripple.

The story is based on a book many people read as children, only to learn later that "Lion" and the six other books in Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia series were full of Christian allegories.

The latent nature of "Lion's" Christian message, and the fact that one can be completely oblivious yet still enjoy the story, allows the film's producers to promote "Lion" on two levels: one method for avowedly Christian audiences and one for everyone else.

While the uplifting Christian message is pitched to pastors and church groups, the theatrical trailer features a dazzling array of special effects created by Peter Jackson's WETA — the company the New Zealand-based director founded to tackle "Lord of the Rings" — and huge battle scenes.



## NEWS IN BRIEF

### MIDDLE EAST

#### Soldier slain at checkpoint

An Israeli soldier was stabbed to death at a checkpoint near Jerusalem. The Palestinian who carried out Thursday's attack at the Kalandia checkpoint between Jerusalem and Ramallah was taken into custody.

#### Air strike kills 2

Israel killed two Palestinians militants Thursday in a targeted killing in the Gaza Strip.

An Israeli air force missile struck a house in the northern Gaza Strip, killing Ayad Nagar and Ziyad Qaddas, militants from the Al-Aksa Brigades, and wounding six others, Palestinian sources told Ha'aretz.

The sources said the attack interrupted a meeting between high-ranking members of the Brigades, the terrorist wing of the Palestinians' ruling Fatah movement.

#### Trump eyeing Netanya

Donald Trump reportedly plans to build a luxury residential complex in Israel. Ma'ariv reported Thursday that Trump was in talks with the municipality of Netanya to build a 2,500-room hotel complex and a series of 20-story apartment towers in the coastal city.

### NORTH AMERICA

#### Schorsch proposes free Jewish education

Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, outgoing chancellor of the Conservative movement's Jewish Theological Seminary, proposed free Jewish education for every child whose family belongs to a JCC or synagogue of any denomination.

Announcing his proposal Thursday at the end of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism's biennial convention in Boston, Schorsch described it as a strategy to combat the Jewish community's growing attrition rate. Every Jewish child has a "birthright to a serious Jewish education," Schorsch said, provided the family affiliates with some denomination.

#### Israel travel bill passes House

The U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation preventing companies from denying life insurance to people who travel to Israel.

The Life Insurance Fairness for Travelers Act passed the House on Wednesday as part of the extension of the Terrorism Risk Insurance Act.

Introduced by Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-Fla.), the bill says companies must make available coverage that does not preclude legal foreign travel, and also restricts premiums for such travel.

#### House approves Bahrain free trade

The U.S. House of Representatives approved a free trade agreement with Bahrain that requires the Persian Gulf country to end its boycott of Israel.

Negotiated by U.S. Trade Representative Rob Portman, the agreement sets a precedent that makes free trade with the United States conditional on trade with Israel.

The House bill, which passed Wednesday 327-95, requires the administration to report back to the House each year on Bahrain's progress in dismantling its primary, secondary and tertiary boycotts of Israel.

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee lobbied hard for the bill.

#### Anti-Semitic leaflets in Maryland

Anti-Semites targeted homes in Annapolis, Md., with crude flyers suggesting that Jews control America.

At least three neighborhoods in Maryland's capital received the

flyers, which were wrapped up like newspapers and left on lawns Saturday morning. "Join the United States Army and Fight for Israel," one sheet read; a comic book story drawn in the style of Robert Crumb was called "When the Goddamn Jews Take Over America."

#### Congress: Elect Hamas, lose funds

Sponsors of a resolution to ban terrorist groups from Palestinian elections said Congress could withhold funds to the Palestinians if Hamas joins the government.

The bipartisan resolution in the U.S. House of Representatives, which is likely to come to a vote in the next two weeks, says that including Hamas or any other terrorist group in the Palestinian government "will inevitably raise serious policy considerations for the United States, potentially undermining the continued ability of the United States to provide financial assistance for and conduct normal relations with the Palestinian Authority."

#### Lingle visits Schneerson grave site

Hawaii's Jewish governor said a prayer at the grave site of the last Lubavitcher rebbe. Gov. Linda Lingle, a Republican, took time off during an official visit to New York on Wednesday to visit the Queens grave site of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson.

"She's very involved with Chabad in Hawaii," Rabbi Itchel Krasniansky, the Chabad representative in Hawaii, told JTA. "On a personal level, she's developed a strong relationship with her Judaism."

#### Anti-Jewish lawyer loses license

Ohio's supreme court permanently revoked the license of a lawyer known for his attacks on Cleveland's Jewish community.

The court revoked Michael Troy Watson's license because he continued to practice law after his license was suspended in 2002. Watson once hosted a Cleveland radio show that often spewed vitriol at Jews.

### WORLD

#### Ukrainian shul attacked

Several windows were shattered in an attack on a historic Ukrainian synagogue. Vandals threw stones early Wednesday at the shul in Dnepropetrovsk where Levi-Yitzhok Schneerson, father of the last Lubavitcher rebbe, was a rabbi before World War II. The shul now houses a Chabad boarding school for boys.

#### Ukraine Jew appointed governor

A Jewish leader was appointed governor of one of Ukraine's key industrial regions.

Yevgeny Chervonenko, an aide to President Viktor Yushenko and a former Cabinet member, was appointed Thursday as governor of the Zaporozhye region, which has one of the largest concentrations of industrial facilities in the country.

Chervonenko, 46, is a vice-president of the United Jewish Community of Ukraine umbrella group, and a vice-president of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress.

#### German soccer team repents

A German soccer team apologized on behalf of fans who unfurled an anti-Semitic banner at a game Monday.

The banner featured the word "Juden," or Jews, with the letter D emphasized as a slur against the Dynamo Dresden team. The image was broadcast live on German television. Germany's soccer scene is under increasing scrutiny as the country prepares to host the World Cup next summer.