

IN THE NEWS

Suicide bombing strikes Tel Aviv

At least 15 people were wounded in a suicide bombing in Tel Aviv.

The only fatality was the bomber. Islamic Jihad claimed responsibility for the attack, which occurred Thursday afternoon.

[Story, Pg.2]

FBI interviews Palestinian pollster

FBI agents interviewed a Palestinian pollster with links to Jewish institutions about his conversations with a man accused of ties to Islamic Jihad.

Khalil Shikaki, who heads the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research in Ramallah, is affiliated with Brandeis University and has addressed the American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

He told JTA on Thursday that FBI agents contacted him in 2003 and showed him transcripts of his 1995 conversations with Sameeh Hammoudeh, who was acquitted last month in a Florida court of charges that he helped fund the Palestinian terrorist group.

Shikaki told JTA that the conversations concerned funds for an orphanage in the West Bank town of Nablus run by his in-laws, and that the FBI never contacted him again.

Some critics charge that "orphans" was a euphemism for terrorists.

An FBI spokesman refused to comment on the matter.

Israel renews U.S. aid request

Israel renewed its request for special U.S. aid in funding the Gaza Strip withdrawal.

Shimon Peres, who is visiting Washington this week as emissary for Acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, raised the issue of the special grant in talks with U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice.

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WORLD REPORT

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Jews take security into own hands after Russian synagogues attacked

By LEV KRICHEVSKY

MOSCOW (JTA) — In the wake of two recent attacks on Russian synagogues, Jewish officials have announced initiatives aimed at increasing security at the country's Jewish institutions.

The initiatives come after two incidents last week: In one, an attacker left eight people wounded at a Moscow synagogue; in the other, a synagogue attack was prevented in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don.

The incidents have raised the issue of who's responsible for security at Russian Jewish sites: While most Jewish groups are taking security into their own hands, at least one prominent Russian Jewish leader believes the government and police should take charge of the issue.

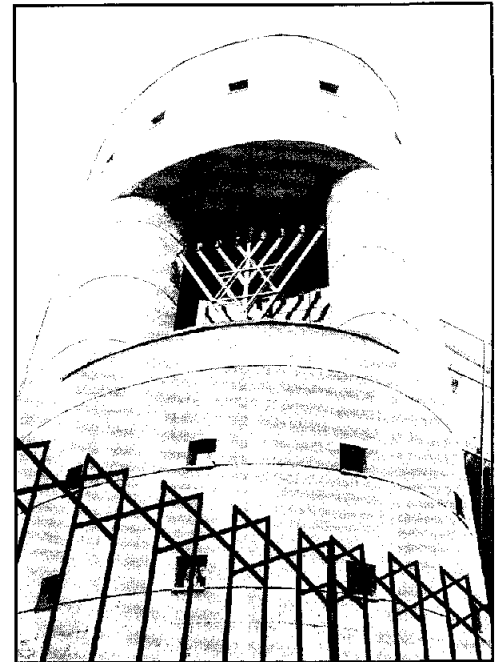
The Federation of Jewish Communities, Russia's largest Jewish organization in charge of most of the country's synagogues, has announced the launch of Magen David, a Jewish security fund.

The group has called on its supporters in Russia and abroad to raise donations toward providing 24-hour security for its institutions and synagogues across Russia.

This week, Berel Lazar, one of Russia's two chief rabbis and a federation leader, sent a letter to the heads of Russia's Jewish communities, asking them to take greater care of the security issues of their institutions including synagogues, schools and community centers.

Currently, Russian Jewish institutions hire private companies to provide security; only a handful of synagogues can boast of more advanced security systems.

Usually, most Jewish institutions have



Andrey Yashin

Moscow's Bolshaya Bronnaya Synagogue, the site of a Jan. 11 stabbing incident that injured eight people.

ACROSS THE FORMER SOVIET UNION

only unarmed security personnel at the doors, similar to what most public places — including supermarkets, restaurants or movie theaters — have in Russia.

Following last week's attacks, Lazar met with leaders of Russian law enforcement agencies, including the Russian minister of internal affairs and the head of the Moscow police.

According to the federation, the issue of "strengthening the state's role in providing for the safety of the Jewish community" was

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Following attacks on two Russian synagogues, Jews step up security measures

Continued from page 1
discussed in these meetings.

In his letter to the Jewish community leaders, Lazar mentioned that police in most Western European countries provide round-the-clock patrolling of Jewish religious and community buildings.

But it remains unclear whether the Jewish community can count on police force or government funds in dealing with security matters.

While many government officials condemned the stabbing incident in Moscow on Jan. 11, none spoke publicly of a possibility to get police involved in helping Jews to cope with their security concerns.

In the meantime, the federation said the funds it is raising will go toward the purchase and installation of metal doors, metal detectors, panic buttons and cameras for video observation.

Another Russian Jewish umbrella group, the Congress of Jewish Religious Communities and Organizations, is also going to call on its constituents to raise funds to improve security measures at its provincial synagogues and Jewish institutions.

But a leading figure in the country's Jewish community criticized these steps, saying the community should demand that the state takes appropriate measures to protect it.

"It all sounds like an internal police force is being created," Vyacheslav "Moshe" Kantor, president of the Russian Jewish Congress, told a news conference Tuesday, referring to the Magen David Foundation.

Kantor said the Jewish organizations should not try to substitute for police.

"The most we should do is to monitor the situation. Protection of the citizens,

including Jews, is not a corporate task; this is a national task. As citizens and taxpayers we can demand protection," Kantor said, adding though that "the authorities themselves will never do anything unless we demand it."

Aside from security measures, Kantor believes there must be a national program to fight xenophobia.

In particular, he said, there should be a particular emphasis on teaching the history of the Holocaust.

"What happened in our synagogues is a direct result of tragic forgetfulness," he said.

"It is not enough to install security equipment in the synagogues," he said. "We should learn how to work with our youth, especially from problem groups and problem regions."

But other leaders contest that while this may be a long-term priority, the Jewish community should learn how to protect itself right now.

With this in mind, another group is going to launch a program that will teach self-defense techniques to local Jewish communities.

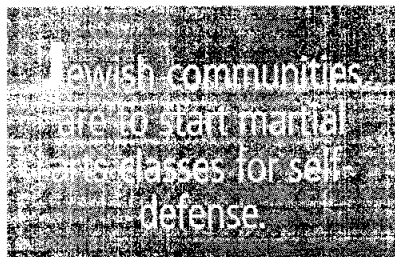
The program has found an unlikely home: the Institute for Jewish Studies, a Moscow-based institution associated with Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, an Israeli scholar best known for his translations of the Talmud into modern Hebrew, English and Russian and for his efforts to spread Jewish knowledge into smaller communities across the former Soviet Union.

The project will be a combination of martial arts, psychological training and Jewish values, explained David Palant, director of the Institute for Jewish Studies.

The institute's project, also called Magen David, will seek to prepare some two

dozen trainers from local communities, who after a year-long program in Moscow will start self-defense courses in their communities.

Palant described the core idea behind this train-a-trainer project as a "mix of Eastern martial arts and Jewish spirituality."



Suicide bombing shakes Israelis

By DAN BARON AND DINA KRAFT

TEL AVIV (JTA) — Palestinian terrorism has reared its head once more, in an 11th-hour test of Mahmoud Abbas' statesmanship.

An Islamic Jihad suicide bomber who blew himself up Thursday in downtown Tel Aviv failed to cause massive carnage, but managed to deal another blow to the peacemaking credibility of the Palestinian Authority.

The bombing, which killed the bomber and injured at least 15 — most of them lightly — disrupted the calm of late afternoon in Tel Aviv.

The blood of the suicide bomber was smeared in streaks on the shwarma stand's tiled wall just a few inches away from skewers of roasting meat.

On the ground baguettes were strewn alongside broken glass and toppled bar stools.

The bomber had chosen a popular stand in south Tel Aviv as his target, near an open-air fruit and vegetable market frequented by working-class Israelis and foreign workers.

Abbas, who has long argued that Palestinian terrorism could be tamed through political engagement, condemned the bombing, and said its real target was next week's parliamentary election in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

"This operation aimed to ruin the Palestinian election and scupper the steps that the Palestinian Authority is taking to return security and calm to its territories," Abbas said.

But Israel has long accused the Palestinian Authority president of taking insufficient steps by refusing to crack down on terrorist groups as required by the U.S.-led "road map" for peace.

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Hamas, Fatah vie in Palestinian elections

By GIL SEDAN

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinian elections, set for Wednesday are mainly seen as a race between the ruling Fatah party and the fundamentalist terrorist group Hamas, which is running for the first time in general elections.

Some 1.34 million Palestinians are to go to the polls to elect 132 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council. The general elections are the Palestinian Authority's first in 10 years and originally were scheduled to take place in summer 2005, but were postponed.

Around a dozen lists are to run, though recent polls indicate that some 75 percent of the vote will be split by Fatah and Hamas.

Hamas, labeled by Israel and the U.S. as a terrorist group, is known for its social and charity programs in the Palestinian territories — as well as its spectacular attacks on Israel — and did well in last year's municipal elections. Long opposed to Israel's existence, Hamas' recent public statements have been slightly less categorical.

Fatah, the ruling party of P.A. President Mahmoud Abbas and his predecessor, Yasser Arafat, has dealt with internal problems, almost splitting in late December over its party list. Certain factors, including a large increase in the Parliament's size and a change in the style of the elections, have brought Fatah's internal tensions to the fore.

The elections are seen as a confidence vote on the leadership of Abbas, elected a year ago following Arafat's death. Abbas has not made visible progress on major Palestinian goals, such as reaching a peace agreement with Israel that would lead to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, securing Israel's release of Palestinian prisoners who took part in terrorist attacks, raising international financial support to help the ailing P.A. economy recover and reducing widespread corruption.

Abbas also has failed to curb the internecine violence that has plagued P.A.-controlled areas, with the P.A. security forces fighting armed militias, violent gangs vying for influence and Fatah facing off against its competitors.

Conflict also exists within Fatah,

between its younger and older generations. The Old Guard, led by P.A. Prime Minister Ahmed Qurei, accompanied Arafat through the long years of political exile. The Young Guard is comprised of local leaders such as Mohammed Dahlan and jailed Tanzim head Marwan Barghouti, and has been active in the armed struggle against Israel.

Fatah officially accepts Israel's existence and is pushing for a Palestinian state alongside the Jewish state, but it maintains an armed wing — and a fierce internal debate rages in the party over whether attacks on Israel are acceptable.

Hamas will run on a ticket of "change and reform." However, many candidates vow publicly to continue attacks on Israel. Gaza Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar told The New York Times last week that his faction will not recognize Israel or disarm, even if it wins the elections.

Other Hamas leaders have made slightly softer public announcements. Sheik Mohammed Abu Tir, No. 2 on Hamas' national list, did not rule out negotiations with Israel, saying Hamas has adopted "new rules to the game."

The party's political manifesto is one of the most moderate documents the organization has published since its establishment. Unlike Hamas' 1988 charter, which denies Israel's right to exist and says its land is part of the Islamic trust, or Wakf, the new platform suffices with a general demand for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital — the same election slogan used by Fatah and the PLO.

The manifesto does call, however, for the right to use "all means" to put an end to occupation, implement the "right of return" that the Palestinians demand for millions of refugees and make Islamic legislation the source of P.A. legislation.

Thanks to Hamas demands, the electoral system has changed. Previously, each of 10 districts voted for representatives, whose numbers were decided by the district's population size. Hamas pushed for a national vote with a proportional system, similar to the Israeli one.

The result is a compromise: The number of members of Parliament was increased from 88 to 132, half of whom will be elected in the regional system, and half in a national proportional system. The new system created a special challenge for Fatah, forcing it to form a list for the national half of the elections.

This brought to the surface the struggle between the Young Guard and the Old Guard. Ultimately, it was agreed that Fatah's list on the national ballot will be headed by Barghouti — who is serving five life terms in an Israeli jail for his role in terrorist attacks — and will include mostly new young and relatively unknown candidates.

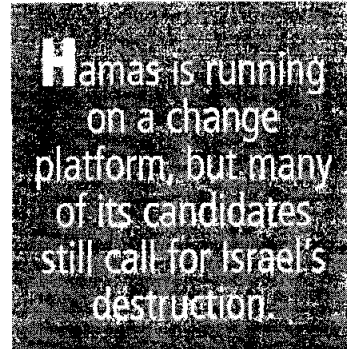
In the current 88-person Parliament, Fatah holds 68 seats, secular non-affiliated parties hold 12 seats, Islamic non-affiliated parties hold seven seats and one seat is held by the Palestinian Democratic Union.

In the upcoming elections, Fatah is fielding 111 candidates and Hamas 115. Other lists include "The Third Road," headed by outgoing Finance Minister Salam Fayyad and lawmaker Hanan Ashrawi; "Independent Palestine," headed by human rights activist Dr. Mustafa Barghouti, who won 18 percent of the vote in the presidential race against Abbas last year; the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, headed by Ahmad Sa'adat, who is being held in a Palestinian prison for his role in the assassination of Israeli Cabinet Minister Rehavam Ze'evi; and Badil, a leftist movement.

Abbas wanted to postpone the elections, but bowed to American pressure and Hamas threats of violence.

Israel threatened to ban voting in eastern Jerusalem but it, too, has bowed to American pressure and will allow Palestinians there to vote. However, Hamas will not be allowed to campaign in Jerusalem, and Israeli police detained three Islamist activists for staging an election meeting there.

According to the latest poll by Birzeit University, Fatah is projected to win with 35 percent of the vote, Hamas will gain 30 percent, and Independent Palestine will win about 6 percent. Some 21 percent of voters are still undecided.



**BACK-
GRINDER**

Female mohels make their mark

By SUE FISHKOFF

WALNUT CREEK, Calif. (JTA) — When Dr. Debra Weiss-Ishai watched her son's brit milah two years ago, she thought to herself, I could do this better.

Not just technically, although as a pediatrician she had done numerous medical circumcisions. She felt she could bring a warmth and spiritual beauty to the ritual in ways her old-school mohel, who she says "rushed through" the ceremony, did not.

Last April Weiss-Ishai completed the Reform movement's Berit Mila Program, an intensive 35-hour certification course for physicians and nurse-midwives at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles. She now has performed seven or eight Jewish ritual circumcisions in the San Francisco Bay area.

Weiss-Ishai spends hours preparing for each brit milah, working with the family to make sure the ceremony fits their needs, determining the level of Hebrew they want, incorporating friends and relatives and personalizing it with readings and poetry.

Doing this work is her way of helping to ensure Jewish continuity, she says.

"There are so many unaffiliated Jews in the Bay Area, and I may be the first Jewish professional they meet," she says. "Their experience can make them want to participate more in the Jewish community, or it can really turn them off. If

you're not sensitive to that, you can turn someone away from raising their kids Jewish."

Weiss-Ishai is one of just a few female mohels in the United States. There are about 35 Reform female mohels, and just four trained by the U.S. Conservative movement, as well as a handful who learned outside the United States.

It's not surprising that throughout Jewish history, mohels have been men. Circumcision is, after all, a guy thing. Beyond the obvious

anatomical requirements, it's something the Torah commands a father, not a mother, to do for his son on the eighth day of life.

What is surprising, however, is that while half of all new non-Orthodox rabbis and cantors in this country are women, few women are choosing to become mohels.

Yet unlike rabbis and cantors, there is no halachic prohibition against female mohels. Every Orthodox authority consulted for this story agreed on that point, though most asked not to be quoted.

Jewish law states only that if a Jewish male is present, it's preferable that he do the brit milah.

"It's a custom, a strong custom, but there's no law except that the mohel be Jewish," says Rabbi Donni Aaron, direc-

tor of the Reform Berit Mila Program. "People assume it's not according to halachah, but they just haven't encountered it. Some people think it's a man's job, that it just feels weird" for a woman to do a brit milah.

Unlike physicians, mohels in this country are not regulated, and technically, anyone can act as mohel if the parents trust him or her to perform the operation

on their infant son. Traditionally it's been a profession passed on from father to son; even today, Orthodox and many Conservative mohels learn by apprenticing with a senior mohel, usually in Israel.

The Reform and Conservative movements set up their training programs because there were so few traditionally trained mohels available to serve the non-Orthodox community.

The non-Orthodox movements, especially the Reform, needed their own mohels since Orthodox mohels generally are reluctant to circumcise the son of a non-Jewish mother.

The Reform program, which has trained about 300 mohels since it began in 1984, and the Conservative Brit Kodesh program, which has trained about 75, both accept only physicians or nurse-midwives who already are experts in medical circumcision. The programs teach them the relevant halachah, rituals, and textual background to perform a Jewish brit milah.

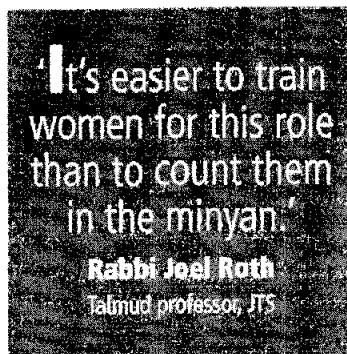
The training is similar, though Conservative mohels generally won't circumcise the son of a non-Jewish mother unless the parents intend to convert the child.

Rabbi Joel Roth, a professor of Talmud and Jewish law at the Jewish Theological Seminary, says there was no problem admitting women to the Conservative program, which is run jointly by JTS and the Conservative movement's Rabbinical Assembly.

"We considered it, we deliberated it and then we said, frankly it's easier to train women for this role than to count them in the minyan," Roth recalls. "We know it hasn't been done historically, but there's no earthly reason why we shouldn't."

Dr. Lillian Schapiro, an OB-GYN in Atlanta, decided to become a mohel nine years ago at the suggestion of one of her patients, a female rabbi.

There were no Reform mohels in the Atlanta area, Schapiro says, and many Reform couples were having their sons circumcised in the hospital, with just a naming ceremony the following week.



FOCUS ON ISSUES



Dr. Lillian Schapiro, left, performs the brit milah ceremony of Brody Weiss in January 2004 in Atlanta, as parents Mike Weiss and Heather Kotler look on.

"It wasn't kosher," she states.

Female mohels say that as physicians, they feel comfortable doing circumcisions, and want to bring a Jewish aspect to what they already are doing.

Dr. April Rubin, an OB-GYN in Washington, had been doing circumcisions for more than 20 years when she became more observant. Two years ago she completed the Conservative Brit Kodesh program, and has since done about 70 britei milah.

Some traditionally trained mohels look askance at these physician-mohels.

"They really don't have a very solid background in the halachah; they're physicians who want a sideline in brit milah, and I feel that's unfortunate," says Rabbi Paul Silton, a Conservative rabbi in Albany, N.Y., who apprenticed with an Orthodox mohel in Jerusalem.

The Conservative program requires applicants to be practicing members of Conservative congregations, and ritually observant. The Reform program requires applicants to belong to any congregation, Reform or not, but makes no stipulations about ritual observance.

Some people choose a female mohel because of her gender, like Bay Area resident Nicole Sorger, who asked Weiss-Ishai to circumcise her son last November.

"The idea of having an old bearded man was disconcerting, not being very religious," Sorger admits. Having Weiss-Ishai do the ceremony "broke up the idea of it being a male event, a patriarchal celebration. It made the ceremony so much more accessible to me."

Dr. Laurie Radovsky, a Conservative mohel in St. Paul, Minn., circumcised her son 11 years ago in rural Wisconsin because no mohels lived nearby. Nine years later, she became a mohel herself.

Her male rabbi told her that women bring "a gentleness, a sensitivity" to the ceremony, but she says there are other advantages.

"First, I don't have a penis," she says. "With men, when you talk about circumcison, there's an instinctive protecting of the genitals. I'm a little more thick-skinned. And as a mother, I can empathize with that mother's feelings and tenderness toward that child. I can reassure her, perhaps more than a male mohel can."

At the end of every brit milah, "sometimes surreptitiously," Radovsky says, she kisses the baby's head to welcome him into the Jewish community.

"I really feel I can make a difference in the world," she says.

Texts, individual precedent leave room for female mohels

By SUE FISHKOFF

WALNUT CREEK, Calif. (JTA) — Jewish law does not forbid a woman from serving as mohel, although it seems to be discouraged.

Rabbi Daniel Korobkin of Kehillat Yavneh in Los Angeles points to Yoreh De'ah 264:1 in the Shulchan Aruch.

"Two opinions are brought," he says, one that says a bris done by a woman is kosher, and one that says it's not.

"But both agree that whenever a Jewish male is available, a woman should not be used," he concludes.

That preference for a male has, over time, become custom that assumed the force of law. It's the way things are done: In Orthodox circles, a brit milah takes place in the presence of a minyan, or group of 10 Jewish men. Women often stay in a separate room during the ceremony, or in a part of the main room separated by a mechitzah, and join the men afterwards.

Throughout history, however, when a male mohel was not available women have stepped in. One prominent Orthodox rabbi, who declined to be named, spoke of an Orthodox woman physician who circumcised boys while visiting the former Soviet Union, and of a nurse who performed ritual circumcisions in post-World War II Europe. There are many other such cases, he added.

Mohels are accepted by popular acclaim of the community, not by admission into any professional organization.

"First, you apprentice with a mohel and learn the practice and all the laws," explains Rabbi Moshe Krupka, programming director for the Orthodox Union. "Then you conduct milah under the supervision of an accepted mohel."

Naturally, the first job is the hardest to get, he notes. Who wants their kid to be a young mohel's first effort?

The community acceptance involved in becoming a mohel effectively has kept women out of the business.

But there is biblical precedent for women mohels in the story of Moses' wife, Zipporah, who circumcises their son.

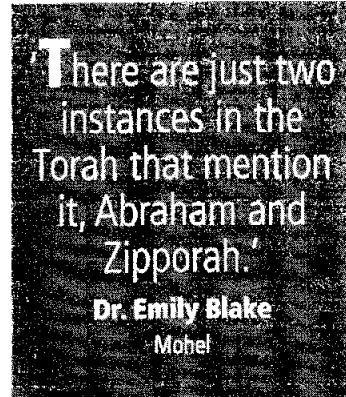
Whether or not Zipporah actually completed the act, or had a male relative take over, as some Orthodox commentaries suggest, the fact that she took it upon herself to make sure the mitzvah was fulfilled is pointed to as compelling support for the position that women may act as mohels.

Dr. Emily Blake, a female mohel in Nyack, N.Y., who belongs to the Reconstructionist minyan at the Germantown Jewish Center in Philadelphia,

says many people ask whether it's alright for a woman to perform their baby's brit milah.

"I tell them there are just two instances in the Torah that mention it, Abraham and Zipporah," she says. One involves a male mohel, the other a woman.

"So the way I look at it, 50 percent of mohelim should be women," she says.



Sue Fishkoff

Dr. Debra Weiss-Ishai, a pediatrician in Walnut Creek, Calif., became a Reform mohel in April 2005.

Lesser-known Jewish thinker gets day in sun

By CHANAN TIGAY

NEW YORK (JTA) — Emmanuel Levinas studied under Heidegger, informed the work of Sartre and was a close colleague of Derrida. His philosophy has been praised by Pope John Paul II, cited by Vaclav Havel and recommended by Elie Wiesel.

So why does the influential French Jewish philosopher remain relatively unknown outside Europe when compared to his teachers and colleagues?

It may have to do with the fact that Levinas' contribution involved a departure from prior traditions, meaning that grappling with his work requires deep knowledge of the major theories that preceded him, namely ontology and epistemology.

"It does, really, require an astonishing level of knowledge — from Hegel to the major exponents of German phenomenology, Husserl and his student Heidegger," said Peter Gordon, a professor of modern European intellectual history at Harvard University. "In Levinas' writing in particular, much of that knowledge is presupposed, and the references to that prior tradition are sometimes only implicitly stated."

Since his death a decade ago, study of Levinas' work has grown steadily in the United States, Israel and elsewhere. Now it's getting a new boost on the 100th anniversary of his birth.

A conference this week in Jerusalem is launching "A Century With Levinas," a series of nearly 20 events over the course of 2006 focusing on the major facets of Levinas' work.

The series is being sponsored by the Association for the Commemoration of the Centenary of Emmanuel Levinas, the Levinas Ethical Legacy Foundation and the Centre Raissa et Emmanuel Levinas. Nine other Levinas conferences unaffiliated with the "Century" series are being held worldwide.

Levinas' influence — and the Jewish angle some say he brought to his work — will be discussed and debated from France to Israel to Lithuania to China. Admirers say it's about time.

"It's a paradox that it took so much time for him to be known here" in Israel, said Joelle Hansel, a professor of philosophy and Jewish thought at the Hebrew

University of Jerusalem who is married to Levinas' grandson. "The decisive fact was when he started to be translated into Hebrew" 10 years ago.

Born in Lithuania in 1906, Levinas studied as a young man with Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger and later developed a philosophy of his own that holds as its core principle the "infinite responsibility for the Other."

After Heidegger joined the Nazi Party in 1933, Levinas began what Gordon called "a laborious process of distancing his own philosophy from Heidegger's." He eventually came to regard his teacher's philosophy as "suffering from a kind of moral autism," Gordon said.

FOCUS ON ISSUES

Convinced, along with Derrida, that his predecessors had focused too narrowly on epistemology, the study of the nature of knowledge, and ontology, the study of the nature of reality, Levinas shifted gears, developing a philosophy that emphasized ethics instead.

"Levinas is best known for a radically ethically based philosophic program," said Rabbi Ira Stone, who has taught philosophy at the Jewish Theological Seminary and has lectured widely on Levinas.

"Essentially he insists that the first philosophy, that is the first question that we have and the first answer we have to give philosophically, is to do with ethics," said Stone, spiritual leader of Philadelphia's Temple Beth Zion-Beth Israel. "The question is really not 'To be, or not to be?' The question is 'Why be good?'"

Levinas' answer was that "to be human is already to find yourself bound by a responsibility to the Other," Gordon said. "That responsibility cannot be undone because it is the very foundation of one's own being."

Levinas volunteered for the French Army when World War II broke out. He was taken prisoner in 1940 and spent several years at forced labor. His religious observance deepened after the war, Hansel said, and, among other traditions he kept, Levinas put on tefillin daily.

Levinas didn't expect others to live up to his ethical standards.

"He always maintained that the radical ethics he speaks of is something he takes on personally, but he doesn't view other people as obligated under these ethics," said Ari Knoll, who sits on the board of directors of the Levinas Ethical Legacy Foundation. "He views his response to others as a responsibility independent of how others

view their responsibility toward him."

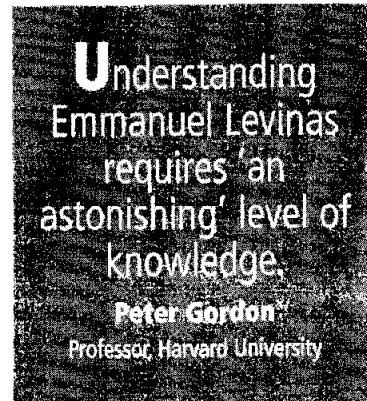
In addition to his philosophical writings, Levinas left behind an oeuvre on Jewish texts, from divrei Torah to works on biblical hermeneutics and the Talmud. The degree to which Levinas was influenced by his Jewishness is debated.

"The Talmud provided Levinas with a possibility to demonstrate that the concern for the Other is not a mere theoretical or rhetorical exercise," Shmuel Wygoda, director of Jerusalem's Levinas Center, has written. "Throughout his talmudic readings, Levinas analyzed human situations as they appear in the Talmud and expressed them in philosophical terms that the metaphysical tradition could not have expressed."

For Gordon, Levinas' "talmudic readings themselves often seem to involve a creative re-reading of the Talmud, which finds in the Talmud Levinas' own prior philosophical concerns."

Levinas' philosophy has proved influential beyond the ivory towers of academia. It has impacted the international fight against poverty, for example, and has guided human-rights activists and political dissidents from Spain's Jorge Semprun to Havel, a playwright who became president of the Czech Republic.

Levinas "taught that the sense of responsibility for the world is born in us with a look into the face of a fellow being," Havel said in an address to the French Senate in 1999. "I think that Europe of today should remind itself of this spiritual tradition. It should recognize that there are fellow beings — both within its territory and around it all over the planet — and that it is intrinsically responsible for them as well." ■



FIRST PERSON

Illness overseas strengthens family

By JONATHAN UDREN

FRAT, West Bank (JTA) — There's no doubt that living so far away from my family is one of the hardest challenges that I've faced as an Israeli immigrant.

But despite the distance and the infrequent visits, my relationship with my family hasn't suffered. As a matter of fact, it has flourished. And due to recent hardships, we have all seen just how solid that bond has become.

Our crisis came two weeks after my wedding. My wife, Dena, and I were packing for our honeymoon, when we got the call: My father had cancer.

Two weeks earlier my widely smiling father had been riding on a friend's shoulders at our wedding. That smile seemed like a distant memory as he explained his treatment.

If I had been in the United States I surely would have planned a trip home soon after the news. But due to cost and the length of the trip it wasn't even discussed. So I did what I could: I talked with my family on the phone a lot, more than ever before.

Throughout the months of chemotherapy and radiation, my father was strong. For a while, he even continued his jogging routine with his chemotherapy pack strapped onto his back, and I never heard him complain.

Despite how difficult it became for my mother, she never made me feel guilty for not being there. When I would tell her how I wished I could be there, she would simply say, "No, you're doing what you need to be doing over there."

Of course one shouldn't have to live across the ocean or be diagnosed with a life-threatening disease to experience this kind of closeness. But for us, my life in Israel and my father's cancer have served as a wake-up call to take a closer look at life and what makes it worth living. And I hope and pray that we will be able to share these lessons as a family for many years to come.

Jonathan Udren is a freelance journalist and editor from Fort Lauderdale, Fla. He made aliyah in 2003.

Immigrant activist awarded

By DINA KRAFT

LOD, Israel (JTA) — High in an overcast sky, beneath a bank of clouds, Alon Tal is waving his hands and delivering a rapid-fire account of Israel's environmental history.

Tal is delivering this lecture in a conference room at the top of a former airport control tower — a fitting setting for a leading proponent of recycling in Israel.

Tal, 45, a powerhouse in environmental activism, is an American immigrant to Israel. He came to Israel determined to make a difference. On Jan. 10, he was awarded the Charles Bronfman Prize, a prize given to outstanding young Jewish humanitarians. Selected from dozens of nominees, the \$100,000 award went to Tal as an example, the prize founders said, of "an outstanding environmental visionary who set out to change the world and has actually done so."

Fighting for the environment in a country focused on development and security has not been easy. In receiving the award, Tal recounted a turning point one rainy winter night 12 years ago when he traveled to Beit Shemesh to deliver a talk on air pollution. He was convinced no one would attend on such a miserable, cold night. To his surprise, he was greeted by a hall packed with 300 people.

"And then I got it. The people of Israel really do care deeply about the health of their communities. They love this land of theirs. And when we learn to tap into that love, we really can move mountains."

In 1990 he founded Adam Teva v'Din, the Israel Union for Environmental Defense. The group was the first environmental watchdog organization of its kind in Israel. It uses American-style legal advocacy to help protect Israel's environment, filing court petitions challenging the government's development policies that it says risk endangering the environment and public health. The group focuses on issues of air pollution, safe drinking water, solid waste management and accessible open space.

Their first victory was stopping sewage being dumped from Eilat into the Red Sea. One of their landmark court victories saw

a \$10 million purification system installed in the Kishon River in northern Israel, after the group uncovered that nearby factories were pouring more sewage into the river than they had been reporting, making the river toxic.

The organization has also worked with Jordan and the Palestinians on common water issues, including shared rivers.

In 1996 Tal founded the Arava Institute at his then home, Kibbutz Ketura near Eilat. He also served as the chairman of Israel's umbrella group for environmental organizations between 1999 and 2004 and is currently a board member of the Jewish National Fund.

After immigrating to Israel at the age of 20, Tal spent two years in the army as a paratrooper. Crisscrossing the Israeli landscape he saw great beauty, but also, to his surprise, a lot of trash. "We are willing to die for it, but not keep it clean," Tal said. He had been looking for a way to contribute to Israel as an American immigrant,

and soon realized that environmental work might be his calling.

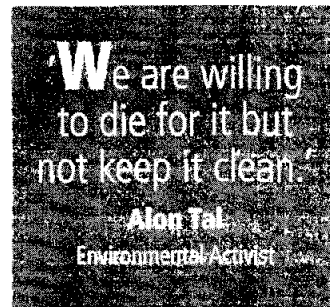
While studying law, he did an internship with the environmental protection service, a department within the Interior Ministry that would eventually become the Ministry of Environment.

Tal then returned to the United States to do a doctorate at Harvard in environmental health policy.

He returned here and founded the Arava Institute in 1996. It offers master's degrees in desert studies and environmental studies. He recruited students not only from Israel but from abroad, including Jordan. Today, some 80 percent of the institute's graduates hold key environmental positions in the region.

In his acceptance speech at the awards ceremony, Tal spoke about how he once wished he belonged to the generation of Israel's founders but now realizes he has an equally if not more important task.

"We are blessed because we have the privilege and the responsibility to define what will be preserved of the land of Israel," he said. "Will future generations enjoy the same natural treasures that so inspired pilgrims and prophets for a millennia?"



NEWS IN BRIEF

WORLD

Germany urged to ban Iran from World Cup

An Israeli lawmaker urged Germany to bar Iran from this summer's soccer World Cup.

Gilad Erdan of the Likud Party made the appeal this week to German Chancellor Angela Merkel, whose country is hosting the summer competition, after Iran called for the eradication of Israel, denied the Holocaust and announced that it would host a Holocaust revisionism conference.

"Dr. Merkel, you have a rare opportunity to take action and to signal to Iran that this latest behavior is unacceptable by the international community and unacceptable by Germany and on German soil," wrote Erdan, who is chairman of Knesset Sports Subcommittee. Germany censured Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's recent anti-Semitic statements, but Merkel has voiced reluctance to impose soccer sanctions.

"The Iranian team can't influence the comments of their president. That's why I think it's difficult to punish a team by banning them," she told the Bild am Sonntag newspaper earlier this month.

Survivors' memoirs to be shown at U.N.

Seven Holocaust memoirs will be exhibited at the United Nations.

The books, published by the Holocaust Survivors' Memoirs Project, which so far has published seven of 900 manuscripts it has collected, will be displayed next week in conjunction with the U.N.'s international day of commemoration for Holocaust victims.

"At a time when anti-Semites in various parts of the world obscenely and routinely characterize the Holocaust as a myth, the survivors' authentic memories of the brutal genocide of millions of European Jews" are "among the most powerful antidotes to contemporary and future Holocaust deniers," said Menachem Rosensaft, chairman of the memoir project's editorial board.

The United Nations will officially commemorate the Holocaust next week during the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

WJC appoints ex-Clinton official

The World Jewish Congress named former U.S. official Stuart Eizenstat as chairman of its audit committee.

The appointment of Eizenstat, formerly the Clinton administration's point man on Holocaust issues, comes as the group continues a restructuring following allegations that it mishandled its finances.

Meanwhile, the Forward reported that the group is trying to block the publication of a book into those allegations, which are still being investigated by New York's attorney general, Eliot Spitzer.

MIDDLE EAST

Nasrallah dims Arad hopes

Missing Israeli airman Ron Arad is probably dead, Hezbollah's leader said.

Sheik Hassan Nasrallah, whose Lebanese militia has been under pressure to locate Arad in order to pursue a prisoner swap with Israel, said for the first time Wednesday that this could prove impossible.

"If any information were available to us about Ron Arad, we would have made a new deal," Nasrallah told Lebanon's NTV television. "If you ask me for my conclusion, I would said that he is dead and lost."

Arad bailed out of his crippled warplane on a mission in Lebanon in 1986.

Israel believes local Shi'ite militiamen handed him over to Hezbollah or Iran.

Pullout portrayal criticized

Israeli media did not provide an accurate portrayal of last year's Gaza Strip withdrawal, a watchdog group said.

According to a report issued this week by The Center for the Protection of Democracy in Israel, local reports on the two-month withdrawal operation focused too closely and emotively on Gaza settlers and the security forces evacuating them, with insufficient political context.

Israeli media also overplayed the potential security threat posed by pullout opponents and Palestinian armed groups, according to the study. Its authors urged media outlets to implement the lessons in covering upcoming elections in the Palestinian Authority and Israel.

Palestinian journalists: Shift in terror reporting

Palestinian journalists reportedly are beginning to offer less sympathetic depictions of terrorism.

At a recent conference held in Jordan, Palestinian journalists told their Israeli counterparts that while they would continue referring to suicide bombers as "martyrs," their reporting on such attacks were lending them less and less legitimacy, the Jerusalem Post reported.

According to the Post, none of the Palestinian journalists attending the European Community-sponsored conference voiced support for suicide bombings, and one reporter from Hebron said he had taken to describing them as "explosive incidents" — though not as terrorism.

Lebanese agent jailed in Israel

Israel jailed a Danish-Palestinian tourist on charges of working for Hezbollah. Iyyad al-Ashuah, who was born in a refugee camp in Lebanon but has Danish citizenship, was arrested last year after he came to Israel and was spotted taking video footage from a train window.

Originally charged with spying for Hezbollah, he was convicted on a lesser charge, of conspiring to provide the Lebanese militia with information, by Tel Aviv District Court this week as part of a plea bargain. Al-Ashuah, 40, was sentenced to 33 months in prison and ordered to return \$2,000 that Hezbollah paid him for his services.

In a separate case, an Israeli Arab was charged in Haifa District Court with providing Hezbollah with information.

According to the indictment, the defendant, a paroled convict, crossed the Lebanese border in search of drugs, and made the deal with Hezbollah after being captured by its gunmen.

NORTH AMERICA

A Jewish learning center grows in Florida

A nondenominational Jewish college in Boston is joining with a university to establish a center for Jewish education in South Florida.

The collaboration between Hebrew College and Nova Southeastern University aims to train Jewish early-childhood education and day-school teachers, offering classes for undergraduates and graduates in Hebrew and Jewish studies, and adult learning and professional training programs.

Ohio Senate condemns Iranian's comments

Ohio's state Senate condemned recent Holocaust-denial comments by Iran's president.

State Sen. Jeff Jacobson said he hopes the resolution, which passed unanimously, becomes a model for other U.S. state legislatures, the Dayton Jewish News reported.

The international community has condemned Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's statements.