

IN THE NEWS
**Ehud Olmert:
Plan set by 2007**

Ehud Olmert said he intends to finalize plans for a further Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank by late 2007.

Israel's prime minister told the Wall Street Journal on Wednesday that he wanted to have his "convergence plan" in place within 18 months, and that he would travel to Washington next month to seek President Bush's approval.

"The State of Israel will change the face of the region," Olmert said. "I will not miss this opportunity." According to the report, the \$10 billion withdrawal would mean evacuating 70,000 Israelis from West Bank settlements.

Olmert, who has vowed to keep major West Bank settlement blocs, ruled out ceding eastern Jerusalem to Palestinian control. "Dividing Jerusalem will not bring peace, only more fighting," he said.

**French kidnapping
suspects surrender**

Two suspects surrendered in connection with the kidnapping and murder of a French Jew.

A 19-year-old, identified by Le Figaro newspaper as Jean-Christophe S., confessed to participating in the abduction of Ilan Halimi, 23, who died from torture inflicted on him by a gang of kidnapers. The leader of the gang, Yossouf Fofana, who is in police custody, says Jean-Christophe was a partner in the crime.

A young man in his 20s, identified as Yassin N., also turned himself in Monday. He is suspected of ties with Jean-Christophe, but denies involvement in the kidnapping. There are 22 suspects under investigation, 18 of them in police custody.

Reminder:
The JTA World Report
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WORLD REPORT

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Brian Hendler/JTA

Israelis do last-minute shopping for Passover at Jerusalem's Machane Yehuda market.

Two steps forward for efforts to correct bias in Mideast studies

By RON KAMPEAS

WASHINGTON (JTA) — The effort by an alliance of Jewish groups to hold government-funded Middle East studies departments accountable took two strides forward in recent weeks, one legislative and one moral.

Congress came a step closer to a mechanism that would monitor how Middle East Studies departments spend federal money, and the U.S. Commission on

Civil Rights, an advisory body, found that anti-Israeli activism could engender a hostile atmosphere for Jews on campus.

On March 30, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a higher education reform bill that for the first time would establish an independent advisory board.

The board would make recommendations "that will reflect diverse perspectives and a wide range of views on world regions, foreign language,

views on world regions, foreign language,

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**FOCUS
ON
ISSUES**

■ A new bill would hold government-funded Mideast studies departments accountable

Continued from page 1

international affairs, and international business.”

At issue is Title VI, the section of the Education Act passed in the 1950s that established federal funding for universities. The intent was to nurture international studies and create a cadre of Americans who would guide the United States through the thicket of foreign relations.

Longstanding complaints from the Jewish community that many college faculties nurture hostility to Israel instead of scholarship were reinforced after the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. A number of academics argued that anti-Israel monomania in Middle East departments helped blind the U.S. policy establishment to the emerging Islamist threat.

Those arguments have resonated in a Washington obsessed with pre-Sept. 11 intelligence failures.

“The events and aftermath of September 11, 2001, have underscored the need for the nation to strengthen and enhance American knowledge of international relations, world regions, and foreign languages,” says the House bill passed last month.

The bill also grants the education secretary some discretion in examining whether Middle East Studies departments are producing well-rounded graduates for the U.S. diplomatic, intelligence and defense corps, as envisioned by the Title VI framers.

A JTA investigative series last year found that several of the Middle East

Studies centers with anti-Israel and anti-Western agendas have extended their biases even beyond the college campus, delving into public education and developing curricula for middle- and high-school students.

The House bill requires the secretary to take into account when allocating funds “the degree to which activities of centers, programs, and fellowships at institutions of higher education address national interests, generate and disseminate information, and foster debate on international issues from diverse perspectives.”

A Senate bill passed last year grants the secretary the same discretion, but the Senate balked at the seven-person advisory body that was included in the House bill. Some senators feared the board invoked unsavory memories of the House Un-American Activities Committee, the controversial government committee that investigated suspected Communists during the McCarthy era.

However, both the House and Senate bills guarantee that “nothing in this title shall be construed to authorize the International Advisory Board to mandate, direct, or control an institution of higher education’s specific instructional content, curriculum, or program of instruction or instructor.”

That language has gone some way to assuaging fears in Congress and universities that the advisory board would be coercive.

The House bill was brought to the Senate floor last week; it remains to be seen whether the advisory board will survive efforts to resolve the two competing bills. The American Jewish Congress, which led lobbying for the advisory board, blitzed Congress members in the days before its passage.

Another battlefield for Jewish groups seeking reforms on campus has been the Civil Rights Commission.

The commission is stacked with members sympathetic to the views of the administration in power. It has no enforcement power, but its recommendations are taken seriously by the Education Department’s Office of Civil Rights.

Meeting last Monday, the commission voted to:

- Recommend that the Civil Rights Of-

fice use Civil Rights Act enforcements, which include funding cuts at universities where Jewish students face a hostile environment;

- Call on university leaders to denounce anti-Semitism;

- Call on universities to “maintain academic standards” and “respect intellectual diversity” in language reminiscent of the House and Senate bills;

- Recommend that the Civil Rights Office inform Jewish students of their rights; and

- Call on Congress to collect data on anti-Semitic and other hate crimes on campuses.

The commission endorsed the recommendations by a 5-1 vote, with one commissioner absent. The commissioner who voted against, Gerald Reynolds, who is the chairman, was unable to shake his concern that a blanket recommendation against anti-Semitism could inhibit Christian proselytizing, a practice he did not endorse but which he believed had constitutional protection.

Perhaps as significant as the recommendations were the commission’s findings, which discerned anti-Semitism in “anti-Zionist and anti-Israel propaganda.”

That recognition was crucial for the San Francisco-based Institute for Jewish and Community Research, one of the groups that had petitioned the civil rights commission.

“Going to college should involve learning, not getting threatened or being called a Nazi,” the institute’s founder, Gary Tobin, said in a statement, referring to propaganda comparing Israel to Hitler’s Germany.

Susan Tuchman, director of the Zionist Organization of America’s Center for Law and Justice, which also petitioned the commission, welcomed the call for university administrators to unequivocally condemn anti-Semitism.

“Many universities have remained silent. That connotes acceptance,” she said.

Other petitioners included the AJCongress, the Anti-Defamation League, Hillel and the American Jewish Committee.

Some senators feared the board invoked memories of the House Un-American Activities Committee.

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Darfur killings are rally's focus

By RACHEL SILVERMAN

NEW YORK (JTA) — Ruth Messinger has borne witness to some of the world's most horrific tragedies.

A tireless human rights activist, Messinger has walked through earthquake-devastated villages in Turkey, traveled to Thailand in the wake of a tsunami and visited Balkan refugee camps during Milosevic's ethnic cleansing campaign.

Still, the scenes she saw in Darfur during the summer of 2004 were "a great deal more depressing.

"The people there have no expectation that the world cares about their situation or that they're going to be able to come home," Messinger said, sitting in her New York City office last week. "The word I use for it when I speak most often is just chilling."

The executive director of the American Jewish World Service, Messinger is leading the charge to restore hope to this ravaged community. Her approach is multi-pronged: form interfaith alliances through a Save Darfur Coalition, flood the White House with postcards and add to the AJWS's \$2.4 million humanitarian aid campaign.

Next on the agenda is an April 30 rally in Washington, where Messinger expects a large turnout, thanks, in part, to efforts by synagogues, Hillels, JCCs and other Jewish organizations across the country.

The message she trumpets is simple: The world needs to determine a "communal response to genocide" and apply it across the board.

Messinger says that Jews, of all people, should heed this call.

"We're the people whose constant context and language since the Shoah has been, Never again," Messinger said. "Do we mean what we said or not? And if we do, then are we going to respond for everybody, and not just wait til Jews are attacked again?"

For Messinger, the answer is an easy one. The Jewish call for tikkun olam, or repairing the world, mandates a response.

A former elected official and Democratic mayoral candidate in New York City, Messinger, 65, has dedicated much of her career to this kind of public service.

Now she's applying it to Darfur.

Messinger said the death toll there has grown to roughly 400,000 to 500,000 in the past three years. There are more than 2

million internally displaced persons in Darfur, she rattled off, and 300,000 Sudanese refugees in eastern Chad.

Two trips to the region have shown Messinger the human face of these statistics.

It took an exhausting combination of planes, four-wheel vehicles and special visas for Messinger to even get to Darfur in 2004, which she toured as a guest of an international relief organization on the ground.

Guided by a local translator, Messinger spent four days talking to Darfuri men, women and children holed up in the desert.

Messinger said those she interviewed described a "tremendously similar" narrative. Most spoke of attacks by air, which, according to Messinger, are clearly coordinated by the Sudanese government.

"There are no tribes that have air-planes," she said.

"Planes drop everything," she continued. "They drop broken air conditioners, car chassis, anything you can put in an airplane that will kill the people it happens to hit. It's just random strafing of the village."

Then the Janjaweed, or "men on horseback," descend.

"As people say, the militia shows up and just starts riding randomly through the village, yelling ethnic slurs, killing men, killing children, raping and branding children," Messinger said. "The people become increasingly terrified and so they flee. And that's the goal: for them to flee."

Most told Messinger this exodus led them to either internally displaced camps in Sudan, or refugee outposts along the increasingly porous Chad-Sudan border.

But while all confirmed the same basic facts, each person Messinger spoke with offered his or her own individual tale.

A 10-year-old boy clung tightly to an international aid worker, who Messinger assumed to be his mother or aunt. No, the aid worker said, the boy, whose parents and

two brothers had been slaughtered, had no family left.

Another woman said she fled her village the same day she gave birth to twins. After watching her aunt, uncle and brother get shot, the woman carried her two newborn babies out of town on a small, straw mat. She showed Messinger the mat.

These stories may not even represent the worst of it.

"There are always parts of the story that you do get, and parts that you don't," Messinger said. "Everybody will tell you about people who are raped by the Janjaweed. I've never met a woman who told me she was raped."

Messinger said the Darfur people have dire, pressing needs. But while food, water and medical treatment are critical, a greater mobilization may still be paramount.

"They need some sense that somebody's coming to their aid, that someplace in the world somebody's going to take on this government which is continuing to support and arm the Janjaweed militia, and is still attacking villages."

Messinger faulted the media, as well as political inaction, for what she called a slow international response.

While Messinger declined to spell out an exact formula for peace, she listed a number of strategies — allocating more money to the African Union, establishing a no-fly zone and enlisting more help from NATO countries — as viable options.

She did, however, praise some positive steps that have been taken. She commended congressional representatives who have spoken out on the issue, the work of New York Times columnist Nicholas Kristof, and key pieces of legislation, such as the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act.

More than anything, though, Messinger stressed empowerment at the individual level.

"We all need, every single one of us, to exercise this muscle that says take this responsibility, speak out," she said. "Don't let evil in the world move you into silence." ■

FOCUS ON ISSUES

The people become increasingly terrified and so they flee. And that's the goal: for them to flee.'

Ruth Messinger

Executive director,
American Jewish World Service

Growing number of non-Jews teach aleph-bet

By SUE FISHKOFF

SAN LEANDRO, Calif. (JTA) — It's 10 a.m. Friday morning at Temple Beth Sholom's preschool, and teacher Diane Acquistapace is helping a dozen toddlers get ready for Shabbat.

"You put your challah in, you put your challah out, you put your challah in, and you shake it all about," they sing, arms high above their heads as they turn slowly, doing their own rendition of the hokey-pokey.

Turning to an Asian boy to her left, Acquistapace asks, "Simon, what do you like best about Shabbat?"

"Challah!" Simon shouts.

"Madison, what do you like best?"

"The candles!"

Then they all crowd around a pint-sized table to light candles, eat fresh-baked, chocolate-chip challah and sing Shabbat songs, in English and Hebrew.

Acquistapace, who is not Jewish, knows all the songs. She should, after eight years teaching in this Conservative congregation's preschool.

"I'm Catholic, but I've learned so many things about the Jewish religion," she says. "It's so exciting. I never knew what Shabbat was. I love Chanukah, lighting the candles."

Of the eight teachers at this San Francisco Bay area preschool, seven are non-Jews. So are many of the children they teach.

That's not unusual in the world of Jewish preschool.

According to 2004 figures from the Coalition for the Advancement of Jewish Education, 15 percent of the more than 122,500 children in Jewish preschools in this country are not Jewish: about 10 percent in Reconstructionist and Conservative preschools, 20 percent in Reform schools, and 44 percent in preschools run by Jewish Community Centers and Ys. Virtually all children in Orthodox preschools are Jewish.

This isn't referring to children of intermarried parents, rather the children of two non-Jewish parents.

And many of their teachers aren't Jewish either: 30 percent in the JCC preschools, 10 percent to 25 percent in Reform schools, and 12 percent to 20 percent in Conservative schools, according to the



Sue Fishkoff

Diane Acquistapace sits with her students at the Temple Beth Sholom preschool in San Leandro, Calif.

CAJE figures. The percentage is highest in the western United States, where almost 40 percent of preschool teachers are not Jewish.

That sets up an interesting scenario: Plenty of

classrooms where non-Jewish teachers are introducing non-Jewish children to Jewish history, values and customs.

Does it matter? The question is important at a time when Jewish preschools are gradually being recognized as a critical factor in developing a strong Jewish identity both in the toddlers and their families.

The answer? Yes and no.

On one hand, Jewish early childhood experts acknowledge that they'd rather have Jewish teachers to act as living role models for the children. But finding Jewish teachers is becoming increasingly difficult.

Lyndall Miller, coordinator of the Jewish early childhood education certification program at Gratz College in Melrose Park, Pa., says that few younger Jews are going into the field because of low salaries and benefits.

"We're all in our 40s and 50s. Who will be coming in? It'll be almost all non-Jewish teachers."

On the other hand, every preschool director interviewed insists that her non-Jewish teachers are dedicated, hardworking and often know more about Judaism than their Jewish colleagues.

Certainly, they say, any qualified teacher can learn the level of Jewish and Hebrew knowledge required to teach such young children.

Eloise Hull, director of the preschool at The Temple, Congregation Ohabai Shalom in Nashville, Tenn., is one of the few non-Jewish preschool directors in the country.

Hull doesn't see any conflict between

her personal beliefs and heading a Jewish preschool.

"We were always taught Jews are God's people, and what I do at the temple isn't that different than being an educator in a Christian school — the values, the stories, the heritage, it's all something I'd want children to know, Jewish or not."

About half the 106 children and three-quarters of the teachers in her school are not Jewish.

She had to chastise some of those teachers, she admits, when she found out they were bringing Christian Bibles to class and even taking their pupils to Sunday school.

BEYOND TORAH FOR TOTS

Fewer young Jews are becoming Jewish preschool teachers because of low salaries and benefits.

Parents follow kids to Jewish learning

By SUE FISHKOFF

OAKLAND, Calif. (JTA) — Eighteen months ago, when Lenard Cohen's 4-year-old daughter was enrolled in the family's congregational preschool, the Philadelphia-area father of three decided to go back to school himself.

He signed up for the Florence Melton Parent Education Program, a Jewish adult education course for parents of preschoolers.

Raised as a Reform Jew, Cohen said he was on the "lower end" of the observance scale when he signed up for the course, which meets once a week, 30 weeks a year, two hours at a stretch, for two full years.

His goal, he says, was to "increase my knowledge of Jewish practice, Jewish history and Jewish ethics, and to be able to pass it on to my children better."

The course has done that and more, he says, bringing together a group of parents with disparate backgrounds and experiences.

"We're all there because we're parents of preschoolers and we want to learn," he says.

With a number of recent studies showing that preschools have a profound effect on the Jewish life of the entire family, and that greater linkage is needed between preschools and the rest of the Jewish educational and communal network, educators and philanthropists are engaging in new initiatives to bring parents of Jewish preschoolers into the process.

Some of those initiatives are formal, such as the Melton program, which operates in 15 cities, and some are more informal, involving interaction and greater outreach between parents and their children's school.

"There's a sense of fragmentation," says Lyndall Miller, coordinator of the Jewish early childhood education certificate program at Gratz College in Melrose Park, Pa. "Parents don't have models of how to parent. People don't talk to each other about how they can build relationships with their children. Schools must become communities, and they don't know how."

Simply making the effort to reach out is a crucial beginning, educators say.

Ina Regosin, founding director of the Early Childhood Institute and dean of stu-

dents at Hebrew College in Newton, Mass., says that when she was director of a Jewish preschool 30 years ago, she'd routinely invite parents into the building when they dropped off their children, "to educate them, of course."

The school sent home weekly newsletters for the parents to read, and held evening programs on Jewish holidays and other topics.

The best Jewish preschools today all engage in that kind of active outreach to parents, and try to make it part of the natural rhythm of family life.

"Whatever we do for the children we do for the adults," says Helen Cohen, who 12 years ago founded a preschool at Temple Israel, a large Reform congregation in Boston. Teachers send home weekly newsletters on the Torah portion, with the Hebrew words translated and transliterated. They hold family havdalah services, and send parents home with clear instructions on how to do the ritual themselves.

Taking part in a Jewish learning experience at their child's preschool is a non-threatening way for many parents with little or no Jewish education to increase their own knowledge and feel more at home with Jewish observance.

At the Osher Marin JCC preschool in San Rafael, Calif., director Janet Harris stands in her front lobby every morning to greet the children and their parents. She shakes their hands and personally invites them to the school's family programs.

The Osher Marin preschool is one of 12 schools involved in a pilot project by the Jewish Early Childhood Education Initiative, which was launched in 2004 to develop models of preschools that bring the entire family into the project of Jewish learning.

Mark Horowitz, the initiative's executive director, says that each school receives funding and coaching to deepen the Jewish and developmental content in the classrooms, and to build strong relationships with the parents.

Next year, the program will add 10 to 20 new preschools to the project.

"If we can create communities of Jew-

ish families around these preschools, then they will want to continue their connection with Jewish education and institutions," he says. "We will have created a craving for Jewish life. It might mean congregational affiliation, or JCC membership, or Jewish day school — some meaningful way to continue the communities in which they have been flourishing."

The Melton Parent Education Program is one of two formal initiatives to emerge in recent years. The program, based at Hebrew University in Jerusalem and run out of their North American office in Northbrook, Ill., is modeled after the successful Florence Melton Adult Mini-School curriculum.

More of those parents are enrolling their children in day school — the stated goal of the Avi Chai Foundation, which subsidizes tuition for the program. The program is also, in some cases, open to parents

of children in the younger grades of day school.

And, Parker says, "We definitely see behavioral changes" among the parent-students. "They admit that after two years, they are doing more Jewish things."

**BEYOND
TORAH
FOR TOTS**

**'Schools must become
communities, and they
don't know how.'**

Lyndall Miller

Coordinator, Gratz College



Owen Scott Shirwo

Tessa Chernissa and her preschool students at the Osher Marin JCC in San Rafael, Calif., practice celebrating Shabbat.

Orthodox conversion opening up?

By LARRY LUXNER

HOLLYWOOD, Fla. (JTA) — When is an Orthodox conversion really kosher? How long should a prospective Jew have to study before being universally accepted as a convert? And how much should a rabbi charge to supervise the process?

No one has easy answers to these questions. In fact, until recently few Orthodox rabbis even were asking them, at least not in a public forum. And most, if not all, did not accept applicants with Jewish spouses.

Now the Orthodox community gradually is encouraging non-Jewish spouses to convert in accordance with halacha, or Jewish law.

■
“We’re reaching out to intermarrieds to encourage them to apply for conversions if they are truly and sincerely dedicated” to being religious Jews, said Rabbi Leib Tropper, co-founder of the group Eternal Jewish Family, or EJJF, based in Monsey, N.Y.

Demographics may have a lot to do with the change of heart. According to Tropper, 50 percent of non-Orthodox Jews in the United States are currently marrying non-Jews, and another 20 percent are married to spouses who have undergone Reform or Conservative conversions — which Orthodox Jews often don’t consider “kosher.”

Last month, EJJF hosted a conference in Florida called “Universally Accepted Conversions in Inter-marriage.”

The event attracted 170 leading rabbis ranging from modern Orthodox to Lubavitch, including the chief rabbis of Israel and Poland.

“The notion circulating in the Jewish community that intermarried couples are unwelcome and that Orthodox rabbinical courts will not entertain their conversions is being quickly dispelled by the activities of this organization,” conference chairman Marvin Jacob told JTA.

The group has established seven rabbinical courts in the United States and is in the process of creating more. As rabbis join the EJJF, they become part of the network of courts, or batei din, that perform conversions, Jacob said.

Tropper said the group doesn’t seek to proselytize, but rather “to create universally accepted standards for becoming Jewish.”

Rabbi Moshe Krupka, the Orthodox

Union’s national executive director, agreed that standardizing conversions is a good idea.

“Our hope is that we’re not going to utilize mediocre standards. When we as a faith community welcome a convert into our midst, our standard should be acceptance of the Torah and a Torah way of life, so that it elevates the community as a whole,” Krupka said. “The last thing you want is for people to go through a life-altering conversion,” then find out later that the process was faulty.

Another rabbi said the conference, and EJJF itself, represent a sea change in thinking on the part of the U.S. Orthodox establishment.

“The trend here is to accept reality. There are about a million intermarried Jews out of 5.2 million Jews in America. What do you do with them?” said the rabbi, who asked that neither he nor his congregation be identified. “Many of these Jews would convert halachically, but until now, the Orthodox world has written them off.”

■
By standardizing the conversion process, EJJF hopes to lure in mixed couples that vow to practice Orthodox Judaism and keep kosher.

“Sometimes, even if people are ready we push them off for months, if not years, to test their sincerity. People lose interest and go away,” Jacob said. But if the judges are persuaded that the applicant is sincere about observing the commandments, “we urge that the conversion should take place immediately, because that’s halacha.

“The three judges have to be absolutely convinced that the couple has agreed to observe” mitzvot, he added. “Once you’re declared Jewish in a kosher conversion, you’re a Jew, whether you keep it or not.”

In the past, Tropper said, “the reputation regarding conversion was that if you’re intermarried, it’s going to be very difficult to persuade an Orthodox rabbi to convert you. You’re better off going the Conservative route.”

How long a prospective convert should study is also a matter of debate.

“What’s more important is the conviction

and determination of the candidate,” Tropper said. “If someone’s very determined, it can be done in five months. In other cases, it can take up to two years.” What matters, he said, is that the candidate “knows what he’s required to know, and agrees to practice and observe it.”

In the eight months since EJJF’s establishment, he said, “we’ve done 70 conversions divided among various rabbinical courts, and we have another 130 candidates in the process of studying for conversion. We get an average of six applica-

tions per week on our Web site.”

Tropper said batei din are functioning in Los Angeles, Lakewood, N.J., Monsey, N.Y., Philadelphia, Chicago, Cleveland and Jerusalem.

■
“We’re also looking at Milwaukee, Miami and Boston, but making the beit din is secondary to inspiring mixed-marriage couples to come to us,” he said. “The meat and potatoes of our program is getting intermarried couples to share the same passions. I travel all over the country to do that.”

The EJJF, which is sponsored by the Lilian Jean Kaplan Jewish Pride Through Education Project, has set up regional branches in Salt Lake City, South Fallsburg, N.Y., Westchester County, N.Y., Cleveland and Charlotte, N.C.

Jacob, a retired New York attorney and Orthodox rabbi, said the Kaplan family started EJJF with a budget of \$18,000, which has grown to “hundreds of thousands of dollars.”

The group also is promoting a uniform fee for conversions so that applicants can avoid what Jacob called “shysters.” He said that a fair fee is about \$300 per dayan, up to a maximum \$1,000 fee for all three together.

“I’ve heard of one Orthodox rabbi who charges \$7,500,” he added.

Said Krupka, “It pains me greatly that there are Jews who don’t live up to their Jewish potential. But that should in no way lower the bar for what it takes to become a Jew, especially if we believe that Judaism is divinely ordained.” ■

‘Our hope is that we’re not going to utilize mediocre standards.’

Rabbi Moshe Krupka
National executive director,
Orthodox Union

OP-ED

Tying today's greats to a hero of the Passover Exodus

By SIMON GREER

NEW YORK (JTA) — The holiday of Passover celebrates the liberation of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt, but the Haggadah doesn't mention Nachshon ben Aminadav. Who was this man?

According to the biblical account of the exodus, the people have no sooner left Egypt than they encounter a seemingly insurmountable obstacle — the Red Sea. As Pharaoh's army pursues them from behind, God performs a miracle and divides the sea in order that the Israelites may walk through on dry land.

In the rabbinic retelling of this story, the crossing of the Red Sea becomes a test of the Jewish people's faith. According to one midrash, as the people stood on the edge of the sea, each tribe said, "I'm not going in first." As each tribe waited for another group to take the plunge, and as Moses himself stood praying to God, one man — Nachshon ben Aminadav — jumped into the water. This action prompted God to split the sea in order that the rest of the people could walk through safely.

Nachshon is a biblical profile in courage. Without his faith and determination, the Exodus story might have ended before it even had begun.

Even today, we are often still inspired by a contemporary Nachshon to take the first step, to lead us through uncharted waters. This year we lost two women who fulfilled that role profoundly: Rosa Parks and Betty Friedan.

Contemporary Nachshons like Parks and Friedan inspire us because they saw potential where we remain transfixed by peril.

Our hopelessness often leads us to dismiss challenges like the ones confronted by Parks and Friedan as lost causes. Their faith, courage, and hope compel us to improve conditions that are too often ignored. ■

Simon Greer is President & CEO of Jewish Funds for Justice, a national public foundation dedicated to mobilizing the resources of American Jews to combat the root causes of domestic social and economic injustice.

Chicago philanthropy giant Herman Spertus dies at 105

By PAULINE DUBKIN YEARWOOD
Chicago Jewish News

CHICAGO (JTA) — Herman Spertus loved to tell the story of how, in 1923, he and his brother were able to elude the Communist authorities in the Soviet Union and make it to the United States by way of Canada, just days before a ruling took effect that would have prevented anyone from Russia or Ukraine from entering the country.

That trip "could never be repeated," he told a visitor at the time of his 100th birthday. "If you tried to do it twice, it could never be."

The same thing might be said of Herman Spertus' remarkable life, which spanned the 20th century and was in many ways a microcosm of life and opportunity during the period.

Spertus, an entrepreneur, businessman, Jewish communal leader, artist and patron of the arts, died April 5 at the age of 105.

Along with his brother Maurice, he created what is now known as the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies and the Spertus Museum in downtown Chicago, and continued to be active in its affairs until close to the end of his life. ■

Dr. Howard Sulkin, the institute's president, praised Herman Spertus' "passion, commitment to lifelong learning, and clarity of thought (which) have been a source of guidance to all those around him. His noble character helped to bring about innumerable noble deeds," he said.

Spertus was born in 1901 into a middle-class Jewish family in a small town in czarist Russia. He studied engineering and quickly became fascinated by the new machinery and techniques that marked the beginning of the technical revolution. Eventually, anti-Semitism and pogroms forced their family to leave the country.

After the two brothers' harrowing trip to America, they settled in Chicago, where the rest of the family was already living, and took jobs working in a lamp factory. Soon they decided they wanted to try out some techniques of their own and, after less than two years in their adopted country, started their own business. ■

When the Depression hit, the factory went into bankruptcy. But in 1933, their entrepreneurial spirit intact, the Spertus brothers realized that the growing popularity of Kodak's new Brownie camera meant the market for photo frames was also growing. They opened a new business, Metalcraft Corp., that became the first in the country to mass-produce picture frames. The company thrived and eventually, under the name of Intercraft, became the largest manufacturer of picture frames in the world, employing more than 1,800 workers.

During World War II, the brothers stopped producing consumer goods to make optical instruments for the U.S. Navy.

After the war, with the business continuing to thrive, Herman Spertus — by this time married to the former Sara Levin and the father of five children — began to develop an interest in Jewish education. Along with

Maurice, he became an ardent supporter of what was then called the College of Jewish Studies. At the same time Maurice created the Spertus Museum as a home for his extensive and valuable collection of Judaica. In 1970, the school was renamed Spertus College to honor the family's generosity. Eventually the college and museum became the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies. ■

Herman Spertus stayed involved with the institution for the rest of his life, continuing to come to board meetings into his 100s.

Spertus was active with the Jewish United Fund/Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago beginning in 1959 and in 1980 became the general chairman of the JUF's annual campaign — at 79, the oldest person ever to hold that office. He also funded the first gallery of the Israel Museum in Jerusalem and served on its board for many years.

Herman Spertus' own career as an artist began when he started taking painting lessons at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1932 and continued throughout his life.

His canvasses, mostly in an abstract style, have been exhibited at a number of venues in the Chicago area, and he continued painting until close to the end of his life. ■

Spertus' life was microcosm of a century's opportunities.

NEWS IN BRIEF

NORTH AMERICA

Bush sends Passover wishes

President Bush sent Passover greetings to the Jewish community. "By reading the Haggadah, singing traditional songs and sharing the seder meal, Jewish people relive the story of their redemption and ensure that their values and heritage are passed on to future generations," the president said in a statement.

He added, "We pray for a more peaceful and hopeful world where the blessings of liberty are bestowed upon all mankind."

Jewish publisher seeks new head

Yosef Abramowitz plans to step down as CEO of Jewish Family & Life. Abramowitz, who co-founded the publishing company in 1996, said he sought to redefine his role at JFL after he and his wife last month adopted an AIDS orphan from Ethiopia, their fifth child.

The winner of the 2004 Covenant Award for Excellence in Jewish Education, Abramowitz will continue as JFL's CEO until a replacement is found, and after that will continue as editor in chief of the company's four print publications and dozen Web offerings.

He also will continue to chair the Koret International Jewish Book Awards, co-direct BabagaNewz and serve as executive editor on JVibe, JBooks.com, SocialAction.com and Sh'ma.

Newspaper aimed at Jewish teens

The Jewish National Fund and the Jerusalem Post are launching a newspaper aimed at American teenagers.

Eighty percent of the content of IM: Israel Messenger will be written by Jerusalem Post staffers, 10 percent by Israeli high school students and 10 percent by American high school students.

The newspaper, which will come out nine times a year, is slated to begin publication in October, with free sample editions slated for May and September.

Passover seder held for dogs

A Passover seder for dogs was held in Chicago. The second annual seder was held at Soggie Paws, an upscale pet store in Chicago.

The dogs "sat content and still with tiny yarmulkes on their heads," according to a news release.

WORLD

Putin greets Russian Jews for Passover

Russia's president sent Passover greetings to the country's Jewish community and promised that his government will fight anti-Semitism.

"The state and society should jointly — decisively and consistently — fight anti-Semitism, any manifestations of xenophobia and extremism," Vladimir Putin wrote in a message sent Tuesday, the presidential news service reported.

Putin spoke highly of Jewish values and the importance of the Jewish community for Russia, perhaps the most unequivocal support he has offered for Russian Jews since he became president in 2000.

"Pesach symbolizes the most important milestone in the history of the Jewish people and in the shaping of its spiritual values based on eternal ideals of justice, good and care about the neighbor," he wrote.

In a related development, the Federation of Jewish Communities, Russia's largest Jewish group, said Tuesday it would beef up security measures in its synagogues across Russia during the holiday week.

'Chasidic Jewish trail' in Poland

Polish groups are developing a tourism route tracing the country's Orthodox Jewish past.

The Institute for the Preservation of Jewish Culture and the Carpathia Institute are developing the project, the Polish newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza reported. The trip will pass through towns that were hotbeds of Chasidic Judaism.

Plans are to extend the trail into Ukraine and perhaps other countries.

Passover Haggadah for 'lost Jews'

A Passover Haggadah was published in the language of an Indian group that claims to be one of the lost tribes of Israel.

The Haggadah tells the Exodus story in the Mizo and Thadou-Kuki languages spoken by many Bnei Menashe.

The Haggadah is published by Shavei Israel, a group that works to connect "lost Jews" to Judaism.

Several hundred Bnei Menashe have made aliyah in the past decade.

Ukraine-Israel link enhanced

A commemoration was held in Ukraine for families whose relatives were killed while serving in the Israeli army.

The Jewish Agency for Israel and the Israeli Embassy in Kiev organized Tuesday's event in cooperation with the Jewish community of Dnepropetrovsk.

Seven families from the city have lost loved ones in the Israeli military, the AEN news agency reported.

Artist's money helps Latvian synagogue

A historic synagogue renovated with funds donated by the family of a famous American artist was rededicated in Latvia.

The country's president, Vaira Vike-Freiberga, attended Tuesday's ceremony in the city of Daugavpils, where the only synagogue recently underwent major reconstruction thanks to funds provided by Keith and Christopher Rothko, children of the painter Mark Rothko.

The Jewish abstract expressionist painter was born in Daugavpils — then called Dvinsk — in 1903 when Latvia was still part of the Russian Empire. He immigrated to the United States in 1913. Built in 1850, the synagogue once was a major center for Latvian Jews.

MIDDLE EAST

Iran bomb seen by 2010

Iran could have nuclear weapons by 2010, Israel's military intelligence chief said.

Maj.-Gen. Amos Yadlin made the prediction in a Yediot Achronot interview Wednesday after Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announced Tuesday that his country had managed to enrich uranium, a key step for making an atom bomb.

"They are liable to produce a nuclear bomb within three years, by the end of the decade," Yadlin said.

Wall sacrifice blocked

Israeli police prevented the attempted sacrifice of a Passover lamb at the Western Wall.

A group of religious Jews led by far-right activist Itamar Ben-Gvir, lamb in hand, was blocked from reaching Judaism's holiest site Wednesday.

They said they wanted to slaughter the lamb as part of pre-Passover rituals, but authorities said Ben-Gvir, who is identified with Jews campaigning to establish a Third Temple in place of the Al-Aksa Mosque, aimed to provoke Palestinians.