

**IN THE NEWS**
**Israel approves probe into the war**

Israel's Cabinet approved setting up a commission of inquiry into the war against Hezbollah.

Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's proposal for a government-appointed, rather than an independent, probe was endorsed by a 20-2 vote in the Cabinet on Sunday, with one abstention.

The decision was deplored by anti-government groups, which accuse Olmert, Defense Minister Amir Peretz and the military top brass of trying to duck a full reckoning on the handling of the war.

Heading the probe is Eliyahu Winograd, a retired judge. He is joined by law professors Ruth Gabison and Yehezkel Dror, and two retired army generals, Menachem Einin and Haim Nagel.

**Rally calls for action on Darfur**

An estimated 20,000 to 25,000 people gathered in New York to urge the United States and the United Nations to end genocide in Darfur.

Sunday's rally, which drew Jews from across the United States, was organized by the Save Darfur Coalition.

North American Jewish groups have taken the lead in advocating an end to the massacre of Darfur residents in Sudan by government-allied Arab militias.

Madeleine Albright, the former U.S. secretary of state, headlined a list of 20 speakers.

"All the sides in the Darfur conflict are predominantly Muslim," Albright said.

"But this is not about politics, this is about people."

She added: "We need to tell the United Nations that this is what it is here for, and President Bush has to make it clear to the United Nations that the United Nations has to get in there."

Rallies took place in 31 American states and 57 cities, including Jerusalem, in 41 countries, according to David Rubenstein of the Save Darfur Coalition.

# WORLD REPORT

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## Evaluating the shul innovators: Do transformation programs work?

By RICHARD GREENBERG

**N**EW YORK (JTA) — Synagogue transformation programs exude good intentions, but do they actually work?

The record is mixed. They are no panacea, but they sometimes benefit participating congregations — at least temporarily — by attracting newcomers, energizing existing members and perhaps forcing the synagogues to re-examine themselves.

For example, Rabbi Shawn Zevit, a spokesman for the Jewish Reconstructionist Federation, says participating congregations in his movement have enjoyed "modest success" in luring unaffiliated Jews, although getting them to participate in synagogue activities has not always been easy. On the other hand, he adds, some existing members have become more deeply involved in congregational life thanks to transformation initiatives.

Those initiatives include Synaplex, whose core mission is to strengthen Jewish identity and create a sense of community largely by making Shabbat meaningful. Turnout at synagogues that have participated in the program for at least two years generally doubles, triples or even quadruples on Synaplex weekends, according to Rabbi Hayim Herring, a spokesman for Synaplex's parent organization, STAR, or Synagogues: Transformation and Renewal. What's more, Herring adds, membership has either stabilized or increased at 17 pilot congregations evaluated by his organization, even those that had been losing members.

But a boost in headcount does not neces-

sarily translate into meaningful change, according to representatives of both transformation projects and participating synagogues.

"The goal of a synagogue is not simply to get people to use it, although that may be the initial goal," says Rabbi Jerome Epstein, executive vice president of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism. "The ultimate goal is to effect change in the person and the congregation. I'd look at the situation two years from now and see how many people have had continuous involvement, or became involved only because this is something new."

The success rate of these experiments varies dramatically, according to Epstein. Without offering percentages, he says he has observed "large numbers" of congregations that seek a "quick fix," and therefore have achieved only limited success — and "large numbers" that have been able to reinvent themselves and become more vibrant institutions.

Benchmarks of congregational transformation come in many forms — some of them concrete and easy to quantify, but many more of them abstract and difficult to attach numbers to. They may be manifested by congregants who now take Jewish learning seriously. Or who have inculcated Jewish values into their lives. Or feel prayer in their bones for the first time. Or it may be reflected in a once-impersonal synagogue that now has a warm, friendly atmosphere and makes newcomers feel at home.

Whether these innovations actually take root is the product of many factors, accord-

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**EXTREME SHUL MAKEOVER**

## ■ How successful are makeover programs for Jewish congregations?

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ing to Epstein and others, including the quality of leadership at individual congregations, and that can vary widely. The consensus: The best leaders are visionaries who cultivate congregations that creatively and boldly pursue long-lasting change rather than simply add new programs. Ideally, such an approach is so firmly implanted in the congregational culture that it will survive changes in synagogue personnel.

"You have to be ready to look at yourself objectively and critically and really be honest about what your strengths and weaknesses are," says Rabbi Daniel Frelander, vice president of the Union for Reform Judaism. "You need to create rising expectations and break your sense of complacency. It's very difficult." Frelander says only about one-half of the congregations he has monitored have been able to create a climate that is conducive to profound change. "But when it happens," he adds, "you can see the light bulbs going off and the congregation is better for it."

The point at which change becomes "meaningful" or even "profound" is subject to interpretation, of course. Herring of Synaplex, for one, says an important threshold has been crossed when a congregation "moves from using Synaplex as a program to using Synaplex as a way of doing business in the synagogue."

However it is defined, fashioning a truly transformative approach to congregational thinking and decision-making "is incredibly hard to do and we still

have a lot to learn about how to do it," says Lawrence Hoffman, the co-founder of Synagogue 2000, an initiative that was launched in 1995 and recently evolved into a leadership-training program known as Synagogue 3000. The goal of Synagogue 2000, in part, was to help congregations become more spiritual, adult-centered and welcoming.

Hoffman estimates that about one-third of the 100 congregations served by Synagogue 2000 had poor leadership, and therefore achieved lackluster results. Of the remaining synagogues, he says, about one-third of them were modestly successful at transforming themselves and one-third were very successful.

Amy Sales, associate director of the Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies at Brandeis University, says that about half of the Synagogue 2000 synagogues she surveyed could legitimately be called success stories.

A third major shul-overhaul program is the Experiment in Congregational Education, which focuses on Torah study as an important entry point into Jewish life. "On one level, transformation seems daunting," says ECE Director Rob Weinberg. "But on another level, we're just asking congregations to do the best of what they already do, but on a regular basis."

Stressing that he considers success

to be a "continuum, rather than a yes-no proposition," Weinberg estimates that roughly one-half to three-quarters of the synagogues that have participated in his program for several years have in fact transformed themselves.

Temple Shalom of Newton, Mass., is one of them. Under the ECE aegis, the 1,000-family Reform congregation spent five years coming up with five core Jewish values — lifelong learning, enriching spirituality, creating community, tikkun olam, or social action, and Jewish continuity.

Ideally, every new synagogue

event or program exemplifies one of those values. For example, when three of the temple's aging Torah mantles disintegrated, more than 330 members, from nursery school children to grandparents, needlepointed decorative covers for the new mantles, illustrating the values of kedushah, or holiness, and kehillah, or community.

Meanwhile, the congregation has become active in its local federation and the national Reform movement and has sent two large groups to Israel this past year.

"That's what it means to us to be a learning congregation," says Temple Shalom's education director, Julie Vanek. "Not just creating programs, but helping people reflect on who they are and what they want to be." ■

**A** program's 'ultimate goal is to effect change in the person and the congregation. I'd look at the situation two years from now and see how many people have had continuous involvement, or became involved only because this is something new.'

**Rabbi Jerome Epstein**

Executive vice president,  
United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

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## Arrests made in London anti-Semitic attack

LONDON (JTA) — British police detained six young suspects in connection with an attack on a Jewish girl in London. Four 14-year-old girls, a 10-year-old girl and a 10-year-old boy were arrested last week by British police and then released on bail, [TotallyJewish.com](http://TotallyJewish.com) reported.

The victim says she still has nightmares about the attack, which occurred

last month on a bus. In the attack, one of the group allegedly approached the girl and asked if she was Jewish; she replied, "I'm English."

The four girls then pushed her to the floor, stomped on her face and repeatedly kicked her.

The attack left her unconscious with a fractured eye socket. ■

# Memphis gets modern Orthodox school

By RACHEL POMERANCE

ATLANTA (JTA) — Can a prestigious, Orthodox prep school from Manhattan take root in Memphis?

Andy Groveman is betting on it.

Steeped in the city's business and Jewish life, Groveman, president of the new Memphis Jewish High School, has experience to draw on: He has presided over a slew of local Jewish groups, from the Memphis Jewish federation to the city's largest Orthodox synagogue, Baron Hirsch.

Groveman's family business, Belz Enterprises, owns Memphis' legendary Peabody Hotel — famous for its opulence and the ducks who, in a tradition begun in the 1930s, march through the lobby on a red carpet twice a day to the strains of John Philip Sousa's "King Cotton March."

Orthodox Jews make up as much as

25 percent of Memphis' 8,500-strong Jewish community, and they lend significant leadership to the community.

When it came time to send his kids to high school, however, Groveman shipped them to the Ramaz School in Manhattan. Now he's trying to infuse a bit of Ramaz into Memphis.

Three weeks ago, the Memphis Jewish High School opened its doors to nine freshman students, some of the city's most illustrious and devoted teachers and the Harkness method — a roundtable approach to learning instituted at the Phillips Exeter Academy.

So far, so good, those affiliated with the new venture say.

But not everyone is convinced Memphis Jewry can sustain the modern Orthodox school. That's because the city already has an Orthodox Jewish high school — though not a co-ed one, a feature Groveman believes is key.

"If we can figure out a way to support two high schools, 'kol hakovod,' a Hebrew expression meaning roughly "more power to you," said David Cooper, president of the Margolin Hebrew Academy/Feinstone Yeshiva of the South.

But it "flies in the face of reality and logic," he added. "My fear is that because of the size of our community and not trying to work together, whatever the reason, that we're going to have two struggling high schools, and nobody wins that way"

He called it "disappointing to see another school open in the same mold that we are."

But Groveman argues that the new school utilizes a different model and reaches a different market.

Early discussions between the schools showed it made more sense to have separate institutions because of their different ideologies, Groveman said. Without the Memphis Jewish High School, the current crop of freshmen would have chosen non-Jewish schools, he added.

Furthermore, Memphis Jewry's financial and human resources are "extremely

elastic," Groveman said.

The education is certainly an unconventional one.

Apart from the Harkness method, students fulfill their physical education requirement by practicing yoga after morning prayers — it helps them focus for class, faculty members say — and each child receives a state-of-the-art Apple laptop.

The school "will appeal to the majority that's in the middle," principal Adrian Weissman said. There are "a lot of parents that want their daughters to be able to learn Gemarah" and "to study some of the same things that the boys have been able to study."

All but one of the students comes from an Orthodox background, and all but two are boys. A new freshman class will be

added each year until the school serves a full four grades.

"As a parent, it's amazing and beyond our expectations," said Pam Thomas, whose daughter, Courtney, studies at the school. "I've never seen my kids so excited and happy about going to

school as I have with Courtney."

Tuition is \$12,500 per year, but a "pioneering discount" of \$5,000 was offered to the first class, according to Groveman. Beyond the initial investment of the three co-founders — Groveman and his wife Jan; Groveman's in-laws, Jack and Marilyn Belz; and Mark and Sally Wender — the school is seeking to raise money from the Jewish community in Memphis and nationally.

The local federation already offers scholarships for Memphis' other Jewish schools. Some 1,000 students attend Jewish day schools or after-school programs.

"Our community is extremely supportive of Jewish education, and when we do our annual allocations the single largest allocation that stays local is Jewish education," associate federation director Norris Marcus said.

Still the federation remains \$100,000 short of scholarship requests.

"There is never enough money," Marcus said. ■

## THIS WEEK

### MONDAY

■ The Arab American Action Forum, promoting U.S.-Middle East business ties, opens its two-day conference in New York. Jordan's King Abdullah II is keynote speaker.

### TUESDAY

■ President Bush addresses the U.N. General Assembly and outlines his vision for the Middle East. Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, is also scheduled to address the General Assembly.

### WEDNESDAY

■ The Quartet - the grouping of the United States, the United Nations, the European Union and Russia driving the Middle East peace process - meets in New York during the U.N. General Assembly and considers new formulas for Middle East peace.

■ Jewish groups organize a mass solidarity rally at the United Nations on behalf of Israel and calling for the release of three soldiers still in captivity.

■ In New York, the International Raoul Wallenberg Foundation honors to Stjepan Mesić, the president of Croatia.

■ Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), the chairwoman of the U.S. House of Representatives Middle East subcommittee, convenes a briefing on anti-Semitism in the Arab world.

### THURSDAY

■ The U.N. Security Council considers the Quartet's deliberations on new formulas for Middle East peace.

There are 'a lot of parents that want their daughters to be able to learn Gemarah.'

Adrian Weissman

Principal, Memphis Jewish High School

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### MIDDLE EAST

#### Abbas: Coalition talks on hold

Mahmoud Abbas said he has frozen negotiations on forming a Palestinian Authority coalition government with Hamas.

Aides for the Palestinian Authority president said Sunday that his Fatah faction had suspended coalition talks with the governing Hamas because the ruling Islamist movement is refusing to soften its stance on Israel.

Western power brokers who halted aid donations to and diplomatic contacts with the Palestinian Authority after Hamas took power earlier this year have cautiously welcomed the idea of a unity government, but said it would have to recognize Israel and renounce terrorism.

Hamas voiced surprise at the announcements from Abbas' office.

#### Abbas sees Bush talks

Mahmoud Abbas expects to meet President Bush this week for talks on the planned Palestinian Authority coalition government.

An aide to the Palestinian Authority president said over the weekend that he would meet with Bush on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly on Wednesday.

#### Palestinians attack churches

Palestinians attacked churches in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in revenge for the pope's remarks on Islam.

There were no casualties in the weekend arson and shooting attacks against six Palestinian Authority churches, which were claimed by a previously unknown group called The Sword of Islam.

The vigilantes threatened to escalate their actions to church bombings unless Pope Benedict XVI apologizes for a sermon last week in which he appeared to endorse a Christian view that early Islam was spread through violence.

The Vatican has voiced regret in the pope's name.

Two of the attacked churches are Roman Catholic. The rest are Greek Orthodox or Anglican.

#### Israeli Arab MKs praise Hezbollah

On a visit to Beirut, three Arab members of Israel's Parliament praised Hezbollah's "resistance" to Israel.

The three legislators told Lebanese Prime Minister Fouad Siniora last Friday that Hezbollah had "lifted the spirit of the Arab people," the Jerusalem Post reported. Attorney General Menachem Mazuz had opened an investigation against Balad Party legislators Azmi Bishara, Jamal Zahalka and Wasal Taha.

#### Maps blamed for strike on U.N.

Israeli officials said the bombing of a U.N. post in southern Lebanon this summer, in which four U.N. peacekeepers were killed, was caused by faulty maps.

The Israeli air force hit a U.N. outpost in a July 26 strike in Lebanon, drawing harsh criticism from U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who accused Israel of deliberately targeting U.N. forces.

An Israeli report said the strike was aimed at a Hezbollah outpost 180 yards from the U.N. base but that incorrectly marked maps led to the mishap, according to Ha'aretz.

### NORTH AMERICA

#### Senatorial candidate fires aide over blog

A Jewish candidate for U.S. senator fired a staffer who posted racist and anti-Semitic comments on a blog. Rep. Ben Cardin (D-Md.), who won Maryland's Democratic nomination for Senate last week,

fired the staffer after the posts included references to Oreo cookies.

Lt. Gov. Michael Steele, the Republican candidate for senator, said people have thrown Oreos at him in the past, an apparent reference to Steele, who is black, holding views that are conservative, and therefore "white."

The blog also contained an entry describing Cardin's friends as "large men with strong loud voices and Jewish noses."

Cardin said he is "deeply offended and disgusted" by the entries.

### WORLD

#### E.U. sticks to principles on Hamas

Any Palestinian government must recognize Israel and renounce terrorism if it wants international support, the European Union said.

"We are willing to engage with the Palestinian authorities if they are willing to comply with the three demands," Dutch Foreign Minister Ben Bot said last Friday at a gathering of E.U. foreign ministers in Brussels.

He referred to the three conditions for assistance and dialogue set out by the international community after Hamas was elected earlier this year: recognition of Israel, renunciation of terrorism and willingness to abide by previous peace agreements.

#### Moscow stabber gets 16 years

A Moscow man received a 16-year prison term for a January stabbing attack on worshippers at a local synagogue.

Alexander Koptsev, 21, went on a stabbing rampage at the Bolshaya Bronnaya shul in Moscow, injuring nine people.

He was found guilty last Friday of attempted murder and also of inciting racial hatred, a charge that was dropped during his first trial, in March. The Federation of Jewish Communities, a leading Russian Jewish organization, said Friday it was satisfied with the Moscow City Court's verdict in the retrial "because it included hate crime charges and qualified the crime as an act of anti-Semitism."

#### Arrests made in London anti-Semitic attack

British police detained six young suspects in connection with an attack on a Jewish girl in London.

Four 14-year-old girls, a 10-year-old girl and a 10-year-old boy were arrested last week by British police and then released on bail, TotallyJewish.com reported. In the attack, which occurred last month, one of the group allegedly approached the girl and asked if she was Jewish; she replied, "I'm English."

The four girls then pushed her to the floor, stomped on her face and repeatedly kicked her.

The attack left her unconscious with a fractured eye socket.

#### Fallaci, Israel critic turned defender, dies at 76

Oriana Fallaci, the Italian journalist who changed from one of Israel's toughest critics to one of its staunchest defenders, died last Friday at age 76.

Fallaci died in her native Florence, where she was being treated for breast cancer. Fallaci became famous for confrontational interviews with figures including PLO leader Yasser Arafat and Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini.

Fallaci was scathing in her early criticism of Israel's settlement policy and defended Palestinian terrorism; by the time of the recent intifada, however, she defended Israel as a bulwark against Islamic extremism and excoriated the Catholic church for being weak in Israel's defense.

Following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, she sparked controversy with a series of books and articles lambasting Muslims and the Arab World and criticizing the West for weakness in the face of Islam.