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Montreal Jew Battles for Kidney Donation

By Janice Arnold

CJNews.com

May 14, 2005

Sent By: Michelle Stein-Evers Frankl

www.cjnews.com/viewarticle.asp?id=5975

Baruch Tegegne, the man credited with rescuing untold numbers of his fellow Ethiopian Jews, is now in a fight for his own life. Tegegne, 61, needs a kidney transplant and a group of his friends, led by Toronto filmmaker Simcha Jacobovici, thought they had found one, from a man in India, through a website that connects live persons willing to donate an organ – without compensation – to strangers. The Royal Victoria Hospital (RVH), the leading Montreal transplant centre, refuses to conduct transplants under such circumstances, for both ethical and practical reasons. The buying and selling of organs is illegal in Canada, but there is no law explicitly prohibiting so-called “altruistic” donations from unrelated persons.

Last week Tegegne’s lawyer, Michael Bergman, launched what he called precedent-setting legal action against the RVH, part of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC). In a letter to RVH director general Timothy Meagher, Bergman states that the hospital’s refusal to “even consider” testing the potential donor for his compatibility, let alone perform the transplant, endangers Tegegne’s life and, thereby, his rights under the Canadian and Quebec charters. Bergman also says it violates the right to medical treatment under the Canada Health Act and Quebec health-care legislation, as well as the medical profession’s Hippocratic oath. If the RVH does not act “within a reasonable delay,” the letter states that Bergman will seek a court order to force it to do so.

MUHC spokesperson Seeta Ramdass said the hospital is making no comment now that the matter is the subject of legal action. In February, Dr. Douglas Keith, head of the RVH’s living donor transplant program, was quoted in the National Post as saying the hospital has never performed a transplant between strangers as a result of an altruistic donation. He said the RVH could not be sure there is no “quid pro quo” agreement between Tegegne and the potential donor, and that it looks suspicious because the latter is from the Third World and the contact was made via the Internet.

Tegegne, who undergoes dialysis four times a week at the Jewish General Hospital, has been waiting for a transplant for more than two years and his health is said to be deteriorating. None of his seven brothers in Israel are able to donate a kidney, he said at a media conference where the legal action was announced. Speaking softly and looking somewhat frail, Tegegne said: “I want to live like everybody... When the donor in India was found, I was so happy – I thought I would have another life.” Tegegne, a pioneer of the Ethiopian Jewish aliyah movement, moved to Montreal 1979 and is believed to be the first Ethiopian Jew to settle in Canada. His

dramatic escape by foot from Ethiopia in 1974 to get to Israel and his activism in persuading the Israeli government to rescue the little-known Jews of Ethiopia was featured in Jacobovici's 1983 documentary *Falasha: Exile of the Black Jews*. Tegegne has spent much of the past 20 years working among the Ethiopian community in Africa and Israel.

Jacobovici, also at the conference, called Tegegne "a hero who has saved hundreds, if not thousands, from the refugee camps in war-torn Ethiopia." Jacobovici paid a \$441 (US) fee to advertise Tegegne's request for a kidney on www.matchingdonors.com for three months. It was answered by a 30-year-old Indian man, Shree Dhar, who participated in the conference by telephone hook-up. Jacobovici said he, and other friends of Tegegne, will pay for Dhar's travel expenses to Canada, as well as a "reasonable" amount to compensate him for lost wages during his recovery.

Speaking in an English that was not always clear, Dhar repeated that his "motives are pure," that he is not looking for money, beyond his costs, or to immigrate to Canada. Married and the father of two, he said he made 9,500 rupees a month as an investment consultant, and described his circumstances as middle class. He said he is motivated by religious conviction – he is Hindu – and was touched by Tegegne's story of his often risky work among Ethiopian Jews. He also said his grandfather, an army general, died of kidney disease.

Asked why he has not donated a kidney to someone in India, Dhar said he and his wife are registered with an Indian organ bank, but he would have to pay part of his medical costs in India. He also feels the level of health care is higher in Canada. He said he understands the risks of having a kidney removed from speaking to a nephrologist in his area of southern India. "I believe God will be with me," he said. Jacobovici accused the RVH of "obstructing compassion" and of "arrogance, paranoia and a bit of racism" because, he says, it assumes that anyone donating kidney, especially if they are from the Third World, are doing it for the money and not for noble reasons. He doubts any policy exists, and the RVH is "just making one up as it goes along." Jacobovici said a donor's word that he is not going to take compensation for an organ should be enough for a hospital and, if not, an affidavit could be drawn up. In this case, he said Dhar is "totally credible," a point Bergman agreed upon.

Bergman and Jacobovici refuted suggestions that, if a Canadian hospital accepts Dhar's donation, Tegegne is "jumping the queue" because he has the advantage of a lawyer and the public advocacy of a well-known filmmaker. On the contrary, they say that if the legal action is successful, it will benefit everyone by changing the way organ donations are managed in Canada. "There's an unwritten policy in Canada that, other than family members, no one can donate a kidney to anyone else" to avoid the chance that the organ was actually purchased, said Jacobovici. "In other words, they treat live donors as guilty until proven innocent. On the off chance that a bad apple may slip through the system, compassion is obstructed and thousands of Canadians are left to die."

Bergman and Jacobovici say about 3,000 Canadians are on the kidney transplant waiting list, and on average 200 die each year before an organ is available. "I believe I am opening doors for others," Tegegne added. Also participating by conference call was Dr. Robert Hickey, a Canadian living in the United States, who recently underwent the transplant of a kidney donated by a young American man with whom he made contact through www.matchingdonors.com. The operation was done at Presbyterian/St. Luke's Medical Centre in Denver after its clinical ethics committee approved the arrangement. Hickey said he has made inquiries with British Columbia's transplant authority and St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver to see if it will undertake to test Dhar and perform the transplant if he is found compatible.

A fund has been set up to pay for a kidney transplant for Baruch Tegegne. Baruch, who as a child was brought to Israel by President Yitzhak Ben Tzvi, later returned to Ethiopia to help his people. Conditions dramatically worsened in Ethiopia and Baruch's activities on behalf of his people made him a marked man. Baruch escaped by walking almost halfway across Africa. Baruch again returned to Ethiopia to rescue Jews, pioneering the escape routes through Sudan later used in Operation Moses. Baruch is now on dialysis four times per week and must have a kidney transplant very soon. A donor has been located but the Quebec government is refusing to allow a live donor transplant from a non-relative, effectively sentencing Baruch to death – God forbid! \$200,000 US is needed to pay for the transplant outside of Canada.

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Falash Mura Tab Listed

JTA Email Edition

May 11, 2005

Temple Times (online edition)

The cost for transporting Ethiopian Jews to Israel will be some \$23 million over two and a half years. The cost was presented Tuesday to officials of the North American Jewish federation system by its overseas partners, the Jewish Agency for Israel and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which will coordinate the aliyah. Falash Mura, descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity but have returned to Judaism, now immigrate to Israel at a rate of 300 per month.

The Israeli government plans to double the rate of aliyah starting in June, so the group's immigration can be completed in two and a

half years. The Jewish Agency is budgeting more than \$18 million for the operation; the JDC expects to pay \$4.6 million. The figures do not include the cost of absorption once the Ethiopians arrive in Israel, said Mike Rosenberg, JAFI's director general of immigration and absorption. The federation system is expected to raise the funds for the operation, though it hasn't begun that campaign yet.

Ethiopian Aliya Cap Threatened

By Uriel Heilman
The Jerusalem post

A special investigation by The Jerusalem Post has discovered thousands of heretofore unknown potential olim in the Ethiopian hinterlands, posing a potentially serious problem for Israel's plans to end mass Ethiopian aliya by the end of 2007. In just one of the rural areas visited by the Post during its investigation, in Ethiopia's Achefer region, there appear to be at least 1,000 and possibly more than 2,000 "Beta Israel" households, each with up to a dozen children. With indications that equally large communities of Beta Israel, known in Israel as Falash Mura, exist elsewhere in Ethiopia, the number of potential olim in Ethiopia easily could reach 50,000.

That would throw a monkey wrench into Israel's plan to cap the number of olim from Ethiopia at 20,000, a figure set by the government at a cabinet meeting in January. Already, some 16,000 Ethiopian migrants from rural areas are awaiting aliya in shantytowns in Addis Ababa and Gondar, and thousands more have emigrated to Israel over the last decade-and-a-half. "We will go to Israel if there is someone who will take us," said Mane Mekonnen, a woman in her mid-50s from the village of Jankeet Mariam, in Ethiopia's Gojjam province. "Nobody has come to register us. It is out of lack of choice that we stay here." Mekonnen spoke with the Post on market day in the village of Ismallah, which she had reached after a two-hour walk from her home village. She said there were about 50 to 60 Beta Israel families in her village, and that two of her grandchildren live in Israel.

The Post's special investigation, which consisted of a series of interviews and expeditions conducted over several weeks, spanning three continents, and including meetings with dozens of Israeli government officials, Jewish aid workers, and Ethiopians in Israel and Africa, will appear in full in tomorrow's UpFront, the Post's Friday magazine. If the newly discovered Falash Mura in Gojjam province petition for aliya – as many told the Post they would like to do that could derail the decision by the Israeli government and the agreement between the Jewish Agency and the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (Nacoej) to end mass Ethiopian aliya once and for all with the emigration of those awaiting aliya in Addis Ababa and Gondar. "There will be no end to this," one Israeli official involved in the process warned.

A similar plan to end Ethiopian aliya in 1998 was foiled when thousands of rural Falash Mura poured into Addis Ababa and Gondar after Israel brought what it then heralded as the last planeload of Ethiopian immigrants to Israel. At the time, the Beta Israel population awaiting aliya in Gondar and Addis quickly ballooned from near zero to more than 17,000, according to a census conducted a year later. "There is hardly any professional who deals with this issue who believes that an all-encompassing decision like this can close the story," Ami Bergman, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee's (JDC) representative in Israel, said of the government's plan to end Ethiopian aliya.

The JDC provides those awaiting aliya in Gondar and Addis Ababa with medical care, and Nacoej runs compounds in the cities that provide schooling, food and adult Jewish education. Nacoej officials told the Post that its expedition to Achefer coincidentally happened upon the only significantly sized Beta Israel community remaining in rural Ethiopia, and that the Post consequently had a distorted picture of how many Falash Mura remain in Ethiopia. They also said the average household in rural Ethiopia actually is much smaller than it appears, given that many homes are occupied by lone widows or elderly couples. But other aid officials, including Israelis, said such explanations were poppycock, designed to mask the fact that there is no foreseeable end to Ethiopian aliya.

Compounding the problem is lingering controversy over whether or not the Beta Israel remaining in Ethiopia are Jewish. In contrast to the Beta Israel who emigrated to Israel before and during Operations Moses and Solomon in 1984 and 1991, those known as the Falasha, who observed many Jewish customs and knew of their Jewish heritage – the Beta Israel remaining in rural Ethiopia, known in Israel and America as Falash Mura, show virtually no signs of being Jewish. Almost without exception, the dozens of Falash Mura interviewed by the Post said they grew up practicing Christianity, knowing nothing about the Land of Israel, having never heard of the Torah and observing no Jewish customs. Most of those who have migrated to Gondar and Addis Ababa have since learned from American Jewish aid groups there that they need to be Jewish to immigrate to Israel, and they have adopted Jewish observances.

But many Beta Israel, particularly in rural villages, continue to maintain Christian practices. Some are even Christian Orthodox priests. Bodies advocating for their aliya, like Nacoej, argue that these people are Jews whose ancestors adopted Christianity under social or economic duress, and they ought to be considered Jewish. Until recent decades, Ethiopia was governed by a feudal system in which Beta Israel were considered a lowly caste and were forbidden from owning land. Even after large numbers of them converted to Christianity, Ethiopian Christians still were reticent to marry them until relatively recently, some experts say. Partly on the basis of this history, Israel's Chief Rabbinate has ruled that the Falash Mura are Jewish, though they still require them to convert upon their arrival in Israel.

Their eligibility for aliya is determined on the basis of whether or not they can prove Jewish matrilineal descent – criteria set by a government decision to bring them under the Law of Entry, which in this case sets stricter standards than the Law of Return. The Interior Ministry conducts the qualifying investigations. But after so many generations of Christianity and intermarriages, the difficulty of determining whether the Beta Israel left in Ethiopia are Jews is compounded by the fact that they themselves know nothing of their Jewish lineage.

Most Beta Israel living in rural Ethiopia have no idea they have a religious heritage distinct from Christianity – if, indeed, they come from Jewish bloodlines and view their Beta Israel appellation as nothing more than designation of caste. "I never heard of Beta Israel who don't pray in a Christian church," said Mebratu Chekne, 65, a Beta Israel community member from a village called Ande. "We just heard recently about Israel. We heard Israel looks out for its own and they give them money and try to bring them home." "A lot of people have gone to Gondar. But we don't have someone who is collecting us, who is taking care of us," he said. "Nobody has come and asked about us."

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Israel Honors Ethiopian Dead

JTA email Edition
May 4 2005

Israelis commemorated the 4,000 people who died on their way from Ethiopia to Israel. The ceremony, held for the first time on Jerusalem's Mount Herzl, marked the 20th anniversary of Operation Moses, during which 8,000 Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel after trekking across the desert. A monument will be completed by 2006. "It is my hope that this memorial site will become part of the education of all Israeli citizens so that they will know the cost of the journey to Israel," Immigration Absorption Minister Tzipi Livni said.

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Their Homes May Be Far Away – But Their Hearts Are in Israel

By Eitan Rabin
Maariv on-line
May 9, 2005

Members of the Bnei Menashe community, who reside along the border between India and Burma, are waiting to make aliyah. And they haven't forgotten to observe Israel's Memorial Day and Independence Day. As Israelis are busy organizing ceremonies this week to mark *Yom HaZikaron* (Memorial Day) and *Yom HaAtzmaut* (Independence Day), members of the Bnei Menashe community in northeastern India are also preparing to commemorate Israel's fallen soldiers and celebrate the country's independence. The Bnei Menashe, who live near India's border with Burma, claim descent from the Biblical tribe of Manasseh. Nearly 1,000 of them have immigrated to Israel in recent years. Many of the community's younger members have volunteered to serve in the Israeli army, and some of them are in elite combat units, including the paratroopers, Golani, Givati and the Nahal HaHaredi. In March of this year, Israel's Chief Rabbi, Rabbi Shlomo Amar, decided that the Chief Rabbinate would recognize the community's connection with the Jewish people, and will dispatch representatives to convert them, thereby enabling them to make aliyah. Currently, the Bnei Menashe are planning to mark Israel's Memorial Day and Independence Day later this week, and have equipped themselves for this purpose with all the necessary gear, including the "Yizkor" (memorial) prayer as well as blue and white Israeli flags. "It is remarkable how the Bnei Menashe, who have been waiting so long to come to Israel, go to such great lengths to celebrate Yom HaAtzmaut and conduct a special ceremony for Yom HaZikaron, even though they are living in a distant land. It shows how much their hearts are here – in Israel," said Michael Freund, Chairman of *Shavei Israel*, which is primarily responsible for the Bnei Menashe aliyah. "I am moved that they are doing so. It is really heartwarming to hear the sense of excitement and anticipation that they feel. Soon, with the government's help, I hope that we will bring the remaining members of the Bnei Menashe to Israel," Freund said.

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Book Review: A Question of Identity: Iberian Conversos in Historical Perspective

Renee Levine Melammed, Associate Professor of Jewish Studies, Schechter Institute, Jerusalem
Oxfordscholarship.com
Sat, 30 Apr 2005

Abstract: The riots of 1391 in Spain triggered a series of developments that would change the course of Jewish history as well as of Spanish history. Spanish society was not willing to accept the large group of Jews that succumbed to forced baptism at this time; this rejection led to ethnic discrimination, the establishment of the Inquisition, the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, and the forced conversions of the Jews in Portugal in 1497. Regardless of their outward religious affiliation, these Iberian conversos retained a strong sense of identity that was deeply connected to Iberia, an identity that became defined as being a member of the Nation. This identity remained with the converso, whether he or she resided in Iberia or emigrated; in the latter case, each emigrant had to contend with the reality of his or her new environment. While a destination like Holland allowed for a relatively free expression of one's new Jewish affiliation, France and England did not. By contrast, the emigrant in Italy faced an array of choices, from joining an existing Jewish community to forming one's own, to remaining Catholic to attempting to maintain an ambiguous commute between the two worlds. The ties between the members of the nation were first and foremost ethnic, but also economic, familial, and emotional. Later, when the descendants of some of these conversos faced modernity, unexpected changes transpired: in Majorca, intermarriages took place for the first time; in Belmonte, conversions to Judaism were recorded; in the Southwest, claims that are extremely difficult to substantiate have been made by supposed descendants of sixteenth-century conversos. Consequently, the question of identity among Iberian conversos has proven to be surprisingly long-lived, for debates on the topic are still taking place well into the twenty-first century.

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Recife Jewish Community Shrinks but Fights to Keep Its School Open

By Bill Hinchberger
JTA email Edition
May 16, 2005

Local leaders fear that Recife, Brazil, the birthplace of Judaism in the Americas, may lose its only Jewish school, the cornerstone of its community. The Colegio Israelita Moyses Chvarts, which serves a Jewish community of 1,400, is saddled with nearly \$250,000 in debt. It might be forced to close at the end of the next term if administrators can't find a way to reverse the school's financial slide.

"We've been able to operate thanks to a miracle," says Principal Marcelo Kozmhinsky, who doubles as the Jewish culture teacher. "We've done it exclusively with resources from the community." Home to Kahal Zur Israel, which became the first synagogue in the Americas when it was founded in 1637, Recife played a key role in Jewish history in the New World. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Iberian Jews fled to Recife and other parts of northeastern Brazil to get away from the Inquisition. When Holland seized the town for more than two decades in the mid-17th century, many Jews from Amsterdam moved there. When the Portuguese reconquered it, some of those Jews escaped to New York, forming the first Jewish community there.

The core of today's community in Recife traces its roots to Ashkenazim who left Russia and Romania in the early 20th century. Those Ashkenazi immigrants founded the school 85 years ago; in its early years, the language of instruction was Yiddish. Today the school offers courses in Jewish history and culture and Hebrew, as well as the standard secular curriculum. The school hosts celebrations of all the major Jewish holidays, and has enrolled as many as 350 students. "That's a pretty high percentage of the community," Kozmhinsky notes. "This school is not like other schools. It is the only institution in this community," Rabbi Avraham Amitay says. Amitay, who is supported by the Jewish Agency for Israel, arrived in Recife last year, the first rabbi to live in the city for a long time.

"I looked for a central place to work, and I settled on the school," he says. Recife does not have a functioning synagogue — the restored 17th century building serves as a cultural center open to tourists so Amitay holds Kabbalat Shabbat services in a classroom on Friday nights. Even more than they appreciate such services, parents appreciate the religious instruction provided to their children. "My wife is also Jewish, but she didn't want to send our daughter to the school because we live 30-40 minutes away," Ismar Kaufman says. But when their first-grader was able to chant the Friday night prayers at home for the first time, Kaufman's wife changed her mind. "It was heartwarming," he says.

The school's enrollment now stands at 126. Assimilation, middle class flight from the school's neighborhood to more upscale beach areas, and migration to Israel and other Brazilian urban centers such as Sao Paulo, are responsible for the decline. Brazil's economic woes have reduced the middle class ability to pay private school tuition. The country's drought-stricken, impoverished northeast, where Recife is located, has been particularly hard hit. Recife's unemployment rate stood at 22.7 percent in March, according to DIESSE, a labor-funded think tank. The school's tuition is more than \$250 per month. That's high by Brazilian standards, about 50 percent more than other top private institutions in Recife, Kaufman says.

The school offers an introductory rate of about \$180 per month for new students. Most children receive "scholarships", a euphemism

for discounts. Unwilling to raise tuition even more, the school successfully turned to wealthier members of the community for help. Still, three years ago officials had to close the high school, and last year the administration began actively recruiting non-Jews for the preschool, elementary and middle school programs. "At the end of every year, there's uncertainty about the following year," Kaufman says. But community leaders refuse to give up. "We can't let this community die," says Boris Berenstein, president of the Pernambuco State Israelite Federation. "We have to invest in our present and in our future."

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A Priest Embraces His Hidden Jewish Roots

By Ingrid Peritz
Globeandmail.com
Wednesday, May 11, 2005

One night last week, as thousands of Montrealers gathered in a west-end synagogue to commemorate the Holocaust, an enigmatic and dark-featured man in a priest's collar sat quietly in the audience. He looked like one of the many dignitaries in attendance, there to pay homage to the millions who perished. But at one point in the ceremony, a request came from the stage: Would all the Holocaust survivors in the audience please stand up? Amazingly, the priest rose, and started to cry.

Father Romuald-Jakub Weksler-Waszkinel is a living embodiment of an apparent contradiction: He is a Catholic priest and, as he discovered as an adult, also a Jew. "I cried and cried," he recalled of the emotional gathering last week. "I thought of all the people who were exterminated. Of my mother, my father, my brother, and all my ancestors. I am alone." Father Weksler-Waszkinel, a professor at Lublin Catholic University in Poland, is in Canada this week to promote Christian-Jewish dialogue at the invitation of the Canadian Jewish Congress. He also came to visit an elderly Canadian woman in Toronto in the hopes of finding clues to his long-hidden past.

But mostly he came to tell his remarkable story of survival, at a time when the world's gaze turns back to the end of a horrible conflict 60 years ago. Born Jewish, Father Weksler-Waszkinel survived the war by being hidden in a Catholic home. He only learned the startling truth many decades later. He was born in 1943 in the Jewish ghetto of the small town of Swieciany, then part of Poland and now in Lithuania. His parents, Jakub and Batia Weksler, knew their baby risked death at the hands of the Nazis. Desperate, Batia managed to make contact with a Gentile couple, Piotr and Emilia Waszkinel, and begged them to take her infant son.

To accept was to risk death. So Batia Weksler made an appeal that would prove prophetic: "You are a Christian, and Jesus was Jewish," she told the fearful Emilia. "Save my child, a Jewish child, and in the name of Jesus that you believe in, he will grow up and become a priest." The Catholic couple sheltered the little boy and raised him as their own. And one day, as if driven by blind destiny, their son announced he would enter the priesthood. He couldn't understand why his parents weren't happy. His father scoffed, his mother cried into her handkerchief.

He stuck with it, even while doubts about his identity gnawed at him. As a little boy, town drunks taunted him by calling him a Jewish bastard. He searched in vain for a resemblance to his parents and their Slav features. He himself was afraid of the truth. The church had taught that the Jews killed Jesus: "It's not possible I was one of the killers," he thought. It wasn't until he had already been a priest for 12 years that Father Weksler-Waszkinel confronted his mother, who was ailing. They met for supper one night. "I took her hands, and covered them in kisses. I said, 'Mother, you must tell me. It's just one part of the story of your life, but it's my entire life. It's my roots.'" Sobbing, his mother confided the truth. "You had wonderful parents," she told the 35-year-old, "and they were killed. I saved your life."

Stunned, he felt the need to confide in someone, and wrote to another Polish priest. Karol Wojtyla had been Father Weksler-Waszkinel's professor in Lublin. Now he was Pope John Paul II. The pontiff responded: "My Beloved Brother. I pray so that you can rediscover your roots." The priest combined the names of his two families. Eventually, he travelled to Israel and met his father's brother. He was shown a photo of his mother, in whom he finally saw the light of self-recognition. His uncle embraced him as a long lost relative, but also confronted him: How could he choose to embody 2,000 years of hatred toward Jews? "I'm not 2,000 years old," he replied, "I'm just 49. I can only change the attitudes of others. To really belong to Jesus means to love Jews. You can't be observant and anti-Semitic at the same time. I believe my destiny is to purify the house I live in."

While in Israel, he also brought up a name that his father had often mentioned to him: Niusia, a young Jewish girl from his hometown. In another stroke of fate, one of his hosts knew her, and she lived in Toronto. On Friday, Father Weksler-Waszkinel disembarked from a bus in Toronto and an 80-year-old woman recognized him immediately. She had never seen Father Weksler-Waszkinel, but instinctively knew it was him. Niusia Nodel grew up across the street from Father Weksler-Waszkinel's Jewish family. She also remembers his Catholic parents, and the kind Polish woman who took him in. "She was very brave. Because she was in danger for doing what she did."

"As a mother, I know what it is to raise a child," said Mrs. Nodel, who also survived the war in hiding and saw her family wiped out. "I

held back tears for his mother, who wasn't alive to see him grow up." Now Father Weksler-Waszkinel struggles to reconcile his two faiths. He wears a Star of David overlaid with a cross, which he glued together himself. Since arriving in Montreal, he finds that everywhere he looks, he sees people who resemble him. "When I'm with Jews, I feel I'm with my family. It's irrational. I live in Poland, where I'm a bit like an orphan."

Lublin, whose population was one-third Jewish during the war, doesn't have a single Jewish family left, he says. Mainly, the 62-year-old priest says he is in Canada because he wants to bear witness to history, and his personal tale that he describes as "miraculous." "I am here as a Catholic priest who is Jewish, and who discovered his roots. And now that I discovered them, I love them."

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Bearing The Unbearable

By Michele Chabin

The Jewish Week

May 13, 2005

www.thejewishweek.com/news/newscontent.php3?artid=10874

Jerusalem — Therese Collins never imagined she would major in Jewish studies in college. "I came to Jewish studies by accident," said Collins, 20, a student at the City University of New York, explaining how a black Catholic woman from the Caribbean island of Antigua came to be standing outside the walls of the Old City, next to the Jaffa Gate. Her long silver earrings shimmering in the warm Jerusalem sun, Collins recalled that "when Chem 101 was booked, my adviser suggested I study the psychology of religion, a Jewish studies course. I loved the class and heard from other students that the Holocaust class was very interesting. Halfway through the year I declared a major in Jewish studies."

The journey that brought Collins to study the Holocaust and other Jewish subjects brought her to Poland last week, where she and nine other Jewish studies majors from CUNY — only one of them Jewish — participated in the March of the Living. From there they flew to Israel. The trip, which was subsidized by the Anti-Defamation League and CUNY, brought the students face-to-face with the evils of the Holocaust. In Poland, the students walked through the gates of Auschwitz and gazed into the crematoria. They wept at the sight of shoes and eyeglasses piled high at the Madjanek concentration camp, knowing these ordinary possessions belonged to ordinary people exterminated by the Nazis simply because they were Jewish.

The CUNY students shared these experiences with a group of Polish students majoring in Jewish studies. Like them, the Poles were overwhelmingly non-Jews. The ADL, which this year also invited a group of Catholic educators to the March of the Living, felt compelled to invite the CUNY students after learning of their eclectic backgrounds. The vast majority of CUNY's Jewish studies majors are non-Jews; many are minorities, either from the United States or abroad. "You have a kaleidoscope of every color, every religion, who are studying Jewish religion and the history of the Shoah," ADL National Director Abraham Foxman said in an interview shortly after flying into Israel from Poland. "What better way to bring a better understanding of the greatest tragedy of Jewish life?"

Foxman said he was very impressed with the CUNY students, whom he met for the first time in Poland. "I sat together with them in Warsaw at 1 in the morning, along with one of the individuals who had helped ADL fund the trip," he recalled. "The students shared what the visit had meant to them. There were a lot of tears." This was especially true for Katarina Sefrankova, an immigrant from Slovakia, who learned in her late teens that her father is Jewish and most of his family had perished in a concentration camp.

"Until the last second, I was not sure that it was a good idea for me to come to Poland," Sefrankova admitted during a shopping break along Jerusalem's Ben-Yehuda pedestrian mall. "At Madjanek I couldn't stop crying. I couldn't catch my breath. There was human hair and shoes piled high. One girl in our group collapsed and that's how I felt. It was too much for me. I'm not sorry I went, but I'll never go back there." What made the trip to Poland bearable, Sefrankova said, was the support she received from other students, faculty, ADL staffers and Holocaust survivors. "Everyone was holding everyone else," Sefrankova recalled, her face drawn. "When someone became a little weak, the others instinctively held out a hand or touched a shoulder." As difficult as the trip to Poland was, "it made me feel more Jewish," she affirmed. Memuna Kamara, 21, a senior who like several of the other Jewish studies students is also majoring in international relations, called the visit to Poland and Israel "the culmination" of her studies.

"I've studied Jewish law and ethics and the Talmud. I've looked at questions through the prism of halacha," said Kamara, a black Muslim from Sierra Leone, using the Hebrew term for 'Jewish law.' I'm taking the Bible as a literature and a kabbalah class." While her studies have made her more adept at reading Jewish texts, Kamara said, nothing quite prepared her for what she saw in Poland. "After going to the extermination sites, it's hard to understand how such a thing as the Holocaust could have happened not so many years ago," Kamara said. "As a child in Sierra Leone who experienced a fraction of what it is to live in a war zone, I think the Holocaust is not an issue that should be spoken of only by Jews. It needs to be seen globally, by all people."

"You can say Jews are paranoid, but they have a reason to be," Collins said, describing her visit to Madjanek. "Above one of the bunks were pictures of babies, old people, who were killed just because they were Jews." Collins said it was impossible as a black

woman not to see parallels between the way blacks suffered at the hands of slave traders and the way Jews suffered under Nazi rule. "With slavery, people were brutalized, deported and many died," she said. "The same thing happened 100 years later in the form of the Holocaust. How could the Holocaust happen? Why wasn't the world crying out?" Collins called Jews "another minority that has been disenfranchised and victimized." Now, she said, "I want to take a black studies course to learn more about my people's struggles and connect the two together." Foxman suspects that at least some of the students on the trip will go on to teach Jewish studies at far-flung universities. "Chances are some will be teaching in black universities or other minority environments, where they will be able to forge a greater rapport with students than a Jewish professor teaching Jewish studies would be able to forge," he said. "What they experienced in Poland and Israel will only make them more credible."

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Crosses, Crescents and Stars

New York Times
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The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has member organizations from more than 180 countries, but not Israel. Excluding Israel is wrong, and it diminishes the Red Cross movement's moral standing. But there is a real chance that under heavy pressure from the American Red Cross, the policy will change in the near future. For the sake of the Red Cross as much as Israel, it should. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies includes Red Cross organizations from North Korea, Iran and Cuba, but not from Israel. The reason it gives is that the corresponding Israeli society, Magen David Adom, uses the Jewish star as its emblem and will not adopt the red cross or red crescent, emblems that are recognized by the Geneva Conventions and the international Red Cross movement. Understandably, the Israelis do not want to adopt either of these emblems because they are heavy with religious meaning.

There is growing pressure on the Red Cross federation to change its policy. Since 2000, the American Red Cross has protested the discrimination against Israel by withholding \$30 million in dues from the federation. Unless something changes before the 181 Red Cross and Red Crescent societies meet in November, the American Red Cross will have withheld its dues for five years. That means it could have its voting rights suspended, which would be a setback for both the American Red Cross and the international Red Cross movement.

The best solution would be for the umbrella organization, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, to drop both the cross and the crescent and to adopt a protective emblem with no religious connotation. It would be less divisive and safer for rescue workers, who are now in danger of being targeted because of the religious symbolism of the emblem they operate under. It seems unlikely that the Red Cross movement will switch to a single emblem anytime soon, but it is working on a plan that could allow Israel to join.

It is considering adding a protective emblem devoid of religious connotations, known as the red crystal, which could be adopted by Israel and by other nations that do not want to use the cross or the crescent. But there are a series of procedural hurdles that must be jumped over, starting with amending the Geneva Conventions. Switzerland, the official depository of the Conventions, is now sounding out the 191 signatory nations to see whether there is enough support for the change. If the Geneva Conventions are amended, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which includes the federation, would then have to change its statutes to recognize the new emblem.

Despite all the talk of emblems, it is politics that have impeded Israel's entry. That situation puts the Red Cross movement in an unfortunate position. The International Committee of the Red Cross, the arm of the movement that works in conflict zones and visits prisoners, often finds itself urging nations to put politics aside and do the right thing, such as in its current work on behalf of the detainees at the American prison in Guantánamo Bay. It will be in a better position to make these moral appeals when it can show that it is part of a movement that does what is right, rather than what is politically expedient, when it comes to running its own shop.

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Survey: Children of Intermarriage Identify as Jews Some of the Time

By Sue Fishkoff
JTA Email Edition
May 8, 2005

A new survey of adult children of intermarried parents shows a high level of Jewish cultural identification and interest in Jewish studies, combined with low levels of childhood Jewish education and religious attachment. Ninety young adults from Boston, Chicago and San Francisco, each with one non-Jewish parent, described their relationship to Judaism and the Jewish community in recent face-to-face interviews run by the Jewish Outreach Institute. Key findings from the study were slated to be presented Wednesday in San Francisco. The full report will be released later this month, and the institute's executive director, Rabbi Kerry Olitzky, says he hopes Jewish organizations will use it to design programming to reach that growing population.

Preliminary analysis of the data suggests a population that "feels Jewish" in many ways, despite a lack of Jewish education or affiliation. Just 30 percent of those interviewed identify with Judaism as a religion, but almost 70 percent say that being Jewish is important to them. Those who did not celebrate any Jewish rituals or holidays describe being Jewish in cultural terms — reading Jewish books, going to Jewish movies — or in terms of social action, such as giving to charity and working on tikkun olam projects. One respondent said, "The older I get, the more I feel I want to cling to my Jewish roots, especially in these times, to see an alternative to the Christian right."

Concerning formative Jewish experiences, one-third said they'd had some formal Jewish education as children, but a large proportion mentioned two specific Jewish experiences as being meaningful: being taken to see *Fiddler on the Roof* and/or *Schindler's List*. In other words, survey analysts wrote, "for many of these young people, Jewish history as filtered through a Hollywood or Broadway lens was their sole Jewish experience while growing up." The institute's assistant executive director, Paul Golin, says the interesting aspect of this response was that this population understood such films as touching their Jewish core. "A non-Jewish American seeing these films would not be having a Jewish experience," he muses. "What else is out there in secular society that could be experienced as a Jewish experience? And how do we build a bridge between that experience and deeper Jewish engagement?"

Despite the minimal nature of their religious upbringing, nearly 40 percent of those interviewed had enrolled in a Jewish studies course in college, and 78 percent said they wanted to transmit a Jewish identity to their children. This finding conflicts with the National Jewish Population Survey 2000-2001, which found that just 24 percent of students with one Jewish parent had taken a Jewish studies course. Other findings cannot be accurately compared, as questions were worded differently in each survey. The same is true of the 2002 Hillel study of Jewish college first-year students. Olitzky says the study reveals a population curious about its Jewish identity and ripe for creative outreach by Jewish organizations, particularly during the college years. "If these kids are gaining their Jewish experiences through secular means, Jewish institutions need to exploit those secular means," he says, instead of "working solely within the walls of their own institutions."

For example, he suggests that instead of running its own Jewish film festival, Hillel might "insinuate a Jewish film" into an already existing nondenominational film festival, thus providing a "non-branded Jewish experience" for young people from intermarried homes who are interested in their Jewish heritage but might not step into a campus Jewish organization. The study also revealed how important celebrating a bar or bat mitzvah is to this group. "We didn't know how significant that was," Olitzky says. "Take a typical kid from an intermarried home, with no childhood Jewish experience. He gets to the age of 12 or 13, he goes to his friends' bar mitzvahs, comes home and says, I want one." "How will the synagogue community respond to that? Will they say, You have to be a member. You have to have gone through our religious school." Another interesting finding concerns the level of comfort these young adults have with their dual religious identity. Many describe themselves as half-Jewish, seemingly unaware that the Reform and Reconstructionist movements accept patrilineal as well as matrilineal descent. That seems to apply to their parents as well: While 77 percent of respondents with Jewish mothers were encouraged to identify with the Jewish religion, that number dropped to 45 percent for respondents with Jewish fathers.

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Campus Groups Hold Multicultural Shabbat: Coach Speaks on Israel Team Experience

By Josh Goldman
Sun Staff Writer
April 12, 2005

Cornell's African-American and Jewish communities came together Friday night in Robert Purcell Community Center for a traditional Jewish Shabbat dinner with a twist. That twist was provided by former basketball star LaVon Mercer, a self-described African-American Israeli who seemed the perfect man to bring the groups together. Mercer spoke and fielded questions about race relations, terrorism, food, culture and basketball in Israel and in the United States, among other issues.

He said the friendships he made in Israel were the main reason he stayed for so long and maintains such a strong connection to the country. "I thought, 'they took care of me, now I have to give back to the State of Israel,'" he said. Mercer emphasized the importance of accepting individuals as people instead of labeling them with a particular race or religion. He said his Israeli teammates and neighbors made him feel comfortable and at home from the day he arrived in the country. "The Israeli brothers and sisters took me in

and we started working together," he said.

Mercer also stressed the extent to which he felt accepted in Israel and implored those in attendance to work together to cross racial lines and create the same culture of cooperation in the United States and at Cornell. "The complacency we have in the States is because we all sat on our rumps too long," he said. After starring at the University of Georgia, where he holds the career record for blocked shots, Mercer was drafted by the NBA's San Antonio Spurs. The Spurs sent Mercer overseas to develop his offensive skills. Though he intended to stay for a short while, Mercer soon fell in love with Israel, and played for 14 years on Hapoel and Maccabi Tel-Aviv, Israel, as well as the Israeli national team. Before long, people were calling him "the Israeli Michael Jordan" for his leadership on and off the court.

After acquiring Israeli citizenship, Mercer also served in the Israel Defense Forces. He is currently the head basketball coach at Spelman College in Atlanta, Ga. Students who participated in the event seemed to feel inspired and optimistic. "It was very heartening to hear Coach Mercer speak of his great experiences living in Israel. I'm very hopeful that the Jewish and black communities will continue to build bonds with each other well into the future," said CIPAC President Dan Greenwald '05. "Now that we have created an open dialogue, and people are comfortable with each other, we can start to collaborate. Us coming together and celebrating together is what Ezra Cornell wanted. This is diversity, and were giving it to him," said Justin Davis '07.

"He had some cool stuff to say about religion and what we have in common as opposed to our differences," said Kur Robin '08. "I thought this was a really positive experience. I always like to see different groups get together," said Ashley Holt '07. "I enjoyed the speaker and hope to attend events like this again." The event, which drew more than 100 Cornell students, was co-sponsored by the Cornell Israel Public Affairs Committee (CIPAC), Black Students United (BSU), Cornell Hillel, Cornell NAACP, the Program of Jewish Studies, the Near Eastern Studies Department and the Grinspoon Grant from Hillel International.

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