
Be'chol Lashon (In Every Tongue)

**We are different cultures, languages and colors,
yet we share Israel, Hebrew and Torah**

A Program of the Institute for Jewish & Community Research
www.JewishResearch.org

Be'chol Lashon Update 5/20/04

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3rd Annual Bay Area Be'chol Lashon Spring Event: MultiCultural Shavuot Festival

Institute for Jewish & Community Research 415.386.2604

Sunday, May 23, 2004 from 1:00-4:00

See flyer at www.JewishResearch.org

Location: Berkeley Richmond Jewish Community Center, 1414 Walnut Street

Free: open to the public

Join Black, Asian, Latino, and mixed race Jews and their families and friends to celebrate Shavuot (the festival of the giving of the Torah) and the inclusiveness of Judaism. During the Jewish holiday of Shavuot, we commemorate "zman matan Torataynu," the time of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai. Tradition asserts that all Jews throughout history stood at Sinai, including future generations and those who join the Jewish people through conversion.

Featuring: Family Art Stations (Asian, Latino and African Jewish Art), Music, Dance, Workshops (with Rabbi Capers Funnye, Rabbi Gershon, Tziporah Sizomu, Miri Hunter Haruach, Ph.D. and Scott Rubin) and a Book Fair with multicultural books by Cody's Bookstore.

This year we are please to announce that we have 40 co-sponsors:

American Jewish World Service, Ayn Sof Kabbalah Community, Berkeley Hillel, Berkeley-Richmond JCC, Beth Jacob Congregation, Brandeis Hillel Day School, Building Jewish Bridges: Outreach to Interfaith Couples, Congregation Beth El, Congregation Beth Israel, Congregation Beth Shalom (SF), Congregation B'nai Emunah, Congregation B'nai Shalom, Congregation B'nai Tikvah, Congregation Chevra Thilim, Congregation Emanu-El, Congregation Kol Shofar, Congregation Netivot Shalom, Congregation Rodef Shalom, Congregation Sha'ar Zahav, Congregation Sherith Israel, Congregation Shir Hadash, East Bay JCRC, Jewish Community Center of San Francisco, Jewish Community High School of the Bay, Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC), Jewish Family & Children's Services of the East Bay, Jewish Community Federation of the Greater East Bay, Kehilla Community Synagogue, Kol Hadash (Humanistic Judaism), Osher-Marín JCC, Pact, An adoption Alliance, Project Welcome, Union for Reform Judaism, San Francisco Hillel, SFJCC's Club 18 Teen Program, Tehiyah Day School, Temple Beth Abraham, Temple Beth Shalom (San Leandro), Temple Isaiah of Contra Costa County, Temple Israel of Alameda & Temple Sinai

A special thanks to the Berkeley Richmond JCC for donating their Center

Black Jews Find New Home in Marquette Park

Israelites March with Torah Scroll and Dedicate their New Synagogue

Rabbi Capers Funnye

Chicago, Illinois

June 4-5, 2004

6601 South Kedzie Ave

The second oldest congregation of African American Jews in the United States moves from the South Chicago community to Marquette Park, a community once riddled with racial tension. The new synagogue, which has twice the square footage of space than the old synagogue, was designated as a safe house for Martin Luther King Jr. when he marched in Marquette Park in the mid-'60s. The congregation's former home located at 8927 South Houston Avenue, built in 1902, is the oldest Jewish edifice in continuous use in the Chicago metropolitan area. Beth Shalom B'nai Zaken Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation was chartered under the name, Association of Ethiopian Settlement Workers, in 1915, a time when very few African-Americans adopted Judaism as a way of life.

Beth Shalom B'Nai Zaken Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation will join with approximately 300 friends and well-wishers from Christian and Jewish congregations around the country and the metropolitan area. We will march with the Torah Scroll from 67th Street and Kedzie Avenue to 6601 South Kedzie at 10:30 a.m. on Saturday, June 5, 2004. We will dedicate the synagogue and unveil the new name plaque. "...Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

This weekend also celebrates the 10th year anniversary of the congregation's reorganization. Following the morning service there will be tours of the two-story building. The theme of the commemorative weekend is taken from Joshua 13:1, ".....and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed," speaks to Rabbi Funnye's visionary leadership. The festivities will kick-off on Friday, June 4, 2004, at 7:30 p.m. with an evening service and culminate on Saturday evening June 5, 2004 beginning at 9:00 p.m. with an evening of dining, entertainment, and dancing. The public is invited. Tickets are \$25.00 per person, and \$12.00 for children.

Lenny Kravitz's Feature Film about his Black-Jewish Roots

JTA Email Edition

Friday, May 14, 2004

Rock star Lenny Kravitz is making a semi-autobiographical feature film about his black-Jewish roots. Kravitz, the son of a Jewish TVproducer and actress Roxie Roker, told MTV.com he is making his cinematic debut in "Barbecues and Bar Mitzvahs," a dramatic comedy about a musician searching for love and happiness.

Israel's Tallest Ambassador

by Daphna Berman

Ha'aretz

5/14/04

Former Hapoel and Maccabi Tel Aviv basketball player LaVon Mercer is promoting Israel's case in black churches, universities and community centers in his native Atlanta.

Former Israeli basketball sensation LaVon Mercer is on a mission to serve his country. But as an African American with

an Israeli passport, that's become a bit complicated given a hybrid identity that allows him to feel perfectly at home "on either side" of the black-Jewish divide.

"I'm an Israeli and a black American," he explained last week, repeating an obviously well-rehearsed mantra. Mercer, who was here for the Final Four on an Israeli consulate sponsored trip, has recently become Israel's "public relations ambassador" in Atlanta's large, vocal and traditionally segregated black community. He is trying to plead Israel's case from the inside, and the local Israeli consulate, meanwhile, couldn't be more pleased.

Standing at two meters nine, Mercer likes to think of himself as "Israel's biggest ambassador." He gets annoyed when people ask him when he first decided to work on Israel's behalf. "I never stopped working for Israel and so I never started either," he replies.

Mercer's career here began in 1980, when he arrived to play for Hapoel Tel Aviv. During the course of his 14-year stay, he acquired Israeli citizenship, switched to Maccabi Tel Aviv, served in the IDF, and played for the Israeli national team. He retired from professional sports 10 years ago and has since returned to his native Atlanta, but that he says, does not reflect on his steadfast commitment to the state. "I don't have to be here [in Israel] to help Israel," he insists.

Mercer, who regularly tours the African American circuit in Atlanta and visits churches, universities, and community centers, tries to make Israel's case "as a black man." He began soon after returning to Atlanta, but with the Israeli consulate in Atlanta's recent co-opting of his services, Mercer's PR mission has become more official, organized, and in many ways, recognized.

"There are a lot of things that I can contribute, beyond just teaching someone how to shoot a basketball," he told Anglo File last week.

Mercer's speaking tours are varied, though he usually likes to speak about his military basic training, his volunteer work with Ethiopian immigrants here, and the time when a bicycle carrying explosives went off only a few hundred meters from his home. "People are receptive to me, I know they are," he insists. "The consulate wouldn't have paid for my flight here if I wasn't doing something right."

Aviv Ezra, the Deputy Consul General in Atlanta, agrees. "The first time I heard LaVon speak, I knew that he would represent the state of Israel and the people of Israel," he said last week from Atlanta. "LaVon lived in Israel for 14 years and so he knows what the Israeli experience is all about. He's not a paid government employee and so he's more credible to a crowd. He speaks from the heart."

But not everyone is as convinced. When Mercer, who now coaches basketball at a small liberal arts college in Atlanta, tells people that he's "just doing what's right for my country," by-standers are confused when they realize that he is referring to Israel. People have stormed out of his talks before, and Mercer admits that his job has been more difficult in recent months, especially since Israel's assassinations of Hamas leaders. He insists, however, that whatever mistrust exists between the African American and Jewish communities in Atlanta is a result of ignorance, rather than anti-Semitism.

"They [African Americans] just don't know who we are," he says, in an ironic twist of pronouns.

In the meantime, Mercer admits to have checked local real estate prices during this short visit, in the hopes that he will eventually split his time between Tel Aviv and Atlanta. Racial tensions in Atlanta, he says, are demoralizing: "You accept people for who they are here. There, it all depends on the color of your skin." He is also working on a project that will bring him back later this summer to coach a joint basketball team of African-American and Israeli youth in Ra'anana, Atlanta's sister city. "I can come and go as I please," he adds. "I've got dual citizenship."

Changes Slow to Come for Liberal Latin Congregations

By Marcus Moraes and Gabriel Toueg

JTA Washington Bureau Chief Ron Kampeas contributed to this report

JTA Email Edition

Thursday, May 13, 2004

With hundreds of rabbis, community activists and synagogue-goers in the audience, the excitement was palpable as Brazil's first female rabbi took to the bimah on Shabbat. Never before had a female spiritual leader been invited to the bimah at the 2,000-family Congregacao Israelita Paulista, Brazil's largest synagogue, affiliated with both the Reform and the Conservative movements. But Rabbi Sandra Kochmann's appearance on the bimah was one of many signs of change

at the recent Conference of Jewish Communities of the Americas, perhaps heralding a new Jewish era in Latin America.

"There was electricity in the air," said Rabbi Uri Regev, executive director of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, of Kochmann's appearance on the bimah. In late 2003, Kochmann took the post of assistant rabbi at Rio de Janeiro's largest synagogue, the 1,000-family Associacao Religiosa Israelita, also known as ARI. She was the only woman among 25 rabbis at the April 29-May 2 conference in Sao Paulo. "I felt like a hero when I saw that all of ARI's delegation members sitting in the first rows were staring at me," Kochmann said of her appearance on the bimah. "That truly represented a lot for them; I was like their daughter up there."

Some 350 people from 50 Reform and Conservative institutions across Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay, Canada, the United States and Israel attended the conference, debating topics such as Jewish education, intermarriage, small communities, the role of women in Jewish community, human rights, youth, Jewish outreach and homosexual Jews. For some, the conference was an opportunity to see how the different streams of Judaism vary from country to country.

Lenore Mass, vice president of the Union for Reform Judaism in the Chicago area, said she was struck by the vast differences regarding women's roles between Reform Judaism in Brazil and in the United States. "It is clear that even in more egalitarian congregations in Brazil there is still a long way to go," Mass said. "In talking with some of the women at the conference, it was clear that many -- even those from somewhat more liberal congregations -- feel real pain at being relegated to a status more on the periphery, though they also acknowledged that many other women in their congregations did not perceive a problem and were not looking for change."

Historian Jeannete Erlich, of Rio's Associacao Religiosa Israelita, said there were few opportunities to discuss how interfaith couples could be integrated into Jewish communal life.

"I was very disappointed to see that the issue was swept under the rug," she said. "On the other hand, I was very glad to see that ARI is light years ahead of the others. We have an open attitude in welcoming couples in which one of the spouses is not Jewish. We must focus on the children; we can't cast off children with Jewish potential." Rabbi Leonardo Alanati, spiritual leader of the 180-family Congregacao Israelita Mineira, in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, said, "One of the challenges of Liberal Judaism in small communities is to keep a moderate action line so that people can absorb the changes." He mentioned innovations such as egalitarianism, saying, "Evolution instead of revolution."

At his synagogue, Alanati said, men and women sit together "except for the four front rows, which are reserved for those who wish to stay separated." Women also are counted toward the minyan at Alanati's synagogue, but are not allowed to read the Torah. Mario Grunebaum, president of Sao Paulo's Congregacao Shalom, said, "Some two-thirds of Sao Paulo's Jews attend no synagogue, not even on the High Holidays. These people are our biggest challenge -- their return to Judaism."

Marcelo Kozmhinsky came to the conference from Recife, Brazil, the first Jewish community established in the Americas. "Today," he said, "we have no other temple beside Chabad. We came to find an alternative way to live Judaism other than the Orthodox way." Buenos Aires-based Rabbi Sergio Bergman, executive president of a group called Fundacion Judaica, said Argentine and Brazilian Jews should cooperate by holding joint events such as conferences and seminars.

"The meaning of the word community can't be other than common-unity," he said. The next Conference of the Jewish Communities of the Americas is scheduled for mid-2005 in Buenos Aires. "Until then, we hope to start a culture of acceptance for Liberal Judaism and things that Latin American chauvinism rejects, like the opening for women in rites that were once exclusive to men," said Miriam Wasserman, the World Union for Progressive Judaism's representative for Latin America.

Starting at the Post Office, Guide Gives Tours of Jewish Mexico City

By Corrie MacLaggan

JTA Email Edition

Friday, May 14, 2004

For someone wandering the cobblestone streets of Mexico City's Historic Center, where the sound of the cathedral bells fills the air and the streets have names like Jesus Maria, it's hard to imagine that this neighborhood was once the heart of the country's Jewish community. But here, where the streets are now crowded with vendors selling everything from tacos to baseball hats, Mexican Jews founded their first synagogues and community centers. Centuries before that, it was the area where Jews were burned at the stake during the Inquisition.

For nine years, Monica Unikel-Fasja has given Jewish historical tours in Mexico City's oldest neighborhood, a dilapidated area that is now under construction as part of Mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's plan to revitalize what has been the city's nucleus for centuries. Unikel-Fasja guides groups through streets where Jewish immigrants found their first homes in converted convents and established their first clothing and jewelry stores, the places where they began their lives in Mexico.

"I think you can appreciate history more when you see it visually, when you retrace the steps," says Unikel-Fasja, the author of a Spanish-language book that translates as "Synagogues of Mexico." Unikel-Fasja begins her tours at the city's main post office, a beautifully preserved building decorated inside with ornate gilded metal.

The post office? Unikel-Fasja explains that it's the perfect place to start because when Jews first immigrated to Mexico from countries like France and Syria, it was a gathering place -- a place they would go to send and receive mail from loved ones. "Jews laughed here, they cried here," Unikel-Fasja explained. "Some would go every day to their post office box to check for mail from home."

The first Jews came to Mexico in the 16th century. When the Spanish Inquisition arrived in the New World they were forced to convert or practice Judaism in secret. Another wave of Jewish immigrants, including many from France, came during the presidency of Porfirio Diaz (1877-1911), who invited Europeans to immigrate to Mexico.

But the immigrants who form the base of Mexico's modern Jewish community didn't arrive until the 20th century, Unikel-Fasja said. In the early and mid-1900s, Jews arrived from Turkey, Greece, Syria and Eastern Europe. Today, Mexico is home to about 40,000 Jews, most in the capital, Mexico City.

The next stop on the tour is 15 Tacuba St. It has a nondescript facade; inside, it's a rundown, empty building that has been under renovation for more than 10 years. The building is now privately owned, but decades ago it was the primary gathering place of Mexico's Jews -- a community center, gymnasium, event hall and place where Jews came to learn about employment and educational opportunities. Jews also took Spanish classes there.

Standing in a musty room that was once a grand ballroom -- the chandeliers are still intact -- it's easy to imagine the building filled with life: Unikel-Fasja shows the 10 people on the tour black-and-white photos of weddings and conferences that took place here. Back outside, Unikel-Fasja stops to point out Jewish historic sites that show no outward sign of their past. She stops at the former location of the Red Room, a Jewish-owned business that was Mexico's first movie theater and had the city's first escalator.

She also points out the clothing store High Life -- still operating on Madero Street -- which was an important Jewish-owned business. "This street was the Fifth Avenue of Mexico," Unikel-Fasja explains. "People put on their finest attire to walk down this street to see the latest European fashions from the chic clothing shops, many of which were owned by Jews."

Walking through the narrow streets, Unikel-Fasja says she gives tours in Spanish or English whenever people request them. In addition to her Historic Center tour, she gives a Jewish history tour in the Roma neighborhood of the city. Most of her visitors are Jewish, but not all. "I think it is important that non-Jews come on the tour," she says. "Mexico is the product of a cultural mosaic, and we don't know or understand members of other groups."

On one recent tour, most people are Jewish, and there also is a Catholic couple that has heard Unikel-Fasja interviewed on a local radio program. "We are fascinated with the history of other religions," says Ofelia Hernandez, who attended the tour with her husband, Jose Manuel, and their 3-year-old grandson. "We have been to Israel, but we never knew about the synagogues in Mexico."

Jews built their first synagogues in Mexico City's Historic Center, but they abandoned them and built new ones and as they acquired wealth and moved to other parts of the city. Some of the old synagogues remain in the Historic Center, still owned by the Jewish congregations but rarely used. The Sephardi synagogue at 83 Justo Sierra St. was Mexico's first, built in 1923. Sometimes, Jews who work in the Historic Center pray there on weekdays, but usually is empty on the Sabbath.

Just down Justo Sierra is another abandoned place of worship, Mexico's first Ashkenazi synagogue, built in 1941. There, the floor tiles are mismatched and the old wooden pews creak loudly when someone sits down, but the intricately painted ceiling gives a glimpse of its past beauty. "It's a piece of Lithuania in Mexico," Unikel-Fasja says. Unikel-Fasja's tours focus more on Jewish life than anti-Semitism, but it's chilling when she points to the Zocalo, Mexico City's main plaza, and explains that it Jews were executed there during the Inquisition. Centuries later, anti-Semitic demonstrators marched there, demanding that the government expel Jews from Mexico.

But Mexico generally was a good place for Jews, Unikel-Fasja says. At times when other countries -- including the United States -- shut their doors to Jewish immigrants, Mexico welcomed them. "Mexico opened the doors to Jews, gave them the freedom to set up their lives," she says. "Gracias, Mexico."

Reform Movement's Latin American Convention in Brazil

JTA Email Edition

Friday, April 30, 2004

The Reform movement opened a Latin American convention in Brazil on Thursday. The conference in Sao Paulo will run through Sunday. The gathering will focus on common challenges facing Reform and Conservative groups as they try to ensure that Judaism remains a relevant and attractive option for Jews in the 21st century.

Israel's Independence Day in Rio de Janeiro

JTA Email Edition

Friday, April 30, 2004

Some 1,500 people attended a ceremony Tuesday in a Rio de Janeiro hotel to celebrate Israel's Independence Day. Supported by the Rio de Janeiro State Jewish Federation, the Yom Ha'atzmaut event took place at the plush Copacabana Palace Hotel.

Mexican Museum of Art to Exhibit Jewish Art

JTA Email Edition

Thursday, April 29, 2004

The Mexico Museum of Modern Art will exhibit works by Mexican Jewish artist Beatriz Ezban. The exhibit, "Principio de Incertidumbre," features 30 large oil paintings. Ezban, an abstract painter who has shown her work around the world, was one of 33 Mexican artists chosen to have their art form part of the permanent collection of Los Pinos, the presidential residence.

Texts on Judaism Will be Distributed to Buenos Aires High School

JTA Email Edition

Thursday, April 29, 2004

Texts on Judaism will be distributed to Buenos Aires high schools. The distribution of the books, which will focus on anti-Semitism, the Warsaw Ghetto, Sephardi Jewish culture and the 1994 bombing of Buenos Aires' AMIA Jewish community center, comes after an agreement between the city's education department and the DAIA umbrella organization of Jewish groups.

Funny, You Don't Look Jewish

By Carolyn Blackman

Canadian Jewish News

5/13/04

Since 1984, when the Israeli government airlifted jets full of Ethiopian Jews, the landscape of Jewish faces has changed, says Rabbi Jordan Cohen, associate director of Kolel: the Adult Centre for Liberal Jewish Learning. Speaking at the launch of a recent three-week series titled "Funny, You Don't Look Jewish," Rabbi Cohen said that no longer is a gathering of Jews dominated by white, Ashkenazi faces. "The racial diversity of a Jew is ever more prevalent in our society." Also on the panel was Hamilton physician and convert, Dr. Tony McFarland, who is originally from Jamaica, and Claudette Edgehill, a native of Guyana who converted to Judaism in 1996. "Through conversion, adoption, immigration and contact with Jews from previously remote communities around the world, it is becoming increasingly more obvious that Jews can

came from any culture or nationality,” Rabbi Cohen said. “Jews of colour, and multicultural Jewish families, [however] still face unique challenges of integration in the Jewish community,” he said.

Having worked and lived for three years among the Jewish communities of Asia, Rabbi Cohen said that he counselled many Asian women who converted to Judaism after becoming involved with Jewish men, as well as a number of North American families who adopted Asian children. “[With children], the question becomes ‘How do I raise my child to identify and appreciate Judaism, but at the same time learn about the heritage given to them at birth?’” “The questions are enormous, and the answers are only starting to flow out,” he said.

Among those trying to deal with this issue are Linda and Jeffrey Cutler, who last summer adopted a daughter, Shoshana Kayla Shifeng, from China. The Cutlers, who also have two special needs children ages 9 and 7, wanted to find a way for their new baby to grow up comfortable being Jewish, so they decided to contact other parents. With the help of Rabbi Reuven Tradburks of Kehillat Shaarei Torah Congregation, they started an e-mail list, and they had about 28 responses to an ad in The CJN’s What’s New column about a Chanukah party.

They have since formed the Jewish-Asian Society. “We know that our daughter may have some issues, but meeting other people from multi-racial families will help. We do not want her to feel isolated,” said Linda, a family physician. They want their daughter to learn about her roots, said Jeffrey, a lawyer who is now on parental leave. “That is who she is. She is also Canadian and Jewish. She is a blend of three cultures. Our challenge is to help her with her identity.”

McFarland says it is important to him to blend his birth culture with his identity as a Jew, and each year he goes to Jamaica to celebrate the High Holy Days. Edgehill said that when she emigrated from Guyana, she babysat for a Jewish family and helped them celebrate Shabbat each week. “That was my opening to Jewish life, I got so involved in the ritual that I began learning more about it. I eventually studied at Adath Israel Congregation. “I cannot put into words why I did it, but the congregants opened their arms and welcomed me. I am blessed to be in such a synagogue.”

We all have barriers around us to protect ourselves, said Rabbi Cohen, “but sometimes [those barriers] get in the way of looking at who can be a Jew.”

New Israeli Film in Tribeca Film Festival

JTA Email Edition

Tuesday, May 11, 2004

An Israeli movie shared the Best Documentary award at the Tribeca Film Festival. “Arna’s Children,” co-written by Juliano Mer Khamis and Israeli filmmaker Daniel Daniel, shared the documentary prize at the third annual film festival in New York City.

France Tries to Diffuse anti-Semitism and Racism Over the Internet

JTA Email Edition

Thursday, April 29, 2004

France will host an international conference on the diffusion of anti-Semitism and racism over the Internet. Deputy Foreign Minister Renaud Muselier announced Tuesday that the conference would be organized under the aegis of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and will take place in Paris on June 16 and 17. Muselier heads a top-level French delegation at this week’s OSCE conference on anti-Semitism in Berlin.

Book Release: Kinesthetic Kabbalah: Spiritual Practices from Martial Arts and Jewish Mysticism

by Daniel Kohn

www.kinesthetickabbalah.com.

www.globalbookpublisher.com

www.BookSurge.com (\$14.99)

“In order to change the world, we must first make the effort to *change ourselves* and develop more harmonious and *spiritual* ways of interacting with our fellow person.”

Spirituality from Martial Arts and Jewish Mysticism

The world is a pretty stressful place to live nowadays. In addition to war, terrorism and the uncertain economy, our personal lives are filled with competing priorities such as making a living, finding love, dealing with family, and the daily chaos of shopping, paying bills and driving on over-crowded streets and highways. Living with high levels of stress is not only harmful to our bodies, it is unhealthy for our souls. *The challenge we all face is creating spirituality and peace in our less-than-tranquil, everyday lives.*

Kinesthetic Kabbalah: Spiritual Practices from Martial Arts and Jewish Mysticism is a practical guide filled with stories, anecdotes, and insights, as well as teachings and suggestions for developing a more peaceful, spiritually centered way of relating to others and managing situations of tension and hostility in an increasingly threatening world. Based on Daniel Kohn's experiences as a rabbi and martial artist, *Kinesthetic Kabbalah* examines the parallels between the *ancient Jewish mystical teachings of Kabbalah* and *Eastern philosophy as manifested in the Japanese defensive martial art of aikido*. This book draws on both spiritual systems to present a manual of principles and practices to change ourselves and improve the world around us.

For mystics and realists alike, *Kinesthetic Kabbalah* offers an in-depth spiritual analysis of martial arts and mysticism and presents its lessons in an approachable, non-sectarian way. This book is a manual that draws on two vastly different traditions, yet uncovers surprising parallels and immediately presents practices for self-improvement.

About the Author:

Daniel Kohn received rabbinical ordination in 1991 and has practiced aikido for the last fifteen years. Serving as a professional educator and congregational spiritual leader in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and California, Rabbi Kohn's articles have appeared in *Tikkun Magazine*, *The Jewish Spectator*, *Aikido Today Magazine* and online at Jewish.com, MyJewishLearning.com, Belief.net and InterfaithFamily.com. A second degree black belt in aikido, Rabbi Kohn lives with his wife and daughter in the San Francisco Bay area. *Kinesthetic Kabbalah* is his third book and he can be reached at www.kinesthetickabbalah.com.

Two Jewish Sites were Nominated for Best Spirituality Web Site

JTA Email Edition

Friday, April 30, 2004

Two Jewish sites were nominated for best spirituality Web sites. Myjewishlearning.com and Ashrei.com were among five nominees in the spirituality category for People's Voice Webby awards, sponsored by the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences. Members of the public can vote at <http://www.webbyawards.com/peoplesvoice>. In addition, Babaganewz, a Jewish magazine for children, has been named a finalist in several categories by the Association of Educational Publishers, where it is up against mainstream brands such as Nickelodeon, Time for Kids and National Geographic Explorer.

American Jewish Orthodox Group Prepared to Work with Same-sex Couples to Continue Government Funding

JTA Email Edition

Friday, April 30, 2004

A fervently Orthodox group says it's prepared to provide benefits to same-sex couples rather than forego government funding. An official at Agudath Israel of America said the group's social-service arm will continue to apply for government grants from New York City if the City Council passes a law next month requiring government-funded groups to provide equal benefits for same-sex partners, the Forward reported.

Black Students at Cal Irked by Lack of Diversity

Underrepresented Minorities Steadily Declining on Campus

Charles Burress

San Francisco Chronicle

Monday, May 10, 2004

She is young, smart and black. And she is mad. By one measure, Renita Chaney is fortunate indeed. She's one of the elite students who won a coveted place at the most prestigious public university in America: UC Berkeley. But the campus that has long prided itself on diversity -- only 31 percent of undergraduates were white at the beginning of this school year -- has become increasingly less diverse for certain minority groups, particularly for Chaney and her African American peers. "Where is the diversity promised to my community by UC Berkeley when we decided to come here?" she demanded at an April 22 rally in front of the chancellor's office after the latest fall admission figures were released.

Those figures vividly illustrated the continuing legacy of Proposition 209, the 1996 ballot measure by which voters banned affirmative action, or racial preferences, in public education, contracting and employment in California. Chicano/Latino admissions for this fall fell 7 percent from last fall, American Indians declined 22 percent and African Americans dropped the most -- 29 percent. Of 8,676 acceptance letters, blacks received 211, or 2.4 percent. At Harvard, African Americans account for 10.3 percent of this fall's admissions. Blacks make up 6.7 percent of California's population and 12.3 percent of the nation as a whole, according to the 2000 Census.

"I don't want to say 'segregated,' " senior La'Cole Martin said in an interview, "but it's kind of discouraging when you don't see a lot of faces in the classroom that look like you." Student Aquelia Lewis told the UC regents in March: "Ever since I stepped onto this campus, I've had to fight racism, negativity and questions about why I should be here." The distress is compounded by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's austere budget and its proposed elimination of state funds for UC outreach programs, which are designed to recruit disadvantaged students to campus.

The shrinking number of black faces has created extra stress not only because of the resulting alienation but also because many African American students feel driven to do what they can to stop the trend. Many of them devote long hours to volunteer outreach efforts in addition to their schoolwork and jobs. Working at the recruitment and retention center "is like a full-time job on top of being a student," said senior James Drake. "If we didn't do stuff like that, things would be worse. It's really, really stressful having all these commitments. "You would think being a Berkeley student, 'Wow! I get to do all these things' -- but being a black student, you can't really enjoy that."

Martin, an American studies major applying to law school, has worked part time since she came to Cal, while also volunteering to help pre-college youth in her Oakland community around McClymonds High School, where she herself benefited from UC outreach programs. "A lot of us go to different places and volunteer our time, different schools and community centers," she said Friday before meeting with fellow seniors to plan next Saturday's African American Studies graduation ceremony, a major annual event for families and members of the Cal black community. "I want to be sure when I leave Cal that there will be students like me coming here."

The new admissions numbers follow a long decline since 1998, the first year that the Proposition 209 ban took full effect. Underrepresented minorities at Berkeley fell to 11.2 percent of entering freshmen in 1998 from 24.3 percent just three years earlier, a plunge rivaled only by UCLA's in the nine-campus UC system. Among all undergraduates at Cal, the number of African Americans has fallen from 1,543 in 1995 to 924 this school year, or 4.1 percent of the current nonforeign total. The latest admission figures have fanned a growing sense of alarm among not just African American students, but the black community at large. Several dozen Bay Area black leaders invited UC President Robert Dynes to a private Oakland home Tuesday night to express concern about the declining admissions, particularly at UC's flagship campus, Berkeley. "President Dynes is concerned about the representation of African American students and wants to understand personally the factors affecting the declines we've seen," said UC spokesman Hanan Eisenman.

For the UC system as a whole, African Americans received 3.7 percent of admission offers in 1997 (1,435) compared with 3.1 percent this coming fall (1, 469). But acceptance letters don't reflect the entire problem. Many highly qualified black students are choosing not to apply in the first place, said UC Berkeley's director of public affairs, George Strait. Applicants to Berkeley from King Drew Magnet High School in Los Angeles, a source of many gifted black seniors, fell 45 percent this year, Strait said. "Part of that is they're going to Harvard," he said. Their decisions are influenced by UC's rapidly rising fees, cuts in financial aid and the "perception problem" that they won't feel welcome at Cal.

UC Berkeley is going out of its way to try to raise the numbers of African Americans on campus and to make sure they feel supported after they arrive, he said. Chancellor Robert Berdahl, who is retiring at the end of this school year, is "going to spend his final weeks with this as his No. 1 priority," Strait said. The campus is expected to officially announce this week, for example, that it will finally establish the long-promised student multicultural center this fall, Strait said. When the new admissions figures were announced, Berdahl called them "flat-out unacceptable." Dynes wants to address all the sources of the decline, including the factors causing similar declines at other universities, deficiencies in the public schools and laws that need remedying, Eisenman said.

It's not an issue just for minorities. A newly formed group of white male students also is raising the banner. A dozen members donned "White Male for Diversity" T-shirts Wednesday at a campus plaza. "We wanted to show the campus that diversity is important to the whole student body," said senior Adam Balinger. Senior Melissa Geddis, another planner of the African American Studies graduation, said the problem starts in poorly funded public schools. "The issue is California has a poor education system," she said. "A lot of the schools where the income and property values are low don't get the resources they need."

Chronicle staff writer Tanya Schevitz contributed to this report. E-mail Charles Burress at .

50 Years After Integration Case, Jews Remember their Crucial Role

By Matthew E. Berger

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Esther Swirk Brown wasn't the Brown for whom the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case desegregating schools is named -- but she is the Jewish woman who helped find Oliver Brown, of no relation, to be the lead plaintiff in the historic case. As a young woman in Kansas, Esther Brown was horrified by the conditions of the school that black children, including the children of her housekeeper, were forced to attend. The one-room schoolhouse in South Park had dilapidated walls and missing light bulbs.

"She went to a school board meeting to press for equal education and was told to go home and mind her own business," said Miriam Katz, who impersonates Brown as part of a one-woman show honoring historic American women that is touring the Midwest. Instead, Esther Brown stopped black children from attending the school, choosing to home school them in her own house and getting friends to serve as other teachers. When she took her fight statewide to Topeka, she met Linda Brown, a young girl, and raised money so that Linda Brown's father, Oliver, could sue the city's board of education.

"She just wanted rights for everybody," Katz said. "Maybe she felt like she had to make things right." As the nation marks the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which changed the face of the civil rights fight, Jews are noting the historic role their community played in pushing the movement forward.

"It was disproportionately black and Jewish lawyers that were fighting the civil rights cases," said David Saperstein, director of the Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism and a board member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Charles Black, a member of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund team that argued *Brown*, used to joke that he was the only non-Jewish name on many of the briefs in that case.

Several Jewish groups are marking the anniversary and the Jewish community's participation in the landmark case. The Anti-Defamation League has created a six-part educational program for schools on Brown's legacy, including a section on key alliances, which tells the story of Esther Brown. And at its annual Washington meeting last week, the American Jewish Committee showcased a video about the group's role in the civil rights movement. It featured several television advertisements AJCommittee funded to promote tolerance. A predominantly liberal community, Jews felt empathy for the plight of black Americans.

"In the fight for the rights of African Americans, Jews were also in a fight for the rights of all minorities in America," Saperstein said. "There was implicit recognition that Jews wouldn't be safe in America until they created a country with no room for discrimination." Jewish organizations lent their name to the civil rights cause, filing amicus briefs for the plaintiffs and funding some of the legal efforts. In fact, the AJCommittee funded research by Kenneth Clark on the effects of prejudice and discrimination on personality development that Chief Justice Earl Warren cited in his unanimous Supreme Court decision handed down on May 17, 1954. Many individual Jews, like Esther Brown, were part of the effort as well -- perhaps none more than Jack Greenberg.

As an associate counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, Greenberg was one of several who argued *Brown v. Board of Education* in front of the Supreme Court. He later succeeded Thurgood Marshall as the fund's director and counsel for more than 20 years. "Being Jewish can lead you in any direction," said Greenberg, now a professor at Columbia University's School of Law. Greenberg said he wasn't driven by his religion but more by his upbringing in the socialist Zionist movement of Jews who had immigrated from Eastern Europe.

"We were social activists," he said. "Back then we'd call them socialists; now you'd call them liberals." Several other Jews who aided the NAACP went on to distinguished legal careers, including Judge Jack Weinstein of the U.S. District Court

of the Eastern District of New York in Brooklyn, and Judge Louis Pollack of the U.S. District Court for the East District of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. But, Greenberg said, not all Jews were “on the good side.”

“Some of the lawyers in the South who led the opposition were Jewish,” he said. The Brown case led to a partnership between blacks and Jews that helped herald the civil rights era. “It was a landmark in what the relationship could achieve,” Saperstein said. It led to the drafting of civil rights legislation, some of which was written on the conference table in the RAC’s Washington office. “This really did prove to them that they could use the political legal system to achieve integration and stop legal discrimination in America,” he said.

But blacks and Jews have not enjoyed an entire half-century of friendship. Most significantly, many Jewish organizations broke with black groups in 1978, coming out against the affirmative action policies for which many blacks were fighting. The ADL’s leader at the time, Nathan Perlmutter, was one of the leading spokesmen against race-based criteria for admission to colleges and universities.

Leaders of Jewish groups said the rejection of quotas for affirmative action came largely in light of numerical limits on Jewish enrollment in European and American universities in the 1920s. Even last year, when the University of Michigan’s affirmative action policies came to the Supreme Court, the Jewish community was split.

ADL opposed Michigan’s standard of giving minority applicants 20 extra points on a 100-point admission-scoring scale, while the AJCommittee reversed course from 1978 and backed Michigan. The court ruled last June that affirmative action programs are legal but struck down the point system Michigan used for undergraduate admissions. More recently, black and Jewish groups have sparred over policy priorities, each seeking more support than the other for key legislative agenda items. In addition, anti-Israel and anti-Jewish comments by some blacks have fueled tensions.

The black community was angered by Jewish groups’ call for a boycott of the 2001 United Nations Conference on Racism in Durban, South Africa, because of the conference’s vehement anti-Israel rhetoric. But black and other non-Jewish groups chose to back the Jewish community last month when it worked to minimize European anti-Semitism at a conference in Berlin. The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights joined Jewish leaders in Germany, providing information to European states on tools to combat discrimination.
