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Ponders Fate ot Old Vilna Shul

Advocate Staff

An Associate Justice to the Massachusetts Superior Court is currently reviewing the facts in the case of the Old Vilna Shul, the historic Beacon Hill synagogue which currently faces dissolution

On December 9, Supreme Judicial Court Judge Ruth Abrams turned the matter over to Associate Justice Ala. Dimond to determine whether the synagogue building on 14-18 Phillips St. will remain in community hands or be sold for a sum estimated to exceed \$1.2

The president of the congregation, 87-year-old Mendel Miller of Boston, filed a decree in September 1985 requesting permission to dis-solve the congregation. The dissolution document, signed by Miller and two other elderly congregants, cited membership decline and failure to attract new members.

Miller's decision to sell the property, the proceeds of which are earmarked for seven charities in Israel, upset members of the organized Jewish community who contend the property or its pro-ceeds should remain in the hands of the Greater Boston Jewish community.

The Synagogue Council of Massachusetts, an umbrella organization of congregations of all branches of Judaism, contested the terms of the sale in the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court. According to the attorney for the Synagogue Council, Judge Dimond will examine affidavits from individuals who have contributed to the synagogue over the years but were not informed of the dissolution proceedings. The Synagogue Council also contends that several individuals who attempted to join the congregation were turned away by Mr. Miller. "We will attempt to prove

(Continued on Page 11)

Ethiopian Jews Face Freedom or Death

By Judith Antonelli **Advocate Staff**

The Jewish communities still existing in Ethiopia can not physically survive much longer, says a member of a mission which visited Ethiopian Jewish villages last sum mer, and Western Jews must continue their efforts to bring hope and support to them

They can't make it another four or five years," said



A JEW from the village of Koshe Shalit, where Western Jews had not been able to visit since 1981, holds pictures of his relatives who reached Israel.

Elihu Stone, 28, who spent 10 days visiting Ethiopian Jews with a 16-member mission sponsored by the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry. "They are flerce about not assimilating . . . Their religious life is fierce about not assimilating . . . Their religious life is declining . . . They want to get to Israel and be reunified (Continued on Page 14,

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JNF to Sponsor Events on Art Honoring Immigrants Phillip Ratner, sculptor of life-size figures of Ellis Island On Jan. 13, Marjorie and Mitchell Marcus of Weston immigrants to be housed at will host a private reception that site, will be in Boston for

for the artist and a viewing of an exhibit of the models for these works on behalf of JNF will be by invitation only. On Wednesday evening, Jan. 14, Jewish National Fund, in from Jan. 13-15. The models have been given by the artist cooperation with Hebrew College, invites the commuto the Jewish National Fund. College, invites the community to a viewing and poetry reading by the artist at 7:30 p.m. at the Hebrew College in Brookline. On Thursday evening from 6 to 8, the Young Leadership of Jewish National Fund is hosting a view and choose reception at

> These events will launch an effort by the Jewish National Fund to reacquaint the

(Continued on Page 14)

wine and cheese reception at

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Chanukah's Future



SHINING FACES - Jewish children throughout New England prepare for Chanukah by learning the meaning of the festival of freedom and the practices associated with it. Pictured with a traditional menorah are first-grade students at Solomon Schechter Day School, left to right, Rena Miller-Jacobs, Aaron Fischlowitz-Roberts, Shawn Weissman and Photo by Leonard Eisenberg

Shammai: Chanukah's 'Scrooge' or Paragon?

By Nehemia Polen

Editors note: Rabbi Nehemia Polen is spiritual leader of Congregation Tifereth Israel in Everett.

The conventional return has it that Shammal was the Jewish counterpart of Scrooge, a crotchety and ill-tempered sage whose idea of fun was to poke people in the ribs with a two-by-four. It is not surprising that the Jew-ish student centers at college campuses are named after Shammai's more congenial colleague, the gentle and com-

Shammai's less than flattering reputation is hardly enhanced when one reads the talmudic passage which discusses the Chanukah story (Shabbat 21b). There one discovers that, according to the view of the School of Hillel, we kindle one light the first night of Chanukah, two lights the second evening, adding one more per night until we reach eight lights on the last night of the festival. This is the view which has been adopted as normative in Jewish law. According to the view of the House of Shammai, however, we are to begin with eight lights the first evening, seven the second evening, subtracting one light per evening until on the last night we kindle but one

light.

Now it is hard not to agree with the rationale which the Talmud offers in support of the Hillelites: "We must always progress in matters of holiness." The symbolism of the Hillelites is both transparent and compelling: one should always add to the light, to the warmth, to the spiritual glow. Why, then, would the House of Shammai wish to give us less light each successive evening, thereby making the last night of Chanukah singularly anticli-

mactic? Is this another example of the allegedly regressive character of the Shammaites?

It should be recalled, however, that while the halacha follows the view of the House of Hillel, yet (as the Talmud puts it) the opinion of the Shammaites is also "the word of the living G-d." Furthermore, there is a kabbalistic tradition that in messianic times, the halacha will follow the view of the House of Shammai. What, one might ask, is worth redeeming in the teaching of those irascible pedants?

We may find a clue by examining another rabbinic dispute, on the topic of the creation of the universe. The House of Shammai maintains that heaven was created before the earth, while the House of Hillel holds that earth was created before the heavens (Bereshit Rabbah earth was created before the heavens (Bereshit Raddan 1). This might be understood as meaning that the Hillellites placed the emphasis on "carth" — on human beings and their activities, while the Shammaites stressed the importance of "heaven" — Divine power and providence. It must be noted in this connection that the Hillelite program of progressive addition to the Chanukah lights inevitably emphasizes the human agent whose volition and intitude the investor. The Sham

and initiative causes the lights to increase. The maite procedure, however, involves a measure of human self-restraint — a progressive diminution of our own kindling of the lights, enabling us better to see the Divine

light which comes down from heaven.

Perhaps we do need the perspective of the Shammaites after all. For if anything characterizes our society, it is the belief that more is always better, that the exercise of human will and initiative is always beneficial, that to

(Continued on Page 4)

On the Inside

December Dilemma See Page 3, Sec. 2

> The Jews of Ireland See Page 4

Northeastern Students in Israel See Page 5



How Boston Jews Mark Chanukah

Approximately 79 percent of Boston's Jews will light Chanukah candles this year, making the practice the second most prevalent Jewish ritual engaged in here. The only Jewish ritual practiced by more local Jews is participation in a Passover seder.

In addition, about 8 percent of Jewish households which light Chanukah candles also have a Christmas tree, while 16 percent have neither:

These are a few of the findings of the 1985 Demographic Survey which was conducted under the auspices of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies. The survey is CJP's third since 1965, and involved interviews with 1,446 randomly selected Jewish households in Greater Boston.

The survey also revealed some interesting and important differences between people at different stages of

YOUNG SINGLES AND THE ELDERLY - In Boston, both of these groups tend to live alone, and they are also the groups most likely to have neither candles nor a tree at home. Virtually no elderly have Christmas trees, but one in 20 of the young singles do, and nearly another one in ten have trees along with

lighting candles.

YOUNG MARRIEDS WITHOUT CHILDREN — If those who married originally non-Jewish spouses are included, young marrieds without children resemble the young singles, including the numbers who are observing both holidays, or only Christmas. But if we eliminate intermarried couples, the percentage who celebrate Chanukah unambiguously rises sharply, and this group most resembles married couples whose children are no longer at home.

FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN — These are the

adults most likely to be celebrating the holidays at home. And which holiday they observe is very strongly influenced by whether or not they have intermarried. For those with children between 7 and 17, overall the vast majority light Chanukah candles only, but 8 percent have candles and trees and 8 percent trees only. But if the intermarried are excluded, the proportion who have Christmas trees becomes very small. The pat-

(Continued on Page 11)

Highlights of Survey: Chanukah and Christmas

GROUPS	Light Chanukah Candles Only	Have Xmas Trees Only	Do Both	Have Neither
All adults	71%	4%	8	169 +
Singles under 40	63%	5%	9%	23%
Elderly	71%	. 177	1%	26%
Under 40 married, no children, inter- married excluded Youngest child 7-	81%	0%	5%	14%
17, all marriages	80%	8%	8%	375
Youngest child 7- 17, intermarried excluded	94%	3%	3%	<1%
All intermarrieds	18%	27%	39%	15%
Intermarrieds with children at home	13%	28%	539	59

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Israel Oscar Entry is 'Avanti Popolo'

JERUSALEM (JCNS) — The Israeli entry for the best foreign film at the forthcoming Oscar awards will be 'Avanti Popolo,' which is set against the background of the 1967 Six-Day war.

This follows the withdrawal of a petition to the High

Court of Justice on Dec. 14 by the distributor of another local film, 'Ricochet,' at the suggestion of the bench. Yoram Belisovski, acting director-general of the Industry and Trade Ministry, informed the Los Angeles Academics of the Industry and Trade Ministry, informed the Los Angeles Academics. my of Film which organizes the Oscar awards that 'Avanti Popolo,' produced by two members of Tel Aviv universi-

The film focuses on two Egyptian soldiers stuck in Sinai during the Six-Day war and has already drawn the ire of right-wing politicians, who see it as symptomatic of the erosion of nationalist values in Israeli society.
G-Colour, distributors of the IDF-produced 'Ricochet,

petitioned the court two weeks ago, arguing that the se-lection of Avanti Popolo was made by interested parties.

Shammai and Chanukah

(Continued from Page 1)

resist "progress" is to sin. We have forgotten that the path of wisdom sometimes involves doing less, not more. Our political and technological policy-makers would often do well to heed the advice: "Don't just do something They might discover a reassuring beauty

in the light that has already been kindled, a new wisdom in the still, small voice that has always been there. Rabbi Judah Arych Leib of Ger writes in Sfas Emes (Terumah 5631) that the making of the menorah for the sanctuary required great skill and effort — and yet, as the Midrash teaches, it emerged from the fire completely formed, presented as a gift from heaven. For such is the paradox of human action: to hope to succeed in a worthwhile endeavor, we must expend our very best efforts and energies; yet when the goal is realized, we must stand back and surrender the product to G-d, seeing it as a bestowal of Divine grace.

There is a strong human tendency to take credit for the fruits of our labors, even if those labors were devoted to a sacred cause, and were expended for the sake of heaven. Those who have worked hard for synagogues and communal institutions know well the temptation to begin to see them as extensions of our egos, as "ours", as if we had a proprietary right to them. This was indeed the downfall of the Hasmonean dynasty, which began in selfless struggle and self-sacrifice, but ended in internecine rivalry and self-aggrandizement.

So there is indeed much to learn from the wisdom of the So there is indeed much to learn from the wisdom of the House of Shammai. While there can be no substitute for human effort and initiative in the world as presently constituted, we also need to recall the importance of self-restraint, of diminution, of what the kabbalists call tsimtsum (self-contraction) to leave a silent space for the One who bestows grace not by power, nor by might, but by spirit.

Curator Seeks to Preserve Heritage of Ireland's Jews

By Joy Frascinella pecial to the Advocate

Ireland, land of leprechauns and sprites, James Joyce and Bernard Shaw, is also the home of a deeply-rooted Jew

ish community.

In June, 1985, Belfast-born Israeli president Chaim Herzog officially opened Dublin's Irish-Jewish Museum. Herzog, whose father Isaac was once Ireland's Chief Rabbi, had been a long-time supporter of the museum president which can porter of the museum project which com-memorates the history and accomplishments of Irish Jews over the last several

The museum's curator, Raphael Siev, an attorney and member of the Department of Foreign Affairs, visited Boston recently on a fundraising campaign to interest American Jews in helping fund the fledgling museum. "Most people don't associate the words Ireland and Jewish says Siev, who was born in Dublin to Russian-Irish parents. "As a result, many tourists to Ireland miss out on seeing the museum because they are not aware of its existence. We want to let as many people as possible know about this

The first Jews arrived in Ireland during the 11th century. But Ireland's monarchy at that time was less than favorably disposed towards Jews and as a



Raphael Siev

result, they were dispersed through Eu-

rope. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, when the Inquisition was terroriz-ing Spain's Jewish community, hundreds of Spanish Jews fled southern Europe and came to Ireland, where they were welcomed. "Records at that time show a preponderance of Jewish last names with Spanish first names," notes Siev.

Jews in Ireland have always held positions equal to that of non-Jews. Ireland elected its first Jewish mayor in 1755, and in 1797 it granted Jews full citizenship and equality, the first European na-tion to do so. Ireland's parliament today has three Jewish members, all of whom represent a different party. It is also the only country in the world with a written statute (dated 1935) which states that all animals must be slaughtered by a shochet, since this was considered to be the only appropriate method of killing an ani-

Catholic-Jewish relations in Ireland have traditionally been harmonious, explains Siev, a sharp contrast to the virulent anti-Semitism that existed in other European nations. "Jews were not per-ceived as a threat," says Siev, "but were seen as contributory citizens to Ireland's economy. There was no fear that Jews would steal away people's jobs or 'take control' of the country. They labored in simple professions — usually traders or storekeepers — and lived comfortably with the non-Jews in their communities."

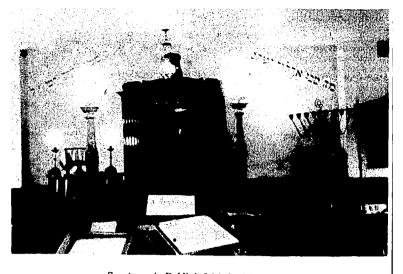
The Russian pogroms of the late 19th century brought scores of Lithuanian Jews to Ireland's shores. Most settled in Dublin, Cork and Limerick. During Ireland's notorious potato famine, it was the Lithuanian Jews who made generous fi-nancial contributions to assist povertystricken farmers.
Irish Jews were, according to Siev, in-

tense in their religious devotion. "The Catholics and Protestants were deeply observant and I think this stimulated many Jews to also worship with a great deal of fervor," he adds.

At its peak, Ireland's Jewish popula-

tion reached 6,000. But with the founding of Israel, many young Jews left Ireland and the current Jewish population is now down to 2,000, most of whom are middleaged or elderly. "The financial rewards that can be found in the United States or other European countries have also lured Jewish people away. This is a great loss o us," says Siev sadly.

Northern Ireland's Jewish population



Sanctuary in Dublin's Irish-Jewish Museum

numbers a mere 250 people. Economic woes brought on by Catholic-Protestant conflagrations caused most of the Jews in that part of Ireland to flee in the late 1960's and early 1970's. And those who remained, Siev points out, are neutral in their politics. "But when the opposing factions want a neutral meeting ground, they invariably use a Jewish site because they know it will be respected."

The dwindling numbers created fears among those Jews who stayed in Ireland that nothing would be left to mark the achievements of this small but unique

Siev and a group of energetic Irish citiboth Jews and non-Jews, volunteered their time to help gather manuscripts, photos, and other documents into a small building in Dublin that was once the Beth Hamedrash Hagadol Synagogue, the same synagogue Chaim Herzog's father used to pray in.
"Our problem is that we don't have

enough space for all the things we could exhibit," says Siev. "We have some beautiful ritual objects hand cast in silver that were used for special holidays but we have no insurance, not to mention display cabinets, and so cannot exhibit them. It has also been very costly to clean and refurbish the old building."

Siev is planning a special Holocaust display should funds become available. Although he was only a child during the war, the 50 year old curator has many special memories of wartime events. "Irish Jews were among the first to send food parcels to people in displaced persons camps, many of whom were trying to emigrate to Palestine or America. I remember all of the food sent was kosher because many people in the camps re-fused to eat non-kosher food."

Siev has so far been pleased with the responses he has received from those who have visited the museum. Many young people, including large groups from Germany, have greeted the exhibits with enthusiasm. "It is vitally important that individual countries have Jewish museums to hallmark the accomplishments of their individual communities. There is so much that exists outside of Israel and the United States which must be preserved for future generations.

The Irish-Jewish Museum is open year-round and admission is free. Those wishing more information can contact the Department of Foreign Affairs, Dublin 2,

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Shamir Appeals for Renewed Aliya

By Gil Sedan

JERUSALEM (JTA) -Premier Yitzhak Shamir made an impassioned appeal for aliya last Wednesday and urged world Jewish leaders not to put obstacles in the path of Jews leaving "coun-tries of distress" and to help them reach Israel. He referred specifically to the "negative" phenomenon of "drop-outs" among Jews leaving the Soviet Union.

Shamir, addressing the Jewish Agency Board of Governors, said he was appalled by recent figures showing a continuing decline of the Jewish population outside Israel. He said assimilation, intermarriage and a low birth rate threaten the survival of the Jewish people.

"Indications are that with-

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in 15 vears the Jewish community outside of Israel will decrease by about 1.5 million and one generation later we may be one or two million less," Shamir said. He was apparently referring to a reapparently referring to a re-cent report of a committee on demographics appointed by the World Zionist Organiza-tion Executive. It indicated that the diaspora Jewish pop-ulation will be 8 million in the year 2000, down from 9.5 million at the end of 1985, and may be as low as six million

Even if these projections are only partly correct, "they still cry out to heaven," Shamir said. "This generation which saw the loss of a third of our people cannot tolerate a second major catastrophe in the struggle for Jewish sur-

vival."

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Yitzhak Shamir Shamir called on Jewish leaders to place aliya at the top of their agenda in order to avert Jewish "mass suicide." He said Israel has improved the process of absorbing olim and the leaders of world Jewry should make it clear to their people that only Israel offered the possibility of a "full Jewish life" as well as many opportunities as many opportunities.

Discussing another development, Shamir said Israel would not improve relations with the Soviet Union unless it recognized "the right of the Jewish people to return to their homeland." He said Israel was meanwhile aiming at direct flights from Moscow to Tel Aviv to fight the drop-out phenomenon, "the movement of Jews from the USSR to countries other than Israel."

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