

Tufts grad an Iranian spy?



The Iranian-born American physician Dr. Noah McKay (formerly Nasser Talebzadeh Ordoubadi), who died on Feb. 14, has been fingered as a mole who passed biological weapons antidotes to Iran, according to Iranian media. McKay was a graduate of Boston's Tufts School of Medicine and was under surveillance by U.S. officials, but was never charged with spying. Iranian media accused "intelligence agencies" of causing his death.

The new Jewish Advocate online

Online debate

February poll question:

What kind of progress do you think Obama's Middle East envoy, former Sen. George Mitchell, will make in Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations in 2009?

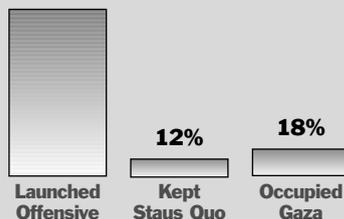
- A. Little to none
- B. All parties negotiating
- C. A framework for peace
- D. Peace at last

Tell us what you think at www.TheJewishAdvocate.com

January's Poll Results

With world opinion divided on Israel's Gaza operations, what should the Jewish state have done?

70%



Learning through their fingertips

Special needs organizations provide Jewish education to blind children

By Cara Hogan
Advocate Staff

Like most 13-year-old Jews, Diya Holladay is preparing for her bat mitzvah this June. But instead of reading from the Torah, Holladay uses Jewish education books translated into Braille. She was born blind and autistic, but with the help of Gateways: Access to Jewish Education in Newton and the New York City-based Jewish Braille Institute, she and her family have continued her Jewish education.

"If it wasn't for Gateways, we would need to have a tutor or organize our own program for Jewish education," said Holladay's mother Caryn Navy, who also suffers from a degenerative eye disease that left her blind at age 11.

Gateways provides Jewish education for 60 local children with disabilities through programs that include a Sunday school, a b'nei mitvah program and a teen program that focuses on mitzvot and social action.

Nancy Mager, Jewish education program coordinator at Gateways, said the organization creates a curriculum that works for children with all different levels of abilities, which is sometimes a challenge.

"Our Hebrew school is very much like other Hebrew schools, but all of our students have special needs," said Mager. "They have diverse learning needs. All of our les-

sons always have special accommodations so every student can be included and taught in the way that they learn best."

For a blind student, Mager said Gateways teachers would usually encourage the student to learn through touch. But because of autism, Holladay is resistant to touch. Instead, they focus on teaching her through language and especially song.

"She really loves music and dance and that's been an important part of helping bring her into the Gateways program," said Navy.

Holladay attends the Gateways bat mitzvah training program each week with her tutor, learning about Judaism and her upcoming rites to become a Jewish adult.

"Education is a struggle for her, but I like to see her when she's proud of learning something new," said Navy. "She's been learning Hebrew words here and there, but she hasn't been reading Hebrew in Braille yet."

Navy said the teachers thought that learning Hebrew would be confusing because her daughter's Braille reading skills are still elementary. The difficulty is compounded because Braille uses the same characters no matter the language: an Aleph is the same as an A.

So Holladay learns most of her Braille at home with her mother, who teaches her using materials available through the

Jewish Braille Institute.

"We're a library for the blind and visually impaired," said Beth Rudich, director of development at JBI. "We produce material in audio, large print and Braille of broad Jewish interest. We do specialized things like bar and bat mitzvah preparation or textbooks, and everything we do is free of charge and [available] by mail."

Founded in 1931, JBI mails texts in eight languages to visually impaired Jews all over the world. Around 400 Massachusetts clients use JBI's services, though most are seniors requesting large print texts rather than Braille.

"We do try to raise awareness for religious schools, should they have a child who is visually impaired," said Rudich. "We can produce custom materials for the student. If a child needs math or science textbooks, they go to the state for that; but there's no resource other than JBI for Jewish materials."

Navy partners with JBI through Duxbury Systems Inc., where she and her husband both work. The company produces



Diya Holladay with her Gateways teen volunteer Gina Brandeis.

software for JBI that translates text into Braille in different languages, including Hebrew. She also ordered books from JBI when she was a child.

"For me, JBI actually taught me Hebrew Braille when I was growing up," said Navy. "They provided a tutor and helped me prepared for my bat mitzvah."

Between Gateways and JBI, Navy has the resources to make sure that her daughter will not miss out on any aspect of her Jewish education.

For more information about Gateways: Access to Jewish Education or the Jewish Braille Institute, go to www.jgateways.org or www.jbibrary.org, respectively.

Toronto Hillel attacked

Jewish-Arab tensions are mounting at Toronto, Canada's York University. About 100 anti-Israel protesters stormed the campus Hillel building last week after being refused entry into a student government news conference. Jewish students had to be rescued from the building by campus and

local police as the mob pounded on the facility's doors and reportedly shouted anti-Semitic slurs at those trapped inside.

The mob was comprised of members of the York Federation of Students, which is aligned with the group Students Against Israeli Apartheid.

Stanetsky: nonprofit funerals short on services

Continued from Page 1

resources we have," said Schlossberg. "We attract the best workforce and have a range of services for our customers."

Schlossberg also challenged the notion that nonprofits can provide such low costs to customers, though he declined to quote Stanetsky's prices.

"A nonprofit doesn't necessarily mean cheaper," said Schlossberg. "Other than that they aren't going to pay taxes, what savings are there to offer? We are a large corporation and can pass on savings to the consumer."

Still, any money saved might be worth considering for cash-strapped Jews struggling to make ends meet. And for those who worry about abiding by Jewish law, Leonard Holtz, executive director of Hebrew Funeral Association

Inc., a nonprofit funeral home in Connecticut, said he goes by the book.

"We do not do embalming or cremation," said Holtz. "Everyone has to have Tahara (ritual preparation) and an all-wooden casket."

Because HFA does not offer lavish options, its services total around \$4,000.

"For-profits have no ritual distinction or are geared toward providing whatever services the community wants," said Holtz. "I think people come to me because they share in the Jewish traditions that stress the simplicity of the funeral process."

The Hebrew Free Burial Association, a 120-year-old, New York City-based agency, is also focused on simplicity. The organization provides low-cost or free burials to indigent Jews in the New York City area.

"If someone passes away and no one comes

forward to make funeral plans and there are no assets, in New York City you can end up in two places, which are anathema to the Jewish community," said Amy Koppel, executive director of HFBA. "One is in a mass, unmarked grave buried with convicts, and the other is as a research cadaver for a medical school."

Koppel said the organization keeps things simple in order to control costs, often with a graveside service led by the on-staff rabbi. She declined to say how much the funeral costs because "it would make commercial funeral homes look bad – the mark-up is tremendous."

HFBA handles about 300 cases a year and sadly, many of these funerals are attended only by the rabbi and the gravediggers.

"It's a tragedy to end your life so alone that there's no one to come to your funeral," said Koppel.

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