

# New York City Atheists

May 2002

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PO Box 1187, New York, NY 10013

Visit our Web site: <http://foody.org/atheist.html>

E-mail us: [atheist@foody.org](mailto:atheist@foody.org)



## Events

### May Meeting plus Bluegrass

Sunday, May 26,  
3:30-5:00 P.M.  
Moonstruck East diner,  
upstairs  
449 3rd Ave. (corner of 31  
St.), Manhattan  
Agenda:  
Promoting NYC Atheists  
After the meeting, join us at  
Paddy Reilly's, a nearby bar  
hosting a bluegrass jam. Cor-  
ner of 2nd Ave. and 29th St.

For more information, contact us at  
(212) 330-6794 or [atheist@foody.org](mailto:atheist@foody.org).

*Also of atheist interest:*

### Teaching about Religion in Public Schools

Atheist and humanist organiz-  
ers Mynga Futrell and Paul  
Geisart of Sacramento discuss  
whether it's "possible to teach  
about religion in public  
schools without stepping on  
too many religious and irre-  
ligious toes."  
Secular Humanist Society of  
New York  
Thursday, June 13, 2002, 7:30  
P.M.  
22 West 34th St. (between 5th  
and 6th Aves.), 5th floor

For more information, contact  
SHSNY at (212) 861-6003 or  
[jarents@bestweb.net](mailto:jarents@bestweb.net).

### Meeting and Bluegrass this Sunday

Join us at our meeting this  
coming Sunday, May 26, 3:30-  
5:00 P.M! We'll discuss how  
to promote NYC Atheists  
(especially text for a flyer).  
The location is the Moon-  
struck East diner, upstairs, at  
449 Third Ave. (corner of 31st  
St.), Manhattan. Afterward,  
join us at nearby Paddy  
Reilly's, a bar at 519 Second  
Ave. (corner of 29th St.) that  
hosts a friendly bluegrass jam  
session.

### April Meeting

The meeting agreed by con-  
sensus to rent a post office box  
and a telephone number with  
voicemail; both are listed on  
the newsletter masthead. Get-  
ting our phone number was  
painless. Getting our PO box  
meant answering a postal em-  
ployee's curious query of "If  
you were being tortured right  
now, who would you call out  
to?" The post office box and  
212 phone number will ground  
us firmly in Manhattan, which  
is useful for promoting NYC  
Atheists as a "New York" or-  
ganization although our mem-  
bers are from the entire tri-  
state area.

If you would like to do-  
nate to NYC Atheists but have  
been unable to attend meet-  
ings, you may send a check to  
the above address. Checks  
must still be payable to "Josh  
Karpf" until we receive a tax  
ID number from Albany so

we can open a bank account. Donations are not tax-  
deductible, yet are spent only on organizational costs. Labor  
is generously donated by our members. Let us know if you  
wish to be thanked by name, since NYC Atheists guards its  
members' anonymity unless otherwise requested.

One member offered to pitch the Bill and Melinda Gates  
Foundation for NYC Atheists in hope of funding our own  
office and meeting space. We approved it by consensus. Bill  
Gates is featured in the Celebrity Atheist List ([www.celebatheists.com](http://www.celebatheists.com)).

We talked about the "Equal Time for Freethought" radio  
show, which WBAI has twice given informal approval (with  
a Sunday 11:00 A.M. time slot), but has yet to give a starting  
date.

We also discussed the annual convention of the national  
group American Atheists, held in late March in Boston.  
NYC Atheists members who attended described couple of  
hundred attendees enjoying lectures and leisure, plus one in-  
vader who "trashed" part of the hotel with religious stickers.  
Speaker Frank Zindler for was singled out for his satirization  
of religious uses of stem-cell research, and for his critique of  
scientists who are reluctant to critique religion. Also praised  
were speakers Brian Lee, whose online Jesus Museum ([www.jesusemuseum.com](http://www.jesusemuseum.com)) features wacky Christian Web sites; and  
Larry Darby, an Alabama activist for atheist civil rights.

We then discussed whether to request affiliation with  
American Atheists. New benefits for NYC Atheists members  
would include a 20% discount on national American Atheist  
memberships, 20% discounts on American Atheist materials  
over \$50 ordered through NYC Atheists, and reduced con-  
vention registration fees. American Atheists had already pro-  
moted us until February, at which point it encouraged us to  
affiliate. Affiliation is subject to annual renewal, may be  
canceled at any time by either party, and is free of fiscal or  
legal entanglements. We discussed the loose flexibility of the  
current affiliation system compared to American Atheists'  
earlier, stricter chapter system. We also discussed working  
more closely with American Atheists' national leaders and its  
national office, which is located in northern New Jersey.

With 11 members present, we voted 9-0 to request af-  
filiation. Incidentally, American Atheists needs a new Man-  
hattan sponsor for its public-access TV show *Atheist View-  
point*. If you are a Manhattan resident and are interested in  
receiving the videotapes and delivering them to a cable sta-  
tion, contact Joe Zamecki at (908) 276-7300.

[continued on page 2]

## April Meeting (cont.)

We closed with thoughts on how to promote NYC Atheists, especially in the form of a flyer, and whether it should negatively critique religion, including its role in September 11, or be "non-defensive, people friendly, and inviting." Help us decide this at our meeting this Sunday. A summary of activities: Besides socializing monthly, we've demonstrated near St. Patrick's Cathedral against public funding for religious charities, marched in a parade, cheered World Trade Center workers and mourned September 11's victims, had letters published in the *New York Times*, *New York* magazine, and *Newsday*, and worked with other freethought groups, national and local. Future ideas have included hosting guest speakers, holding a summer picnic in Central Park, and leading local freethought groups in chartering a bus for September's American Atheist-led march on Washington. Past meetings chose these aims: to promote total church-state separation; promote awareness of atheism, and for its legitimacy; to educate about organized religion's historical oppression of peoples; to hold social activities, including excursions; and to promote atheist community.

## Treasury

Early April's treasury balance was \$305.82. We collected \$95 in donations at April's meeting and received \$50 via mail. We spent \$35.39 to print and mail April's newsletter, \$58 for a year's rental of the post office box (Canal Street Station; including \$2 to notarize a statement), and \$79.38 (to EFLS Communications) for a year's rental of the phone number with voicemail. As of late May the treasury balance is \$278.05, excluding the cost of this newsletter.

## Senate Confirms Priestly CUNY Pick

The New York Senate confirmed the appointment of priest John Bonnici to the City University of New York's board of trustees, despite concerns about this New York Archdiocese official's opposition to abortion, contraception, and gay rights. Bonnici, who was nominated to the 15-member board by Gov. George Pataki, is the director of the Archdiocese of New York's Family Life/Respect Life Office. Several groups opposed his nomination out of fears that he would seek to discontinue access to contraceptive services, including emergency contraception, at the university's health centers and would oppose policies that would protect gay, lesbian, and transgender students from discrimination.

## Bronx Chaplains Office

In one of his last official acts, former Bronx borough president and mayoral candidate Fernando Ferrer created the Borough Chaplains Office "to serve the Bronx's spiritual needs." Ferrer met with clergy of several religions, including Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, to discuss the uncompensated chaplain positions, saying they must work out such details as terms of service and expected duties.

Ferrer appointed Raymond Rivera, a priest and the president of the Latino Pastoral Action Center, as the office's chairman. Rivera first came to Ferrer with the idea of chaplains' posts after seeing clergy's interfaith work after the World Trade Center attacks. "It didn't come as any surprise," Rivera said of Ferrer's favorable response to the proposal. Rivera said the Chaplains Office is important because if clergy are needed, "this office would have already built those relationships." He said the clergy members would provide added support to borough agencies during crises "because of their close ties to the community."

Newly elected Bronx borough president Adolfo Carrion, who said that he strongly supports the new office, plans to pick its other members.

Source: "Ferrer Has Faith in Clergy Office," *Daily News*, 12/18/01.

## Mideast Strains are Local

As Palestinian suicide bombings and Israeli military action escalated in April and May, so did protests in New York City for either side of the never-ending Mideast religious crisis.

On March 30, several hundred demonstrators marched through Union Square to oppose Israel's attack on Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat and its roundup of hundreds of Palestinian men. The week before, three prominent, liberal New York rabbis resigned from the advisory board of a new national Jewish peace group after their names appeared in a controversial full-page *New York Times* ad that likened Israel to the Passover myth's evil Pharaoh, and also used a Nazi allusion to describe Israel's military actions in the West Bank and Gaza. Several right-wing Jewish organizations later supported a boycott of the *Times* for what they described as an anti-Israel reporting bias.

On April 1, hundreds of pro-Israel, Zionist protestors massed outside the Israeli consulate and the Palestinian observer mission to the

United Nations. On April 6, thousands of pro-Palestinian demonstrators jammed Times Square at rush hour, capping a day of protests that included a demonstration at the nearby Israeli consulate and a march in Brooklyn from an Atlantic Avenue mosque to Borough Hall. On the same day, hundreds of demonstrators in Paterson, Jersey City, and Teaneck called on President Bush to end the bloodshed in the Middle East.

On the next day, 500 demonstrators marched across the Brooklyn Bridge to City Hall Park under heavy police escort to show support for the Palestinians, and 10,000 pro-Israel demonstrators rallied near the United Nations headquarters for a rally featuring congressional representative Jerrold L. Nadler.

An estimated 50,000 Orthodox Jews held a "Massive Tefilla Gathering" on April 21 along nine blocks of lower Manhattan, "praying as they bobbed back and forth. . . . The men, clad in long coats and hats, and the women, wearing long skirts and covering their hair, were separated. They all faced east, toward Jerusalem," reported the *New York Post*. "Our most powerful weapon is our prayers," said one demonstrator. "By praying, God should give us the right answer and find a way to make peace."

On the same day, about five dozen Jews demonstrated outside the PLO's Manhattan offices in support of City Council member Oliver Koppell's resolution to close that location. The City Council itself reflected Mideast tensions. After Council speaker Gifford Miller called for a show of solidarity with Israel, Brooklyn council member Charles Barron urged his colleagues to denounce the killing of innocent Palestinians. No one objected to Barron's resolution, which was referred to a committee for a future hearing, and Miller's pro-Israel proposal won support from three other council members. Barron is the only local elected official to support Palestinians. All New York politicians of note, including Gov. George Pataki, Mayor Michael Bloomberg, and state Assembly speaker Sheldon Silver, plus gubernatorial candidate Andrew Cuomo, made statements supporting Israel.

Several thousand pro-Israel, Russian Jewish immigrants demonstrated near the boardwalk in Brighton Beach on April 29 as Pataki, other politicians, and many Jewish leaders condemned terrorism and drew parallels between America's response to the Sept. 11 attacks and Israel's military attacks in Palestinian cities.

Manhattan's thirty-eighth annual Salute

to Israel parade attracted a record number of people: several tens of thousands of participants and watchers, and several hundred demonstrators, all tightly monitored by police, police dogs, and police helicopters. Bloomberg, Pataki, two former mayors, and New York senators including Hillary Rodham Clinton were just some of the politicians that took the opportunity to stand with Israel.

The national leadership of the Girl Scouts, which insists on religious belief similar to that of the Boy Scouts, attempted to ban a 16-year-old member from marching in uniform in the Salute to Israel Parade, calling it "political activity" barred by Scout rules. But after the scout drew media attention when pointing out that Girl Scouts have marched in parades for other religious and national holidays, the Girl Scouts backed down.

When humanitarian aid worker Adam Shapiro of Brooklyn found himself in the international limelight after getting trapped with Arafat in Ramallah, his sympathy for injured Arabs prompted death threats against his parents in local Sheepshead Bay. His parents fled their apartment to stay with out-of-state friends, despite increased police presence around their home. The Shapiro family is Jewish, but Adam said he did not follow any particular religion. A local Jewish student group, Betar, condemned him as a traitor and a "piece of garbage" during a rally and vowed to protest outside his parents' home. "We are going to make his life and his parents' lives a living hell," said a Betar speaker. The militant Jewish Defense Organization also urged its supporters to protest there, but mistakenly gave the address of another, unrelated family also named Shapiro. "What is a Jew doing helping Arafat?" said a JDO statement. "We call upon the parents of Mr. Shapiro to throw him out of the house, to condemn their own son and to realize that they gave birth to a person who is no different than [John] Walker [Lindh], a man who was a traitor to America."

Local university campuses also echo the divisiveness of the

Mideast religious war. After a New York University Jewish group, TorchPAC, advertised to have a rally at one corner of Washington Place to celebrate Israel Independence Day, it discovered that three Arab student groups had already received a permit for a pro-Palestinian rally at the same location. Each side accused the other of dirty politics. The Jewish newspaper *Forward* has complained repeatedly that Jewish students, despite being "among the nation's brightest," have failed to defend Israel or are even supporting Palestinians, and that politically conservative Jewish student groups cannot compete with liberal Jewish groups such as Hillel or pro-Palestinian groups.

State and federal civil rights agencies have been flooded with complaints from Muslims who say that their employers and coworkers openly denigrated Islam after the terror attacks, sneeringly labeled them terrorist and, in some cases, fired them solely because of religion or national origin.

The divorced mother of four children bearing their father's last name of "Islam" attracted *New York Post* attention when she successfully petitioned a judge to approve the change of their surname to her pre-married name, McNerney. The judge noted that "the children fear that carrying the name 'Islam' in the wake of the events of Sept. 11 will subject them to further possible harm."

Sources: "Hundreds Gather in Support of Palestine," *Newsday*, 3/30/02; "No Peace in Peace Camp," *Jewish Week*, 3/29/02; "The Media Are on Trial, and N.Y. Times Is Exhibit A," *Forward*, 5/03/02; "Pro-Israel Protesters Vent Their Rage Here," *New York Post*, 4/1/02; "Thousands Rally for Palestinians," *Daily News*, 4/6/02; "Times Sq. Rally Backs Palestinians," 4/6/02; "Girl Scout to March Defiantly for Israel," *New York Post*, 4/30/02; "Demonstrators Roar Support for Israel," *New York Times*, 4/8/02; "Hearts Go Out to Jews in Peril," *Daily News*, 4/22/02; "50,000 City Jews Hold Prayer Vigil," *New York Post*, 4/22/02; "Middle East Tension Reaches City Council," *New York Post*, 4/25/02; "Hated Hitting Home," *New York Post*, 4/28/02; "Confident -- and Clueless -- on Campus," *Forward*, 10/19/01; "The Campus Challenge," *Forward*, 3/22/02; "Russian Jews Rally for Israel," *Newsday*, 4/29/03; "In Manhattan, a Raucous but Peaceful Salute to the Founding of Israel," *New York Times*, 5/06/02; "Scout Will March for Israel," *New York Post*, 5/01/02; "Aid Worker: I'm No Traitor," *Daily News*, 4/02/02; "Jewish Protest Urged -- At Wrong Home," *Daily News*, 4/05/02; "Threatened, Couple Flee Apartment in Brooklyn," *New York Times*, 4/03/02; "For Many American Muslims, Complaints of Quiet but Persistent Bias," *New York Times*, 4/25/02; "Con's Kids Drop 'Islamic Name,'" *New York Post*, 3/22/02.

## Pedophilia Beyond Priests

Although attention on clergy pedophilia has focused on the Roman Catholic Church, other sects and religions have not been immune. The *New York Times* reported that "a handful of studies compiled by the Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence, some more than a decade old, suggest that up to 15 percent of clergy members in all religious groups have engaged in some inappropriate conduct, whether a stolen kiss or full-fledged sexual abuse. But few authoritative statistics are available on the number and type of complaints, and what information churches collect is usually kept secret."

A Presbyterian church in mid-April sent a letter to its 2,300 members explaining that it forced a longtime choir director, Donald T. Bryant, to retire in 1994 following sexual abuse allegations by a former church member. The allegations became public only shortly beforehand when reported by the *New York Times*. Bryant was not criminally charged, and has denied those claims.

Also in April, police arrested Pangratis Vronis, the archbishop of an Orthodox church in Woodside, and charged him with third-degree sexual abuse and attempted sexual abuse of a 14-year-old boy in 1999. Prosecutors said that while Vronis was teaching the boy Greek, he showed a pornographic videotape while he put his hands down the boy's pants and fondled him. The *New York Post*, in March, exposed Vronis as having pled guilty in 1970 to sodomizing two 14-year-old boys. At the time he was sentenced to 23 months of probation. After then being defrocked by his church, he founded his own independent Orthodox church. Vronis faces up to three months in prison if convicted on the new charges.

Howard Nevison, the Upper East Side synagogue cantor charged in Pennsylvania with raping a preteen nephew, was ordered to stand trial after a judge heard testimony from the alleged victim. In about 90 minutes of testimony, the boy, now 12, said the cantor had sexually assaulted him four times when he was between the ages of 3 and 7. *New York* magazine published a long, sympathetic feature article, titled "Song of Sorrow," emphasizing the praise of Nevison's supporters and the boy's sexual abuse from two other members of his family.

Orthodox Jews are also following the case of rabbi and former Orthodox Union youth group leader Baruch Lanner, who has been accused of molesting more than 20 teenage girls throughout his career. Lanner faces trial in early June in Monmouth County, New Jersey. He could be sentenced to up to 40 years in prison and faces \$250,000 in fines if convicted. Lanner has denied criminal wrongdoing but admits to having had "romantic" relationships with former students. Several of Lanner's alleged victims say the Orthodox Union has yet to apologize officially or accept blame for failing to remove Lanner. "The O.U. is more concerned with being sued than with any sense of justice or decency or caring about the victims," said one alleged victim, a doctoral candidate in religion at Harvard University.

Critics charge that an institution unique to Orthodox Judaism, the rabbinic court or beth din, can protect clergy and discourage civil authorities from investigating a complaint. Brooklyn district attorney Charles Hynes reportedly dropped charges against a Hasidic rabbi in 2000 after a beth din said he was innocent. The rabbi, Solomon Hafner of the ultra-Orthodox Bobov sect in Brooklyn's heavily Jewish Borough Park, was accused of molesting a young boy during private tutoring sessions.

The rabbi of the Jewish Center, a prominent Upper West Side Orthodox synagogue, while asserting that sexual abuse cases are far more common in the Catholic church than among the Orthodox, criticized Orthodox institutions for dismissing many of the claims that do arise in their own backyard, and urged them to learn from the Catholic experience. "In the Orthodox world we . . . circle the wagons and deny wrongdoing. The concern for the reputation of the teacher or school is given greater weight than the child's words," he said.

Two Belmar, New Jersey-based Jehovah's Witnesses were

expelled ("disfellowshipped") by their church for "for sowing discord in the faith by speaking out against the church" about its handling of their daughter's allegations of sex abuse by another member.

After Dwight York, the leader of a cult called the United Nuwaubian Nation of Moors, was arrested in Georgia on federal charges of molesting dozens of his acolytes' children -- including creating pornographic photos and videos of them, and taking them across state lines for sex -- a New York prosecutor began investigating whether the cult abused children when it was based in upstate New York, near Parksville. A Georgia sheriff said that "there is some indication" that children were molested in New York, but that the statute of limitations on those cases probably has run out. York began his movement as the quasi-Muslim Ansaru Allah Community in Bushwick, Brooklyn, in the 1970s after a stint in prison. The group controlled a stretch of Brooklyn's Bushwick Avenue in the 1970s and 1980s. But in 1993, after clashing with local Muslim leaders, York moved the cult to Georgia. York says his tribe is descended from Egyptians and that he arrived here on a spaceship from the planet Rizq in a galaxy called Illyuwn. The group's 476-acre compound has 40-foot pyramids, a large sphinx, and a colonnade with Egyptian-style statues. York separated from their parents at an early age, and dictated visitation times. He also controlled devotees' money, food, and clothing, dictated where they lived and when they could enter and leave the compound. Men and women could not talk or have sex without his permission.

Source: "Abuse by Clergy Is Not Just a Catholic Problem," *New York Times*, 4/13/02; "Church Tells Parishioners of 1970s' Sex-Abuse Allegations," *Newsday*, 4/20/02; "Greek Clergyman Accused of Sexually Abusing Teen," Associated Press, 4/19/02; "Greek Cleric Arrested in Fondling of Boy," Associated Press, 4/19/02; "Cantor Must Stand Trial on Kid-Sex Rap," *New York Post*, 4/18/02; "Song of Sorrow," *New York*, 4/12/02; "Orthodox Jews Have Faced Abuse Scandals as Well," *Newsday*, 4/14/02; "Pressure Builds on O.U. Ahead of Rabbi's Sex Abuse Trial," *Forward*, 4/26/02; "Orthodox Rabbi Issues Warning on Sexual Abuse," *Forward*, 5/03/02; "Jehovah's Witnesses Kicked Out for Speaking Out," Associated Press, 5/11/02; "Cult's N.Y. Past Probed," *Daily News*, 5/11/02; "Ex-B'klyn Guru in Sex Bust," *Daily News*, 5/10/02; "Religious Leader Accused Of Molestation," Associated Press, 5/14/02.

**Your 16-day Olympic TV guide**



**KOSHER NOSTRA**

**\$32M suit: Hasidic strongarm Muslim rivals**




## La "Kosher Nostra"

With a blaring, front-page banner headline, the *New York Post* reported that the Turkish Muslim owners of Kosher Garden, a grocery store in Borough Park, Brooklyn, had filed a \$32 million federal lawsuit charging local Hasidic Jews with conspiring to force them out of business because the Muslims refused to buy out a Jewish rival store, Fruit Plaza. The suit claims that the spurned Fruit Plaza owners interfered with kosher suppliers to Kosher Garden, tacked up flyers branding the Muslim shop owners as "Arab . . . Jew haters" and "terrorists" linked to September 11, broke windows, used smoke bombs, and even forged an advertisement supposedly from the Kosher Garden, featuring specials on non-kosher items like lobster, "meat baked in milk," and "delicious bacon."

The Muslim store owners closed their store in early April after a business loss of \$500,000. Before then, the newspaper *Jewish Week* had a more positive spin, reporting that Orthodox Jews were organizing to support the embattled store. The Federal Bureau of Investigation and Attorney General's Office have launched a civil-rights probe into the allegations.

Sources: "Muslim Merchants Sue over Jewish Rivals' 'Vendetta,'" *New York Post*, 2/9/02; "Jews Rally Behind Muslim Grocer," *Jewish Week*, 2/15/02; "Feds Probing Jew-Muslim Biz Feud in B'klyn," *New York Post*, 4/3/02.

## Protesters Cheer Clinic Closing

An upstate women's clinic that was the longtime target of religious anti-choice protests is closing after 20 years. The Women's Medical Pavilion of Dobbs Ferry did not formally announce its closing, but callers have been told that its shutdown is due to the retirement of its medical director. Since the 1980s, the clinic attracted hundreds of religious protesters, some of whom chained themselves to the building. Several legal decisions upholding access to such clinics centered on the Women's Medical Pavilion. "Our prayers have come to fruition," said the president of the Right-to-Life Coalition of Lower Westchester.

Sources: "Dobbs Ferry Abort Clinic Closing After 20 Years," *Daily News*, 5/8/02; "Dobbs Ferry Clinic Was Longtime Target of Protests," Associated Press, 5/7/02.

## Schisms Cost Orthodox Judaism Political Power

"A sibling rivalry to rule Williamsburg's Satmar sect has turned the political clout of a once-powerful Jewish group into chopped liver," says the *New York Post*.

In August, New York City mayoral candidate Mark Green sought and received a worthless endorsement from the ultra-Orthodox, Hasidic, Satmar Jews when he mistakenly solicited the sect's upstate faction instead of the one within city limits. The error stemmed from the battle between the two sons of the Satmars' ailing, 88-year-old grand rabbi, Moses Teitelbaum, to control the group. In 1999, Teitelbaum reportedly chose his middle son, Zalman, to succeed him instead of his oldest son, Aaron. Aaron's supporters claim that the father is senile and dependent on power-hungry advisers who favor Zalman. Zalman's side says Aaron failed to prove himself. His branch in upstate Kiryas Joel has been ripped by dissent and alleged beatings and arson. Lipa, a third son who supports Zalman, is accused of kicking an Aaron supporter in the head during prayer services in a synagogue plagued by fistfights, shouting matches, and

taunts - such as pulling off religious hats or shawls -- over the succession debate. The synagogue hired 22 private guards to patrol its own services, but even the guards have had to call 911 to end fights there.

Founded by survivors of German genocide in 1948, the Satmar sect is one of the largest Orthodox groups in the world. Unlike others, it believes Jews should not settle in Israel until a messiah comes. Once a powerful voting bloc in city and state political races, it can no longer deliver many votes to any candidate. This will mean fewer extra government services for an impoverished group whose large families are dependent on public housing, health care, and day care.

Recently, Brooklyn District Attorney Charles Hynes won a \$250,000 federal grant to encourage Orthodox Jewish women to report domestic violence instead of keeping it secret in the name of "shalom bais," or "peace in the house." The money will be spent on an education campaign and a network of counseling services for the battered and the batterers. The program will be promoted at nail and hair salons, Lamaze classes, and day care centers where Orthodox women go.

The Satmars' upstate branch, Kiryas Joel, incorporated in 1977, fought for 12 years to create a public school district for its disabled children, whom they refused to send to the surrounding school district. The New York State Association of School Boards argued that such a district would violate the constitutional separation of church and state. The New York State Legislature, with the cooperation first of Gov. Mario Cuomo and then of Gov. George Pataki, passed four laws in response to lobbying from the Satmars, enabling the creation of Kiryas Joel school district, which

opened in 1990. But the first law, which actually named Kiryas Joel as a beneficiary, was found unconstitutional by state and federal courts, and eventually by the United States Supreme Court, because it constituted a special favor to a religious group.

Two later laws allowed any municipality in the state that met specific criteria of population and income to carve out its own school district, but the courts found that those laws also were written so narrowly as to favor Kiryas Joel. The Legislature's fourth attempt at writing the law, in 1999, was upheld by a state judge. The law gives any municipality that has 10,000 to 125,000 residents and is contained within a larger school district the right to petition for its own separate school district, financed by state education aid. The law's terms are broad enough to cover more than two dozen municipalities. The School Boards Association did not appeal the state judge's decision, and Kiryas Joel has now joined the association.

*Jewish Week* reports another split in Orthodox Judaism, revealed at the annual upstate conference of Torah Umesorah-National Society for Hebrew Day Schools, which is the major annual educational convention of Orthodox Jews. Elya Svei, a rabbinical leader of the politically influential Agudath Israel of America and of what the newspaper calls *haredi*, "Orthodox Jewry's so-called right wing or Lithuanian segment," criticized Torah Umesorah for accepting funds from less religious Jews. "It says there is a major split in the leadership of the *haredi* world," said one rabbi with close connections to right-wing circles. "It casts a large cloud on the credibility of their major leader. The whole *haredi* world is churning over this."

Sources: "Rabbi-Rousing Row," *New York Post*, 3/10/02; "Satmar Sibling Rivalry Hurting Them All," *New York Post*, 3/10/02; "Orthodox Domestic Abuse Grant," *Daily News*, 4/26/02; "Controversy Over, Enclave Joins School Board Group," *New York Times*, 4/20/02; "First Crack in the Haredi Wall," *Jewish Week*, 5/10/02.

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#### **Meeting directions for non-Manhattanites**

Taxis are faster than local buses or walking. Closest subway station: 6 (Lexington Local) to 33rd St. From **Penn Station** (NJ Transit, LIRR, Amtrak, subway): take the M34 bus approx. 7 blocks east to Third Ave. and walk 2 blocks south. From the **Port Authority** (buses, subway): take the M42 bus approx. 8 blocks east to Third Ave. and walk 10 blocks south (Third's buses run only uptown), or take that bus to Lexington Ave., transfer to any downtown bus, ride that 10 blocks south, and walk east 1 block. From **Grand Central Terminal** (Metro North, Amtrak, subway): take downtown 6 subway train to 33rd St. or walk or bus 11 blocks down Lexington Ave., then turn left and walk one block to Third Ave. **Driving from Queens:** Exit from 495 and drive south down Second Ave. **Driving from Brooklyn:** Drive north on the FDR till approaching 31st St. **Driving from NJ:** From 78 and the Holland Tunnel, drive north and east; from 495 and the Lincoln Tunnel, drive south and east; from the GWB, drive south down the FDR till approaching 31st St. **Driving from Staten Island:** From the Verrazano Bridge to the Gowanus to the Brooklyn Bridge to the FDR till approaching 31st St. **Driving from Bronx/Westchester/upstate:** I-95 to the FDR till approaching 31st St.

## **Other New York City freethought groups**

### **Atheists, Agnostics and Freethinkers (NYU)**

"An official student club at New York University. To provide an open forum for the discussion of a wide range of controversial issues of philosophical, social, and political interest. . . . To raise awareness of various issues related to Atheism, Agnosticism and free thought including the separation of Church and State."

arist01@aol.com or charliej@bigfoot.com  
<http://www.nyu.edu/clubs/atheists/>

### **Humanist Society of Metropolitan New York (Corliss Lamont Chapter of the AHA)**

"Meets approximately twice per month — generally on the evening of the second and fourth Tuesdays, usually with a speaker followed by a discussion." Meets at same location as NYC Atheists. Mailing address:  
777 United Nations Plaza (lobby floor),  
New York, NY 10017-3521  
(212) 687-2477, info.hsmny@corliss-lamont.org  
<http://www.corliss-lamont.org/hsmny/>

### **New York Society for Ethical Culture**

Several events per month. "A humanistic religious and philosophical movement in which people share a core of common values: the worth of each individual, ethics as central to our lives, eliciting the best from each other and doing good in the world. We seek truth as a growing, changing body of knowledge based on experience, reason and scientific observation, and seek to use it in support of human well-being."  
2 West 64th St., New York, NY 10023  
(212) 874-5210, bbean@nysec.org  
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