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Plug pulled on electric car

► ISRAELI E-CAR COMPANY FILES FOR BANKRUPTCY

By EDGAR ASHER
ISRAEL CORRESPONDENT

Israel's romance with the all-electric car seems to have come to an abrupt end.

Six years and \$850 million later, with investors that included the shipping and fertilizer conglomerate Israel Corp., General Electric, Morgan Stanley, HSBC Holdings and others, after introducing a new concept in all-electric powered cars, Better Place Ltd. filed for bankruptcy last month.

Better Place was founded in 2007 by Israeli-born Shai Agassi, 47, with the aim of introducing the mass adoption of electric cars with a sustainable support system (JEWISH STAR, Jan. 25, 2008).

In 2008, Israel became the first country, and the French automotive group Renault-Nissan Alliance the first carmaker, to adopt the Better Place "quick-drop" battery changing system. With stations around the country, a car battery could be quickly replaced, instead of taking hours to re-charge.

The Israeli high-tech idea never took off, due in part to the high cost of the all-electric Renault Fluence sedan, practical considerations if the battery ran out when the car was not near a battery-changing station, and leasing arrangements for the car's battery.

The Better Place Renault will take its place in transport history as the electric car that almost made it. ☒

— Jewish Star contributed



The writing was on the wall at the beginning of the year for Israel's effort to produce an all-electric car when its offices in Australia and Denmark closed. Some 1,000 Israelis purchased the electric car. ☒

— GIL ZOHAR PHOTO / INSET: PROJECT BETTER PLACE

DACHS REDUX

► JEWISH SCHOOL APPEALS EVANSTON REJECTION

By GILA WERTHEIMER
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

After losing a lawsuit against the City of Evanston at the end of April, Joan Dachs Bais Yaakov Yeshivas Tiferes Tzvi elementary school in Chicago is going ahead with its appeal of the decision, school president MOSHE DAVIS told the JEWISH STAR this week.

Evanston has refused to re-zone the property the school purchased in 2007 to allow it to operate on the site at 222 Hartrey, the former location of electronics manufacturer Shure Inc. (JEWISH STAR, May 24). The property is zoned industrial, which does not permit it to be used for a school.

"Evanston felt it necessary to deny the school the opportunity to grow and flourish," Davis told the JEWISH STAR last month.

On April 30, Judge MARY ANNE MASON of the Circuit Court of Cook County issued a 46-page ruling that upheld Evanston's rejection of the school's applications for re-zoning or for a special-use permit.

Dismissing any claim of religious bias, even as she acknowledged "inappropriate" statements by then-Zoning Administrator BILL DUNKLEY and by Ald. ANN RAINEY, Mason ruled that the loss of tax revenue was the reason for not re-zoning.

As a non-profit institution, the school would be

☞ PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 3

Rabbi heads for jury trial

► GRAND JURY INDICTMENT OVER ALLEGED FINANCIAL ISSUES; 'OVERZEALOUS COMPLAINANT' AT AGUDAS ACHIM

By DOUGLAS WERTHEIMER
EDITOR

"GOOD NEWS!!!" Rabbi PHILIP LEFKOWITZ exclaimed earlier this year, when his legal ordeal seemed finally to have reached a breakthrough point.

"I would like Passover to be my own *z'man chairusainu* [moment of freedom] from this ordeal of more than five years," he told the JEWISH STAR on March 6, just a few weeks before the onset of the celebration of the Israelites' Exodus from Egypt.

The journey had been a long one. Over half-a-dozen lawyers had defended him *pro bono*, and the rabbi, who is 69, had stood opposed to two assistant states attorneys and to lawyers from DLA Piper, a multi-national firm with reputedly more lawyers than any other in the world.

His rabbinic colleagues supported him and donors from across the country had provided him with the financial resources to prevent him from being evicted from his condominium.

There was justification for optimism.

Dear Rabbi Lefkowitz

In truth, Rabbi Lefkowitz's situation at Agudas Achim North Shore Congregation in Chicago — where he was hired in August 1996 — had started off well.

After just over a year at the position, STEVEN TURK,

the congregation's president, announced at the synagogue's Hanukkah dinner that as a gesture of thanks for the turnaround work he had done, Rabbi Lefkowitz had been elected the congregation's "life-time Spiritual leader" (JEWISH STAR, March 27, 1998).

The appointment was confirmed in a 1999 letter from the institution, respectfully addressed "Dear Rabbi Lefkowitz".

In the ensuing years, the rabbi continued working to revive the synagogue, physically and spiritually.

The once-grand Agudas Achim building at 5029 N. Kenmore, with its mosaic Ark housing Torah scrolls, decorations in the Byzantine style, and a 1,200-seat sanctuary with a women's gallery, dated to 1927. It was in poor condition, and Rabbi Lefkowitz found

☞ PLEASE TURN TO PAGE 2

Come-back Frog

By EDGAR ASHER
ISRAEL CORRESPONDENT

The Hula painted frog, which the International Union for the Conservation of Nature declared extinct in 1996, and which is considered to be related to a genus which has been extinct for about a million years, has been rediscovered.



The frog was thought to have disappeared after the Hula Lake in northern Israel was drained in the 1950s. Israeli, German and French researchers report in *Nature* the discovery of the 'living fossil', which may again thrive in the Hula. ☒

— ASHERNET PHOTO



— ROMAN KOGAN PHOTO / LIMMUD FSU / JEWISH STAR TEXT

Begin Centenary Launched in Brisk

The 100th anniversary celebrations of the birth of Menachem Begin, Israel's sixth prime minister, were launched June 4, in a ceremony in front of the Tachkemoni School on Kuybeshava Street in Brest, Belarus, the Jewish school he attended.

The ceremony was organized by Limmud FSU and the Menachem Begin Heritage Center in Israel, and attended by their representatives, some 200 members of the local community, and Israeli government officials.

Begin was born into a Zionist household on August 16, 1913 (his home is pictured above), in what was then known as Brest-Litovsk or (in Hebrew) Brisk, in the Russian Empire.

The woman who delivered him was the grandmother of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon. In a famous incident (recorded in Eric Silver's *Begin*), in 1904 Begin's father, a journalist, broke down the doors of the main synagogue in Brisk in order to eulogize the recently-deceased Zionist leader Theodor Herzl, an act opposed by the synagogue's rabbi.

In his book *Listening to God* (chap. 15), Rabbi Shlomo Riskin recalls being present at a meeting in New York between then-Prime Minister Begin and Rav J. B. Soloveitchik when that incident was discussed. The Rav's famous grandfather, Hayyim Soloveichik, known as the Brisker Rav, was the rabbi who had attempted to prevent the eulogy.

Among some 30,000 Jews living in Brisk in 1941 (about three-quarters of the entire population), only 200 survived the Nazi onslaught, according to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica*.

After leaving Brisk, Begin never again returned, having wiped it from his memory (Avi Shilon, *Menachem Begin*). ☒

— Douglas Wertheimer, Editor

INSIDE



- Editorial: JNF's \$500,000...4
- DC: Hillary's a lock?.....4
- Letters4
- Books for summer5
- FrontRow: 'Void'6
- Community Calendar6
- Sporting Jews: The Odds..7
- Torah: Doing it my way..7



— CARLE CARTOONS / GARY MCCOY

Competence was the issue when credit agencies again downgraded Illinois, page 2.



— CHICAGO JEWISH STAR PHOTO

SHUTTERED — With the exception of a few weeks in the summer of 2011, no religious services have been held at Agudas Achim North Shore Congregation in Chicago since September 2008. The synagogue has been embroiled in lawsuits since then.

The sign above was on one of the synagogue's front doors on August 8, 2010, when members and friends attended a meeting there. At the time, Steven Turk told the JEWISH STAR that he viewed their entry into the synagogue as a "break-in" and "criminal trespassing," and that "police will make arrests of those who broke in." No arrests were ever made. ☒

Jury trial expected

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

ways to have some sections repaired, often for free.

He strengthened as well the Orthodox religious orientation of the congregation. He developed a strong following among its members, where he was beloved, addressing the largely elderly Jews from the former Soviet Union in Yiddish because many of them only spoke comfortably in that language or Russian (JEWISH STAR, Sept. 18, 2009).

And the rabbi had notched public relations achievements. In 2006, Illinois Governor ROD BLAGOJEVICH attended a Passover seder; in 2007, Chicago Mayor RICHARD M. DALEY visited the facility.

Then in September 2008 he received a letter which began with the bald salutation: "Dear Philip Lefkowitz".

It was a notification from the synagogue's board of directors, signed by its President Steven Turk, that he had been "unanimously terminated", effective September 9.

He was accused of "Gross mishandling of Synagogue funds and donations" and "Breach of your duty of care and loyalty as Rabbi and employee of AANSC".

According to the terms of employment, any non-resolvable dispute between the rabbi and the congregation had to be submitted for binding arbitration to the judicial arm (or Beth Din Zedek) of the Chicago Rabbinical Council.

On November 24, 2008, the three-member Beth Din ruled that it "did not find truly demonstrable evidence to prove the allegations [of financial impropriety] to be actual".

It awarded the rabbi

\$20,000, and determined that he and his family could remain rent-free in the synagogue-owned condominium, where they were living, until the end of August 2009 (JEWISH STAR, Dec. 19, 2008).

But the synagogue failed to comply with the Beth Din decision. Therefore on April 6, the rabbinical court issued a contempt citation against it (JEWISH STAR, May 8, 2009).

With no legal ability to enforce that citation, the clash moved into the Illinois court system.

Regarding one such lawsuit, LAWRENCE M. BENJAMIN, an attorney representing Rabbi Lefkowitz, stated in an August 2011 brief that that lawsuit was "nothing more than a control dispute" over the synagogue.

Harris Bank account

But in the next month the matter took a different turn. On September 8, Chicago Police Detective KATHLEEN SIMPSON was summoned to provide pivotal testimony before a grand jury at the Cook County Criminal Courts Building on South California Avenue in Chicago.

The purpose of a Cook County grand jury is similar to that of a preliminary hearing, former Lake County States' Attorney PAUL NOVAK told the JEWISH STAR earlier this year.

It is a secret proceeding in which neither the defendant nor a defense attorney are present. It provides a possible path to bringing a case to trial based upon a probable cause determination.

If a grand jury decides that there is a probability that criminal activity has occurred it brings an indictment, and the case proceeds.



Adam Sheppard, of the Sheppard Law Firm in Chicago, will be the lead attorney representing Rabbi Lefkowitz at trial. — ADAM SHEPPARD PHOTO

Det. Simpson was before the grand jury that day to reveal the results of her investigations in the case of *People v Philip Lefkowitz, Levi Lefkowitz and Moshe Lefkowitz*. The State had accused the three of "the offenses of theft and continuing financial crimes enterprise" allegedly committed against Agudas Achim between February 21, 2007 and November 21, 2008.

"And during your investigation," Simpson was asked on the witness stand by Assistant State's Attorney WILLIAM CONWAY,

"did you learn that with Philip Lefkowitz's knowledge and aide, LEVI LEFKOWITZ and MOSHE LEFKOWITZ opened bank accounts at Harris Bank in the name of the synagogue?"

Answer: Yes.

Question: And during your investigation, did you learn that the synagogue[s] actual legitimate bank account was at a different bank?

Answer: Correct.

Question: During your investigation did you learn that with Philip Lefkowitz's aid, Levi Lefkowitz and Moshe

Lefkowitz obtained more than \$10,000 worth of donation checks from within the synagogue?

Answer: Yes.

Question: And during your investigation, did you learn that these checks were meant as donations to the synagogue and not for personal use of Philip Lefkowitz's, Moshe Lefkowitz or Levi Lefkowitz?

Answer: That is correct.

...

Question: And during your investigation, did you learn that Philip Lefkowitz, Moshe Lefkowitz and Levi Lefkowitz did not have the authority of the synagogue to open bank accounts at a different bank and take these donation checks?

Answer: That is correct. That's true."

Following the September 8 deliberations, the grand jury foreperson returned with a "True Bill", permitting the State of Illinois to file its three-count indictment against the Lefkowitzes.

The case was still awaiting a courtroom date when the Sheppard Law Firm in Chicago, acting for the Lefkowitzes, turned up bank records which challenged Det. Simpson's testimony.

In fact, lawyer ADAM J. SHEPPARD told the JEWISH STAR, his firm discovered that it was Steven Turk himself who "authorized the opening of the Harris Bank account in the name of the synagogue and authorized Moshe and Levi Lefkowitz as signatories on that account."

Hence Det. Simpson "misled the grand jury into thinking otherwise", Sheppard argued.

On January 7 of this year, Sheppard filed a mo-



YOU BE THE JUDGE

"As students, we learn that self-governance relies on good faith: We elect to office the candidates we view as most capable, then trust them to manage us through crises we can see and those we can't anticipate...."

TOPIC
Illinois' dysfunction

In Illinois, though, that process gradually seized up, ossified, and now has plain collapsed....

Last week the credit agencies that again downgraded Illinois applied an almost pitying tone to the dysfunction here: They questioned the competence of current leadership.

Emphasis ours: On Monday, Fitch Ratings said legislators' failure to reform pensions "exacerbates concern about management's willingness and ability to address the state's numerous fiscal challenges."

Two days later Moody's Investors Service wrote, "An A3 rating, while very low for a U.S. state, is consistent with the General Assembly's inability to steer the state from a path to fiscal distress...."

The next governor of Illinois likely will deal with the strewn debris of this wreckage....

[W]hat Illinois needs [is] not more good intentions, but solutions.

That's what today's leaders, overshadowed by financial problems they have nurtured to great stature, don't deliver [and] ... arguably lack the skills and moxie to deliver." ✠

— Source: Editorial, "Choosing Illinois' next governor," *Chicago Tribune*, June 9, 2013.

CHICAGO JEWISH STAR QUOTE OF THE WEEK

tion to dismiss all three counts of the indictment, based upon the newly-revealed documents.

In what Sheppard characterized to the JEWISH STAR as a "very unusual move," Circuit Court of Cook County Judge MICHAEL BROWN agreed that the detective's testimony to the grand jury was misleading. On March 6, the judge dismissed the count relating to the Harris Bank.

Rabbi Lefkowitz returned home from the courtroom hearing excited about the good news. The elation was short-lived.

That same day, the State dismissed all three charges against the Lefkowitzes. It then proceeded to reconvene the grand jury and to re-indict the Lefkowitzes for the same offenses for which they were originally charged on September 8, 2011.

This time, the State abandoned its claim that the Harris Bank account was "unauthorized". Instead, explained Sheppard to the JEWISH STAR, it asserted in effect that "even if the defendants [the Lefkowitzes] were authorized to open the Harris Bank account in the name of the synagogue, that the defendants still committed theft by obtaining unauthorized control over checks and money orders belonging to the synagogue."

PAUL C. KIEFER, the Cook County Assistant State's Attorney who is handling the Lefkowitz case for the State of Illinois, did not respond to a JEWISH STAR request for comment.

Truly innocent
Today the Agudas Achim property is reportedly for sale for \$1.99 million.

Rabbi Lefkowitz and his family, who have several times during the years of conflict faced eviction from

the synagogue-owned condominium in which they live, just two weeks ago were rescued by a last-minute anonymous donor who provided funds for a condominium-required special assessment.

"A miracle!" Rabbi Lefkowitz wrote.

Agudas Achim first held Rosh Hashanah services in 1927; the last ones took place 80 years later. With the exception of a few weeks in the summer of 2011, no services have been held at Agudas Achim since September 2008 (JEWISH STAR, Oct. 31, 2008).

On only one occasion have a large group of members been inside the synagogue during the past five years. On August 8, 2010, a padlock was cut on the outside gate of the property and some 70 Jews from the former Soviet Union, members and friends, flooded into the building (JEWISH STAR, Aug. 20, 2010).

After a status hearing on June 5, lead attorney Adam Sheppard, 33, whose firm continues to represent the Lefkowitzes *pro bono*, told the JEWISH STAR they would likely face a jury trial this August or September.

While that would not coincide on the calendar with the *zman chairusainu* of Exodus times, a trial then would come at, or only weeks before, the onset of the Jewish High Holydays.

The first of those, Rosh Hashanah, is also known as Judgement Day.

"The rabbi has been a stalwart of the Jewish community and the Chicago community at large," Sheppard told the JEWISH STAR.

"He is truly innocent," Sheppard added last week. "We think our clients deserve to be exonerated, they've already been the victims of an overzealous complainant." ✠

Lincolnwood Jewish Congregation / A. G. Beth Israel

Scholar in Residence

RABBI YOCHANAN POSNER

Sunday, July 7th • 10:30 a.m.

at LJC AGBI

Please join us to hear this renowned scholar at this community program.

Rabbi Posner will speak on Chassidism and the Lubavitch Chabad movement.

There is no charge but please RSVP to LJC AGBI at (847) 676-0491.

Refreshments will be served.

This program is supported by the CHARLOTTE AND LOUIS EPSTEIN MEMORIAL FUND.



Rabbi Posner is the Executive Director of Lubavitch Chabad of Skokie. He is also the local instructor for the Jewish Learning Institute, and has dedicated most of his life to helping those in the Jewish community.

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