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The sCoolWork application aims to aid students by taking the pain out of homework.

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Columnist Charles Jacobs says students in one local school system are being taught deceptive lessons concerning Muslim women.

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The 24th annual Boston Jewish Film Festival will provide filmgoers with a variety of offerings beginning Nov. 7.

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Striking gold

Filmmaker Arnon Goldfinger's documentary took a surprising turn while he was making it, with compelling results.

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How would you feel if the world were about to end and you were still single? Julie Judson ponders the question.

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Test of character

A friend missed a history test and then asked for details about the questions it posed, what would you do?

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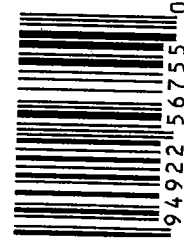
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PHOTO/IEFF LIEBERMAN
A young boy sits inside a traditional Igbo prayer structure that local Jewish community members speculate may be an ancient synagogue.

The changing face of Nigeria Nation's Jewish population is thriving

By Elise Kigner
Advocate Staff

When William Miles first read that there were Jews in Nigeria, he didn't believe it.

Miles, a political science professor at Northeastern, had spent more than 30 years traveling to Nigeria and publishing books and articles on the country. When he read an article about Nigerian Jews in the Conservative movement's magazine around five years ago, it made him think about the Nigerian email scams.

"I know there are a lot of bogus claims made in Nigeria for personal benefit," Miles said.

But when he again saw mention of the community in the 2008 book "The Black Jews of Africa," he figured he needed to check it out for himself.

After two trips to meet Nigerian Jews, the skeptic became a believer.

In August he published "Jews of Nigeria: An Afro-Judaic Odyssey," which he says is the first Western book on the group.

Nigerian Jews are also starting to get attention in the film world. This year New York filmmaker Jeff Lieberman produced "Re-Emerging: the Jews of Nigeria."

Miles is among the scholars featured in the film, which will be screened Tuesday, Nov. 13, at 7 p.m. at the West Newton Cinema as part of the Boston Jewish Film Festival. Miles and Lieberman will appear at the screening.

Both the author and filmmaker found a guide in Howard Gorin, rabbi emeritus of the Conservative Tikvat Israel Congrega-



PHOTO/IEFF LIEBERMAN
Rabbi Howard Gorin reads from the Torah in Nigeria.

tion in Maryland.

Gorin began making regular trips to Nigeria in 2004, and has become known as a leader in the Nigerian Jewish community.

In 2009 Gorin and Miles traveled to Abuja, the capital of Nigeria, to visit two synagogues there. While the members identify as Jews, many would not be considered Jewish according to halachic standards. They were not born to Jewish mothers, and they did not undergo conversion.

Miles knew the Nigerian Jews he was going to meet had never played with dreidels, lit menorahs in their own homes, or feasted on latkes and gelt. He considered whether to bring Chanukah ritual objects with him.

While hesitant at first — "I'm not a missionary; I'm a professor," he explained — he also had traveled to Africa enough times to know that a visitor cannot arrive empty-handed.

Miles, with the help of his congregation, Temple Emanu-El in Providence, brought duffel bags stuffed with Chanukah items.

He taught the Nigerians how to play dreidel, and they showed him how they celebrate. While individuals did not have menorahs in their homes, there was a menorah in the synagogue made of painted Coke bottles attached to a wooden frame box.

Miles met Hezekiah, the son of Sar Habakkuk, the congregation's leader. Hezekiah, age 11, was the congregation's cantor. When Miles was about to leave, Hezekiah asked him if he would come back for his bar mitzvah.

Two years later, Miles was again on a plane to Nigeria.

The bar mitzvah "was very Jewish and very African," he said.

Following services, the congregants said the Hebrew bless-

Method is not merely child's play

Students have fun as they learn about G-d

By Elise Kigner
Advocate Staff

Rabbi Adam Lavitt wiggled his fingers above a toy wooden boat, making the motion of rain. He picked up the boat and rocked it up and up, following it with his eyes.

Lavitt, community educator at Dorshei Tzedek in West Newton, was telling the story of Noah's Ark using a teaching method called "G-dly Play."

In G-dly Play, a teacher uses simple props to tell a Bible story. The teacher then asks questions about the story, aiming to instill a sense of wonder and awe in children.

Developed 30 years ago by an Episcopal priest, G-dly Play is now used in 5,000 church classrooms in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Germany. But in the Jewish community, the approach is largely unknown.

Rabbi Michael Shire, dean of the Shoolman Graduate School of Jewish Education at Hebrew College, is trying to change that situation.

Continued on Page 5

Life sciences summit draws 50+ speakers

By Elise Kigner
Advocate Staff

Avner Halperin was already looking to open a new American headquarters for his Israeli hospital technology company when Gov. Deval Patrick came to visit.

Patrick, who was in Israel on a trade mission last spring, touted Boston's high-quality medical centers.

The pitch worked. Within weeks, Halperin decided to open a branch in Waltham.

Halperin is among the speakers at the third Life Sciences Summit on Nov. 5 and 6 at the Westin in Waltham. It's being organized by the New England-Israeli Busi-

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G-dly Play teaching method mixes religious studies with playtime

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Shire, who became familiar with the value of G-dly Play after meeting founder Rev. Jerome Berryman in 1996, is holding trainings for local Jewish teachers, and working to adapt the G-dly Play scripts for Jewish audiences.

Shire said G-dly Play helps develop spirituality in children — a concept he said is often overlooked in formal Jewish education.

"It's not just a series of facts and skills they can discard later, but a holistic way to become more fully human and more fully Jewish," he said.

For the first time this year, Dorshel Tzedek, which is Reconstructionist, as well as Temple Isaiah in Lexington, a Reform congregation, are offering regular G-dly Play programs.

On Saturday, 1st-, 2nd- and 3rd-graders and parents from the Dorshel Tzedek religious school sat on colored tiles for the weekly Shabbat Circle.

Lavitt began by leading the group in rounds of Ma Tovv. He then removed a replica of a Torah scroll from a cardboard ark. He laid out the scroll, and covered it with brown paper to represent the earth.

Never making eye contact with the crowd, he introduced Noah and his wife Na'amah, placing the unadorned wooden figures on the brown paper. He spoke of the animals that came from the four corners of the earth, and brought out wooden figures to represent them. His audience was completely silent, and rapt.

When Lavitt finished telling the story, for the first time since he started telling it, he looked at his audience. He then asked what are known in G-dly Play lingo as the "I wonder" questions.

I wonder, Lavitt asked, where are you in the story?

One girl piped up that her name is Noa too.

I wonder, he asked, why our ancestors thought G-d wanted to send a great flood?

A boy wearing a bright blue kippah snuggled in his mom's arms replied, "He wanted to tell people they shouldn't behave badly to the earth."

Lavitt listened intently to each child, nodding to their responses or saying "that's beautiful," as if each were a little Torah scholar.

After Shabbat Circle, 2nd-grader Anna Kaplan explained that she especially liked the little creatures in the story. "He tells you the story so you actually know what it looks like," she said.

Parents Tamar Arons and Michael Brann said their 1st-



Talia Ickson, Talia Sharone, Sam Markowitz and Cooper Ray, 1st-graders at Temple Isaiah in Lexington, engage in Torah Play, the school's version of G-dly Play.

grader, Michele Arons-Brann, has recently been asking them more questions about the Torah.

She asks if they believe in science or in the stories. She also asks them: Why, if some of the stories are made up, are they important?

It's clear to her parents she's paying attention. "It's theater," Arons said.

Jedi Jarvis, director of early childhood and family life at Temple Isaiah, is offering Torah Play — her school's version of G-dly Play — in the monthly family program for pre-kindergarten, kindergarten and 1st-grade students.

Each session, children and parents are split up to listen to a G-dly Play story. Afterward, parents are asked to talk about the story in small groups. The kids are set loose to explore a classroom filled with items from G-dly Play stories, as well as ritual objects, like a tzedakah box and a mezuzah. They may also use crayons or clay, or play with blocks. The unstructured play time is a key element of the G-dly Play curriculum used around the world.

The students are not asked to think about the story as they play, though Jarvis said some

use the toys to retell the story to their friends, and others will make art that reflects the story.

Jarvis said giving the kids an opportunity to retell the story themselves makes them consider ideas such as G-d's role in the story.

For example, in the Noah's Ark story "they have to think about: Who made the flood come? Well, G-d made the flood come," she said. "If they were just reading a book, they wouldn't think about who made the flood come."

Jarvis, who is leaving Temple Isaiah this month for a new job heading the young families and interfaith program at Combined Jewish Philanthropies, said G-dly Play has also worked well with parents, especially those who are not Jewish or are not very familiar with the Torah stories.

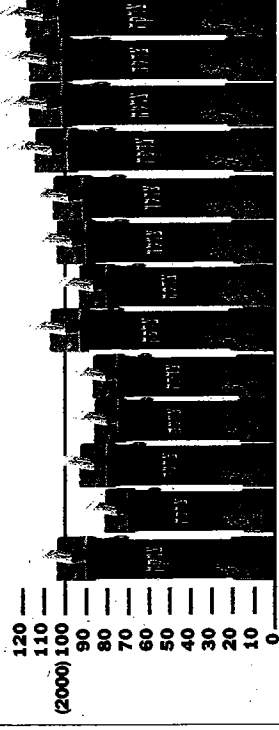
"When you tell a story you would tell at a child's level to parents, it gives them a sense of comfort," she said. "I think it builds a bridge."

Email Rabbi Shire at MSbire@HebrewCollege.edu if you're interested in using G-dly Play in the classroom.

The Pushke Economic Index

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David Horowitz is the founding editor of *The Times of Israel*. He was previously editor-in-chief of *The Jerusalem Post* and editor and publisher of the award-winning news magazine, *The Jerusalem Report*. While in Israel, Horowitz has written for newspapers around the world, including *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Irish Times* and *(London) Independent*. He is a frequent interviewee on CNN, BBC, Sky, Fox News, NPR and other TV and radio stations.

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