

## INTERNATIONAL **Herald Tribune**

### **2 New York prisoners sue to get their banned religious books back**

**The Associated Press**

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**NEW YORK:** Two New York inmates challenging a ban on some religious books in chapel libraries at U.S. prisons are trying to take the fight nationwide, asking that their lawsuit be given class action status so it can benefit thousands of others behind bars.

Moshe Milstein, an Orthodox Jew, and John J. Okon, a Protestant, filed the lawsuit in U.S. District Court on Tuesday. They withdrew a similar lawsuit two months ago after a judge said they needed to register complaints with the prison system first.

The men accused the government of the "indiscriminate dismantling of religious libraries" at federal prisons nationwide.

Prison libraries limited the number of books for each religion to between 100 and 150 under new rules created after a 2004 U.S. Department of Justice review of how prisons choose Muslim religious services providers, Assistant U.S. Attorney Brian Feldman said.

Feldman said the study was done out of a concern that prisons "had been radicalized by inmates who were practicing or espousing various extreme forms of religion, specifically Islam, which exposed security risks to the prisons and beyond the prisons to the public at large."

The lawsuit says hundreds and perhaps thousands of religious books and media used by inmates have been banned and removed from prisons across the United States since February without any effort to learn if they are inflammatory or extremist.

"This purge is an unnecessary, unconstitutional and unlawful restriction of the ability of federal inmates nationwide to practice and learn about their religion and has substantially burdened their ability to exercise their religion," the lawsuit says.

Among the books banned at their prison were "When Bad Things Happen to Good People" by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner, and "The Purpose-Driven Life" by the Rev. Rick Warren, the lawsuit said.

The Muslim portion of the chapel library has been reduced to the Quran and two other titles after the removal of prayer books, prayer guides and the Hadith, the most important source for Muslim practice and faith after the Quran, the lawsuit says.

A spokeswoman for government attorneys had no comment Wednesday.

The men's lawsuit did not say why they were in prison, but it said Milstein is scheduled to be released Aug. 28.

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