

soviet jewry report

Cincinnati Council for Soviet Jews

MONTHLY MEETINGS

Winter 1985

Cincinnati Council for Soviet Jews will hold its monthly meetings regularly on the second Tuesday of each month. These meetings are open to our membership and to the public and we strongly encourage all to attend. Meetings are held at the Rose Warner House/Hillel Jewish Student Center, 2615 Clifton Avenue in Clifton, at 7:30 P.M.



STILL WAITING...

Ida Milgrom for her son Anatoly Shcharansky

THREE VIGNETTES

A TOURIST'S ACCOUNT

Visiting in the Soviet Union is unlike being a tourist elsewhere; one manifestation of the difference is that elsewhere one freely speaks with the individuals who wish to practice their English. In the Soviet Union, in contrast, I was skeptical of any stranger who began speaking to me. It is this reality which highlights even more the special bond which formed between me and the people I was privileged to visit during my week in Moscow and Leningrad. From the moment I phoned and said, "Hello. I am Judith. I would like to see you." I was received like a long-lost friend. And, indeed, by the time I left, I felt that I had discovered, or recovered, many long-lost friends. A part of me did not return from the Soviet Union, but remains in each of the apartments in which I visited. Let me share with you just a little about some of my new friends.

I spent part of Saturday evening with a 43-year-old woman. I brought with me word of her sister who has lived in Israel for eleven years. Just as special to her was our presence. (I travelled with Rabbi Stacy Offner of Mt. Zion Hebrew Congregation in St. Paul, Minnesota.) As she dashed off to the kitchen to prepare something for us to eat, she told us, "Come into the kitchen; I want to be near you." Around the kitchen table we talked and talked, like old friends. She used to be an engineer but no longer has a job. She teaches Hebrew in order to learn it, so that when she reaches Israel she will be ready. She shared with us a fat file of correspondence, most of which remains unanswered, dealing with her request to emigrate. As we talked she showed us pictures, many of them of her sister. Quietly she turned to each of us and asked in turn, "Do you have a sister? It has been eleven years since I saw my sister!" As we were getting ready to leave she said with deep emotion, "I have no more time. In two years my son will have to serve in the army." We all knew what she meant. She accompanied us to the subway; as I turned before putting my money into the turnstile, my last sight of her was her standing there watching. By chance on the way to the airport three days later we went down her street. I hoped for one last glimpse of her, but the street was deserted.

On another evening I visited a young man, an engineer by profession who is a self-trained historian of Russian Jewish history. He corresponds with one of my professors and was delighted to meet someone who knows his friend. We spent a pleasant evening discussing his life, his work, books, what Reform Judaism is, and the Hebrew Union College. He wore a kipah; he told us that he wanted his son to grow up in a Jewish environment. His five-year-old son ran in and out during the course of the evening; somewhat shy, he saw that his father was enjoying these visitors. Our welcome was sealed by the pack or two of gum and Life Savers left over from the flight plus a small, disposable flashlight which I gave him. Shortly before we left, we took pictures of our host and his family. Our young friend ran out of the room to get the family camera and, in childish delight, took his own pictures of his father's guests with the empty camera. He represents a growing number of Russian Jews, for, born five days after his parents were refused permission to emigrate, he has been a Refusenik since birth.

Another exciting evening was spent with a young family looking forward to the day in Israel when they can live as Jews. We had with us some children's books and games, crayons and stickers, and the look of delight on the nine- and six-year-old girls' faces as they saw them was the nicest thank-you we could have received. As we talked to their mother and older brother for several hours, we learned something about their life. Their brother spoke fluent Hebrew -- and was the one who was able

to come up with the appropriate word when we were at a loss for it; only later did he show us his English book and, in reading us a section about Samuel Clemons, demonstrate his competence in English also. When asked if there was anything he would like, he told us that he would like his own Mishnah and a Bible with the commentators because his teacher had the only copy. The day after I returned home my thoughts turned to him and his request; it was the day of his twelfth birthday!

There are so many more experiences I long to share: The religious Jew whom we visited had a room filled with a Bible open to Exodus 12 (from which he was preparing to teach a class), a masecet of talmud, a tzedakah box made from an Israeli coffee can. A former prisoner, his wife, and son gave us a three-hour living lesson of the reality of Soviet Jewry. I saw the delight of a great grandmother when we brought pictures of her great grandchildren in the United States. And still the storehouse of experiences is not exhausted. Our presence brought them a reconfirmation that we know and care, that they are not forgotten. Our visit gave me far more than I gave them.

Judith A. Brewster





"Don't be afraid to make things worse for us. Our situation is so bad that it can't become worse."

So wrote Alla Praisman's mother in November 1982, pleading with supporters to continue their efforts to secure freedom for Refuseniks, Jews who are persecuted by Soviet authorities and denied permission to emigrate. Those efforts paid off. Today, Praisman, her husband Leonid, their six-year-old son Pavel, and Alla's mother, Berta Shakhovskaya, a Holocaust survivor, are free, having emigrated to Israel this past July.

Alla Praisman visited Cincinnati October 24-27, under the auspices of CCSJ. Praising the efforts of the CCSJ, Praisman emphasized, "Cincinnati tourists are among the best prepared and most thoroughly briefed tourists who visit Soviet Refuseniks. It is vital that the Cincinnati Council's work continue and receive the community's support."

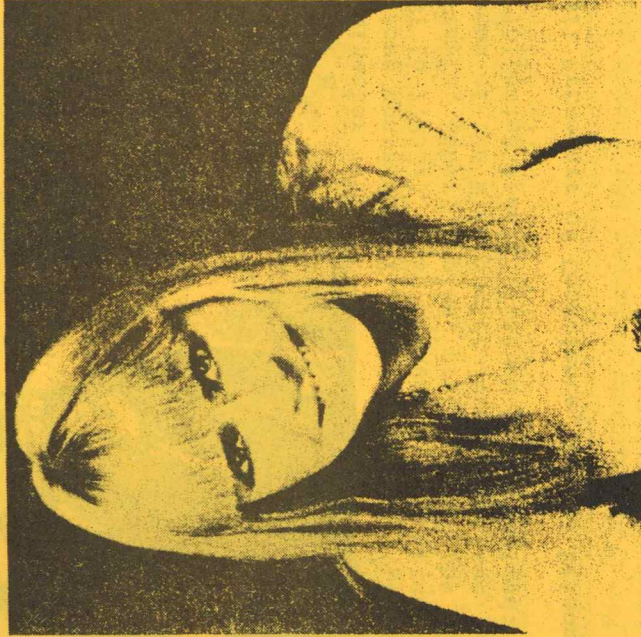
Particularly moving was Praisman's account of the Jewish kindergarten organized and run by parents in their homes in Moscow, a program in which she was very active. Always fearful of being discovered by the KGB, the classes had to move from home to home to escape detection. The children and teachers had to endure intrusions by the KGB, KGB interrogation of neighbors, and other forms of surveillance and intimidation. Children as young as five or six joked to one another about the KGB in an obvious attempt to mask their fears.

"Alla Praisman is a truly remarkable individual," observed Rev. C. David Misicka, Director of the Wesley Foundation at the University of Cincinnati. Misicka and Rabbi Abie Ingber of U.C.'s Hillel Jewish Student Center met Praisman last March during a trip to the Soviet Union sponsored by CCSJ. "When we visited Alla and her family we vowed not to forget them. To be reunited with her in Cincinnati, in freedom, was an answer to our prayers," Rev. Misicka continued.

Praisman and her family are now living in Jerusalem. Life there, she observed, bears little resemblance to the hardships her family endured in the Soviet Union. Trained as an agronomist and biologist, Praisman never was able to work in those professions in the Soviet Union. Soviet authorities blacklisted her because the family had submitted their emigration request. Instead, she worked as a municipal gardener in Moscow. Her husband, a historian and teacher, lost his job after applying for a visa and worked as a night watchman.

Praisman's Cincinnati appearances included Hebrew Union College, the Hillel Jewish Student Center, Clifton United Methodist Church, and the Reform Jewish High School.

K.K. BENE ISRAEL/ROCKDALE TEMPLE Presents MARY TRAVERS IN CONCERT



"The Plight of Soviet Jews"

A musical program featuring the renowned folksinger's reflections on her visit to the Soviet Union and the themes of freedom and human rights.

Saturday, January 25, 1986, 8 p.m.
Rockdale Temple
Ridge Road and Cross County Highway

Tickets available at the door or call
Rockdale Temple office - 891-9900.

\$10.00 per person
\$7.50 senior citizens
\$5.00 students

Proceeds to benefit K.K. Bene Israel/Rockdale Temple and the
Cincinnati Council for Soviet Jews

*This evening is dedicated to the family of Zachar Zunshain,
Rockdale Temple's adopted Soviet refusenik family,
and all other Soviet refuseniks and prisoners of conscience.*

In August, 1985, the Soviet Jewry Committee of the Isaac M. Wise Temple and the CCSJ decided to co-sponsor a petition urging President Reagan to raise the issue of the plight of Soviet Jewry with Soviet leader Gorbachev at their November summit in Geneva. A petition was drafted and other congregations and Jewish Organizations were invited to join in circulating the petitions for signature. Congressman Gradison was contacted and he agreed to accept the petitions and to deliver them to the White House, prior to this historic summit.

The petitions were circulated during September and early October. On October 18, a press conference was held in the Congressman's Cincinnati office where Rabbi Alan Fuchs of the Isaac M. Wise Temple and Sandra Spinner, Director of the CCSJ, presented the petitions containing 2,778 signatures. (Later, additional signatures came in, bringing the final total to 2,953.) Also present at the ceremony were: Richard Snyder, president of the Isaac M. Wise Temple, Robert Kaplan, president of the CCSJ, and Paul Ostand, vice-president of CCSJ and chairman of the Wise Soviet Jewry Committee.

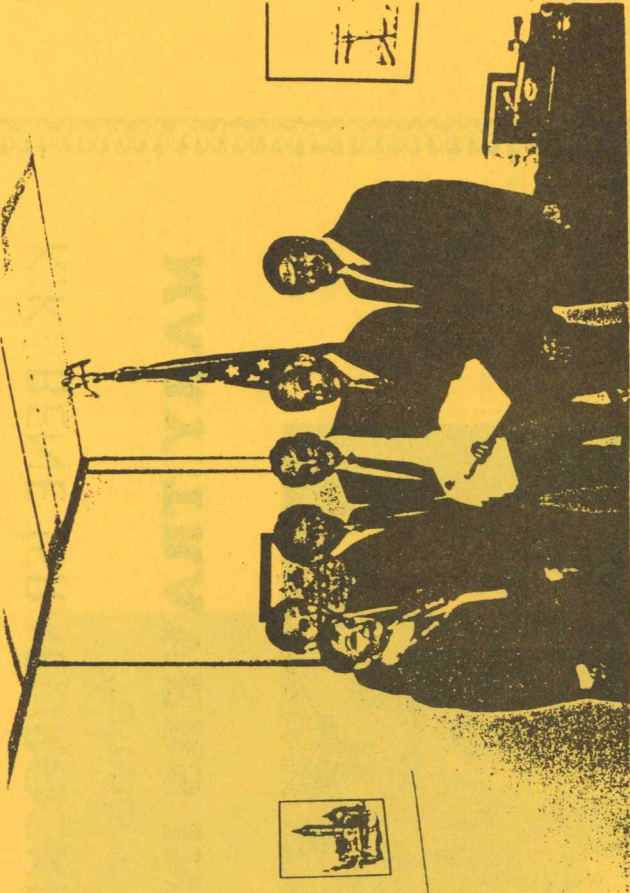
The petition asked that the following specific issues be emphasized:

- 1) The prompt release of all Prisoners of Conscience, former Prisoners of Conscience and their families.
- 2) An immediate end to the harassment, threats, and arrests of Hebrew teachers and Refuseniks and the expeditious emigration of all those who have expressed the desire to leave the Soviet Union.
- 3) To allow those Jews who desire to remain in the Soviet Union or who are awaiting permission to emigrate, to be able to study and express their religious and cultural heritage, free from persecution and intimidation.
- 4) To afford all Jews the right to work at a decent job without fear of termination of employment or demotion because of religious beliefs.
- 5) An end to the publications and distribution of antisemitic propaganda in all media.

In accepting the petition, Congressman Gradison spoke of the historic antisemitism in the USSR and of his personal involvement which included a trip during which he visited refuseniks. On November 5, he delivered the petitions to the White House where they were accepted, on behalf of President Reagan, by Alan Kranowitz, Deputy Assistant to the President for Legislative Affairs.

Mr. Kranowitz told Gradison in a letter, "Please assure your constituents that the President will personally speak with General Secretary Gorbachev about human rights in general, and, in particular, he will raise the plight of Soviet Jews. Please also let your constituents know that the President is personally committed to seeking a resolution of the tragic human rights problems that affect so many Soviet citizens."

The petition was circulated by the following organizations: Wise Temple, CCSJ, Adath Israel, Big Brothers & Big Sisters Association of Cincinnati, B'nai B'rith B'yachad Singles Group, B'nai B'rith Cohen-Shalom Lodge, Bureau of Jewish Education, Council of Presidents of Women Organizations, Glen Manor Home for the Aged, Hadassah-Cincinnati Chapter, Hillel Jewish Student Center, National Council of Jewish Women, Northern Hills Synagogue, Pioneer Women, Rockdale Temple, Temple Beth Shalom (Middleton, OH), Temple Sholom (Cincinnati, OH), Temple Sholom (Galesburg, Ill), and Womens American ORT, Cincinnati Region.



DR. LEONID VOLVOVSKY of Gorky was given a 3 year sentence to a labor camp following a trial in late October. He was found guilty of "anti-Soviet slander" based on evidence such as having anti-Soviet conversations with other Jews, circulating the book Exodus, writing pleas to Brezhnev 10 years ago, and possessing letters and books in a non-Russian language. At his trial, Volvovsky spoke Hebrew and answered only to his Hebrew name, explaining his acquisition of official Israeli citizenship and renouncement of his Soviet citizenship.

For the 43 year old mathematician/computer scientist, this sentencing was just a culmination of 11 years of constant torment by the government. The Soviet state brought about his immediate dismissal from his research post after he applied to emigrate in 1974. In subsequent years, there was a short jailing, interrogations, telephone and mail interruptions, and numerous raids of his apartment to confiscate books, records, and tapes. In 1980, Leonid's landlady was pressured to evict him, at which time he lost his privilege to live in Moscow. This was designed to isolate his family from friends and to remove his influence upon others.

While laboring as a refuse collector and hospital electrician to support his wife and daughter, Volvovsky taught himself Hebrew and Jewish culture. He passed his new knowledge to 30-40 students during picnics he would organize to celebrate Jewish festivals. Volvovsky was an activist in pressing for legalization of the practice of Jewish life.

In a letter written before the trial, his wife Ludmilla summarized their unjust treatment and the anti-Semitism prevalent in Gorky. She concludes, "I know that my husband is innocent, and those who took him know that too. I appeal to the Jews outside the USSR to help our family to save Leonid from unjust reprisals".

Write to Ludmilla at Krilova 14A/115, Gorky RSFSR, USSR

ROALD (ALEC) ZELICHENOK, a Leningrad refusenik, has served the first 5 months of a 3 yr. prison term for "fabrications defaming the Soviet state and the socialist system". The evidence presented at his trial were his correspondences with Western diplomats concerning Raoul Wallenberg. The 49 year old engineer had been a teacher of Hebrew.

In prison, Alec has developed serious kidney and blood pressure problems, but despite poor health, he is being transferred to another labor camp in Siberia. His wife Galina, an invalid, is appealing to have him taken to a settlement camp instead, where she could join him. She wrote in October, "I ask you to prevent the murder of my husband. I ask you to demand that the Soviet authorities provide my husband with the necessary medical treatment. I ask you to send official Red Cross representatives to visit my husband."

Write to Galina c/o Nab. Karpovky, 19/56 Leningrad 197022 RSFSR

Also in Leningrad, ALBERT BURSHEIN was arrested by the local militia in early November. It was known that he planned to begin a work strike the next morning, to dramatize his loss of hope to be granted an exit visa for Israel. Albert's parents were told by the authorities that the arrest was connected with his desire to emigrate, even though this is not illegal according to Soviet law. In an appeal to the Mayor of Leningrad, the Burshtein family is demanding the immediate release of their son, punishment for those responsible, and permission to hold a public demonstration. Albert remains incommunicado at an undisclosed location.

YAAKOV LEVIN, a 26 year old watchmaker and Hebrew teacher from Odessa, has served one year of a three year prison term for anti-Soviet activity. The incriminating evidence was a Jewish calendar and a prayer book. During his pre-trial interrogations, the KGB threatened to have Yaakov's fiancée raped by criminals in his presence, if he did not inform on other refuseniks. Yaakov and his fiancée were married in prison last June after two prior refusals before the trial. However, Judith has been denied subsequent visits. Yaakov works as a sewing machine operator and is suffering from a skin disease. He was placed in solitary confinement for two weeks last July for refusing to cut his hair. Shortly thereafter, he learned of his father's death. In Cincinnati, Julie Schwartz, a fifth year HUC student, dedicated her Senior Sermon to Yaakov in November.

HUC TWINNINGS WITH SOVIET HEBREW TEACHERS

Each student in Hebrew Union College's ordination class of 1986 has elected to dedicate his or her Shabbat service to a Hebrew teacher in the Soviet Union who has suffered the consequences of his convictions. The list of teachers has been provided by CCSJ. Bradd Boxman, a member of our Council and himself a senior at HUC, proposed the project and wrote a special prayer for the teachers, which is used in the services.

Below is a partial list of the senior students and the activists with whom they have been twinned:

Jonathan Rubenstein	Iosif Begun
Cliff Librach	Alec Zelichonek (See page 7)
Steve Hart	Yuli Edelshtein
David Meyer	Alexander Kholmiansky
Steven Ballaban	Evgeny Koifman
Julie Schwartz	Yaakov Levin (See page 7)
Margaret Meyer	Judith Nepomniashchy
Louis Lander	Mark Nepomniashchy
David Freedman	Ilya Essas

PRESIDENT REAGAN HEARS FROM LOCAL TWIN

A recent Bar Mitzvah, David Shriberg, wrote to Pres. Reagan, U.S. Senators Glenn & Metzenbaum, Congressmen Luken & Gradison, and to Soviet ambassador Dobrynin, in behalf of 13 year old Bagrat Prober and his family in Odessa. The Probers have tried unsuccessfully four times in the last 10 years to apply for an exit visa. David's letter to the President was hand delivered by Councilman Ken Blackwell during Mr. Reagan's last visit to Cincinnati.

The B'nai Torah class of Temple Sholom has adopted Michael Oshtrach, a refusenik in Sverdlovsk, USSR. Michael, a 29 year old bio-researchist, never formally celebrated his Bar Mitzvah at the usual age of thirteen. Thus, as the seven members of Temple Sholom celebrate their B'nai Mitzvah, or adult Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrations, Michael will be honored in absentia.

The Cincinnati Council for Soviet Jews, in conjunction with Women's American ORT is pleased to announce that 54 Bar/Bat Mitzvah twinnings were arranged with our cooperation during 1985. The following celebrants were twinned during the period September-December 1985:

ADATH ISRAEL	NORTHERN HILLS	ROCKDALE
Michelle Newman	Frank Cohen	Marnie Abrams
Jaime Willis	Melissa Gelbart	Jennifer Acherman
	Jonathan Horwitz	Lee Bass
	Todd Horwitz	Sheryl Leitman
	Jeremy Lehrer	
TEMPLE SHOLOM	VALLEY	WISE
Tamara Perlmutter	Sean Wagner	Elizabeth Wolf
Paul Schwartz		
Robb Schwartz		
David Shriberg		
Amy Willis		

IN THE SOVIET UNION, ANTISEMITISM IS ILLEGAL, ANTI-ZIONISM, HOWEVER, IS LEGAL

In order to hide their antisemitism, Soviet officials use the word "Zionist" when they mean Jew. On October 21, 1973, the Soviet ambassador to the United Nations, Yakov Malik, declared: "The Zionists have come forward with the theory of the Chosen People, an absurd ideology." This is a typical example of antisemitism masquerading as anti-Zionism. An attack of Jewish chosenness is not an attack of Zionism: chosenness plays no role in Zionism. It is a basic doctrine of Judaism.

Today there is an intensive "anti-Zionist" campaign going on in the Soviet Press, on Soviet television and radio. On November 12, 1984, a program was aired on Leningrad television called "Hirelings and Accomplices." The program was an attempt to depict Zionism as a campaign in which the imperialists, the United States and Israel, are "conducting in the framework of its global psychological war against the Communist system." It also depicts Zionists as "hunters of souls," who lure out of the USSR "citizens of Jewish nationality."

An excerpt from the program: "'Jews, come to Israel!' - goes the chant of the Zionist propaganda, 'The Promised Land of your forefathers is waiting for you!' The American Administration does not hide the fact that a strong Israel would correspond with the United States' own interests. Urging Tel Aviv on to new military conquests, Washington is turning Israel into its obedient gendarme in the Middle East. After all, the crimes of the Zionists serve first of all, to broaden and strengthen American interests in that region."

Another excerpt shows the pattern used throughout the program: the first statement is true followed by halftruth, then a distortion and ends with a lie. "Israel needs new human resources and additional working hands for yet another purpose: for saving the chronically ill economy of the Zionist state and for developing its industry, oriented primarily towards arms production. The rate of Israeli inflation has reached a world record, but the state spends more than 50 percent of its budget on military needs. Frenzied militarization, hardly oriented to defense. The task of the military is to wage wars against Arab states. For conquering new territories and for genocide against their population, Israel also needs people, soldiers, cannon fodder. World aliyah has to provide these too."

Here are two examples of the over thirty articles and broadcasts that have been published or aired recently. First, the article "Under the Mask of Humanism" (Sovietskaya Moldaviya & Kommunist Tadzhikistana, 18 Sept.) was also published under the heading "Zionism As It Is." It tells how the "Mossad" organized Operation "Moses" and how "emissaries of Tel Aviv and Zionist organizations, sent to the Sudan, subjected the falashas, who were in that country in order to be saved from the drought, to intensive 'brain-washing'."

A second article "The Smoke Screen of the 'Eichmann Case'" (Sovietskaya Rossiya, 19 Sept.) asserts that the "Zionist organizations do not at all expose or search for Nazis and do not demand trials for them." And the removal of Eichmann from Argentina "was really...a daring operation. But its real importance lay first of all in raising the authority of the Israeli intelligence services, whose reputation had been damaged by a series of failures..., and, of course, to get rid of a witness to the connections which lasted for many years between fascist Germany and the leadership of international Zionism."

This campaign put on by the Soviets is another knot in the rope to isolate Jews living in the Soviet Union; an isolation not only from fellow citizens within the Soviet Union, but an isolation from those of us in the West.

WE CANNOT LET THAT HAPPEN!

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE

If you have not yet made your 1985 tax-deductible membership contribution, please do so today along with the tear-off below.

I/We want to continue the fight to secure freedom for Soviet Jews.
Enclosed is my/our tax-deductible contribution of

() \$100 () \$50 () \$25 () Other

Please make checks payable to CCSJ and return to: CCSJ, 2615 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio 45220.

Name _____

Address _____ City _____ Zip _____

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