

soviet jewry report

Cincinnati Council for Soviet Jews



MONTTHLY MEETINGS

Spring 1986

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.



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PURIM IN LENINGRAD

A taxi brought us from our hotel to the Leningrad Synagogue. It is an imposing building surrounded by a large gate. Most of the time, Jews remain behind that gate, for the building is owned by the state, and the rabbi is a state appointee. Some of the refuseniks we met prefer to worship in private.

By the time we reached the synagogue people were already milling about. There were old Jews, there were young Jews; few in between. All spoke in whispers. Finally, the doors to the sanctuary opened. We entered and beheld a strange sight: television lights and cameras set up around the room. One could hear the buzz of conversation grow louder as people sought to understand what was going on. "It's for the United Nations," one person explained, "the authorities need to prove that religion is freely practiced here." A few Jews stood up and walked out.

The service began. Many people lacked prayer books, most seemed unable to follow. The cantor and choir sounded strangely surreal -- was this really Leningrad, or was I back in St. Petersburg, before 1917? Suddenly, the television lights went on. Immediately, young people sitting up front in the synagogue moved back: they wanted no part of this. When the cameras and lights were turned around to catch the crowd, many people simply left or went upstairs to the women's gallery. Later, when the cameras departed, they would return.

"Excuse me, can you read the Megillah," a voice next to me whispered. I looked up from the text of the Book of Esther to behold an earnest, boyish looking twenty-year old, whom I later learned was one of the leading Jewish religious activists in the city. "This is not a kosher Megillah reading," he explained, eyeing the television lights, and he wondered whether Benny Kraut and I would step into the back room and lead a service there. I was not adequately prepared to read from the scroll, but Benny promised to correct me (he had one of the few printed texts in the whole synagogue), and the hungry eyes of the young people around me encouraged me to plunge ahead. I began with the traditional blessing recalling God's miraculous intervention on Israel's behalf. Next I recited the Shehecheyanu. My eyes clouded over. Then I chanted aloud the story of Haman and Mordechai and Esther, but somehow my mind was not so much on them, as on their modern counterparts all around me. Was I the only one who saw a double meaning in the text? Was I merely imagining that I heard a special fervor in the stomping that followed the reading of the name "Haman?"

Of this much I am certain: there was intense fervor at the climax of the Megillah. Led by Benny, all cried aloud in unison: "The Jews enjoyed light and gladness, happiness and honor" (Esther 8:16). I could almost hear myself whispering under my breath, "so may it be in our day."

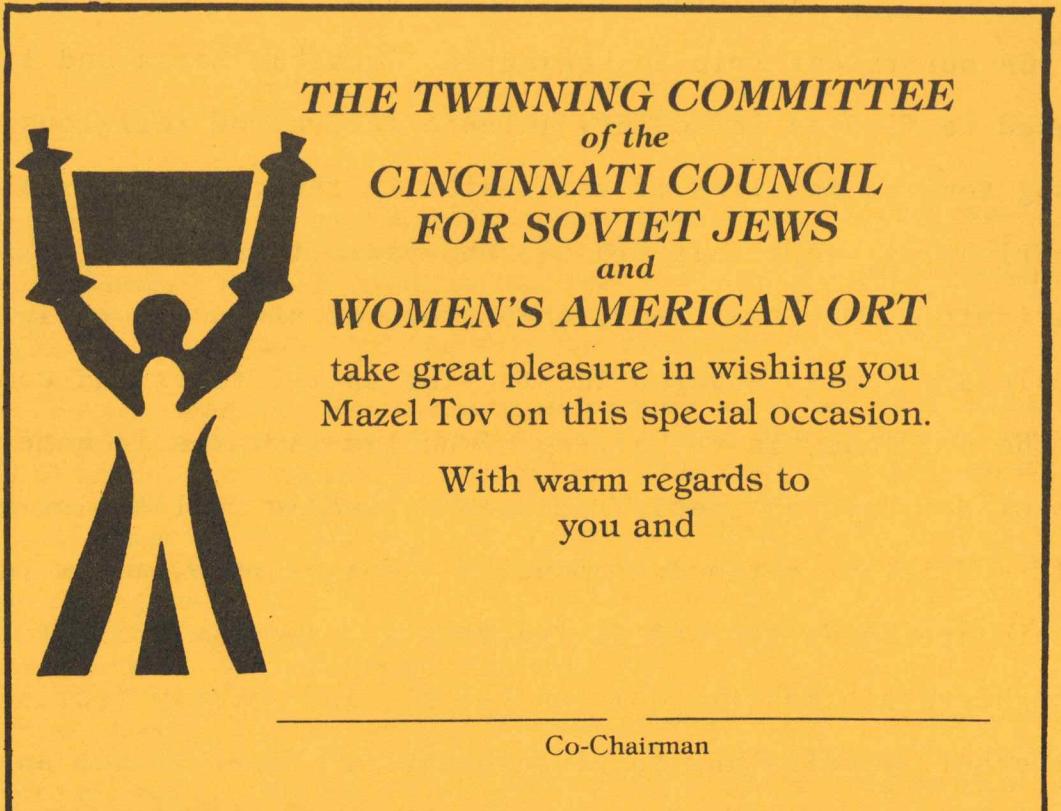
-- Jonathan D. Sarna

RELIGIOUS REVIVAL IN LENINGRAD

On our recent trip to Leningrad, Jonathan Sarna and I were amazed to find an incredibly intense revival of religious life among tens of families of refuseniks in the city. Nominally led by Grisha, a man in his mid-30s who seems to serve as a kind of charismatic spiritual head, this group of staunchly religious people are busily engaged in studying sacred texts and commentaries in the original, in the giving of public lectures in homes on the eve of holidays or special occasions, and in replicating a fully self-sufficient orthodox community. For example, a few young people are being trained to function as shochtim (ritual slaughterers), mohelim (circumcisers), and soferim (scribes to write holy scrolls and legal documents). There exists an ongoing Talmud group consisting of the five or so leaders of the movement, each of whom wears his tzitzit (fringes) over his pants rather than hidden beneath his clothes. Moreover, all three of the religious refuseniks whose homes we entered responded unanimously to our question of what they need: books, books, and more books. Torah and Talmudic commentaries, a Steinsaltz Talmud, Jastrow dictionary, the writings of the Maharal of Prague were among the items requested. Some told us they even received religious books through the mail - strange, but true, and they encouraged us to have such items shipped.

The heroism and undaunted courage of people like Boris, Sasha, Grisha, Alex, Sarah, Hana is something to behold. Clearly all want to leave the Soviet Union; just as clearly, if that is not possible, they are preparing for the long range, with a vision of living a fully observant religious Jewish life, which they seek to share with fellow Jews, even within the Soviet Union.

--Benny Kraut



TWINNINGS

The Cincinnati Council for Soviet Jews, in conjunction with Women's American ORT, is pleased to announce the following Bar/Bat Mitzvah Twinnings for the period January-June 1986:

Wise

Marc Amazon
Reid Elkus
Todd Getz
Adam Levin
David Michaelson
Jamie Schwartz

Shulom

Eric Greenwald
Jeffrey Levinson
Michelle Marcoe
Amy Weitzman
Aaron Yonka

Galesburg, Illinois

Lisa Mandel

Rockdale

Amy Allee
Rachel Basofin
Pamela Fox
Debra Katz
Kerri Korkin
Amy Ringel
Scott Rubenstein
Scott Wouters

Northern Hills

Andrea Karlsberg

Roanoke, Virginia

Jennifer Novack

Agudas Israel

Hope Kaplan
Adath Israel
Laura Baron
Amy Kurlansky
Miriam Zeifman

Beth Israel, Hamilton

Adam Morenberg

Huntington, West Virginia

Rachel Mayer

CCSJ TO SOVIETS:

"CLEAN UP YOUR ACT!"

The Cincinnati Council for Soviet Jews has embarked on an action campaign to publicize the plight of Soviet prisoner of conscience Zachar Zunshain. Zunshain's wife, Tatiana, has communicated that he is being forced to live and work in a unit with prisoners suffering from tuberculosis. Despite being exposed to active tuberculosis carriers, Zunshain has been prohibited access to soap for washing his hands. The Council for Soviet Jews has obtained approximately 700 hotel-size bars of soap and has organized a mass mailing of them to Zunshain at his prison camp in Irkutsk. Tatiana has been advised of our efforts and has communicated her thanks.

The Zunshains first applied for permission to emigrate in 1980. Zachar has been imprisoned since 1984 for "anti-Soviet slander" because he publicly demonstrated for the right to emigrate. Since his arrest, Tatiana has been under constant surveillance by the KGB, and her contact with the west has been virtually cut off. The Soviet Committee of States Security is exerting enormous pressure to have Tatiana fired from her current job, intending to find her work that will occupy more of her time and pay her a lower salary. This, the Soviet authorities believe, will interfere with her ability to engage in activities seeking her husband's release.

CCSJ also has learned that Zachar was reported to be suffering from hepatitis. The prison physician informed Tatiana that Zachar was infected by the use of a dirty needle. Shortly after so informing her, this doctor was fired. CCSJ's sources also report that the authorities have let other prisoners know that Zachar is "free game" and that anything they do to him will be acceptable.

Rockdale Temple has adopted the Zunshains as part of CCSJ's adopt-a-family program. Rockdale, through the efforts of its social action committee and Miriam Medow, already has participated in the CCSJ-sponsored campaign on the Zunshains' behalf. Members of Rockdale's congregation and religious school have committed to sending several hundred bars of soap.

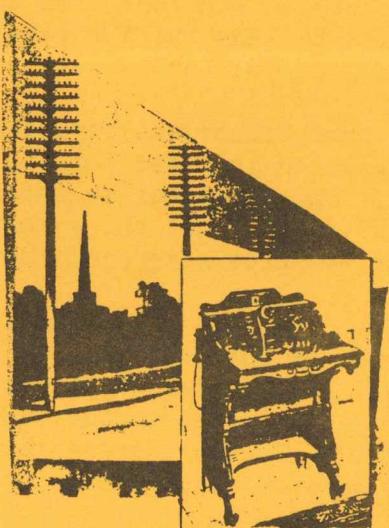
The No-Name Club of Adath Israel Synagogue, Wise Temple, Hebrew Union College, Hillel, and Anderson Hills United Methodist Church are among other participating groups. If you are interested in participating in the soap sending campaign, please contact the CCSJ office at 221-7134. The Council will provide envelopes pre-addressed to Zunshain and the bars of soap and requests a tax-deductible contribution of \$1.50 for each bar to cover postage.

The Cincinnati Council for Soviet Jews thanks all participants during the past year in our Emergency Telegram Bank. The program assures prompt and unified communication to Soviet officials to protest harsh treatment of Soviet Jews. Because of your support, we have been able to respond effectively when Soviet Jews have been arrested, harrassed, threatened, and beaten. We seek your continued participation and want to inform you of a modification of the Telegram Bank. We want to make our system as easy and efficient as possible -- both for you and for us. If you have not participated in the past, we ask that you sign up now.

The changes are designed to eliminate the confusion many of us experienced this past year as a result of the billing system utilized by Graphnet, the communications network we use. Under the new arrangement, Graphnet will bill the Council directly, and we will take care of payment. Our research indicates that Graphnet's rates are among the lowest, at 23-1/2 cents per word. The average telegram, which includes address, message and signature, runs between \$10-\$15. You will not be billed by Graphnet and will incur no additional expense. All you have to do is send your once-a-year tax-deductible check now to Cincinnati Council for Soviet Jews.

Please take a moment to fill out the information sheet below and return it with your check. This will enable us to verify the number of telegrams you wish to authorize in your name for one year. You will receive notification when we send your telegram, along with a copy of the text.

Thank you!



I authorize the number of mailgrams checked below to be sent in my name in periods of emergency for Jews in the Soviet Union.

\$10 \$20 \$30 \$40
 1 mailgram 2 mailgrams 3 mailgrams 4 mailgrams

Enclosed is my tax-deductible check for \$. Make check payable to:
CCSJ Emergency Telegram Bank. Return to CCSJ, 2615 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, Ohio
45220.

Name _____ Telephone _____
Address _____ City _____



FLOWERS FOR NADEZHDA

Bouquets to CCSJ Director Sandy Spinner. It was Sandy's idea to have the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews mark International Women's Day by presenting flowers to Nadezhda Fradkova. In the Soviet Union, this day is an important occasion on which mothers and wives receive flowers.

Nadezhda Fradkova, a Prisoner of Conscience, is the only Jewish woman prisoner at this time. She is serving a two-year sentence in a labor camp near the Arctic Circle. By profession a mathematical linguist, Nadezhda suffers punishment for her desire to live in Israel. She is a victim of psychiatric abuse who was arrested for "parasitism," that is, being unemployed, after forcible incarceration in psychiatric hospitals. Nadezhda, however, has no spouse or other relatives to visit her, complain to authorities about her treatment, or enlist support for her from friends in the West.

Thirty bouquets of flowers were delivered to the Soviet Embassy in Washington on International Women's Day to remind the Soviet government that Nadezhda has friends who have not forgotten her. Annette Lantos, chairwoman of the Congressional Spouses Committee of 21, led the delegation to present the flowers. Embassy officials refused the flowers. (Kathryn Porter finally persuaded a woman leaving the Embassy to accept one bunch of flowers "as one woman to another.") The remaining flowers were delivered to the Washington Hospital for Sick Children and the Bethany House for Homeless Women.

The flowers serve as a reminder to Soviet officials that Nadezhda's friends will neither forget nor abandon her.



A CHILD IN REFUSAL

A Child in Refusal is a small book of memories of several mothers living in the Soviet Union who are determined to teach their children Hebrew, Jewish customs and traditions. It is a book that talks of determination and dedication in avoiding the KGB so that pre-school children could have a positive Jewish identity. The children give us glimpses of how they see refusenik life as a practicing Jew; in many cases a humorous look at the grim details.

The Jewish Kindergarten, organized in 1977 in Moscow, began with ten children studying Hebrew, mathematics, Russian language, drawing, and singing. Since its inception, the mothers and children have been harrassed by the KGB and tormented by non-Jewish Soviets. The mothers "attempted to conduct lessons regularly but lacked the skill, the means and the knowledge." But their perseverance and dedication drove them beyond these obstacles and the kindergarten still thrives.

Today, we in Cincinnati are trying to support this Jewish Kindergarten by providing materials for the mothers to use. When Alla Praisman was in Cincinnati last October, she shared with us the many stories about the children and the experiences they had. Alla was instrumental in the continuation of the kindergarten while she was in Moscow. When she made aliyah to Israel she aided in the translation of A Child in Refusal.

It is obvious that being a refusenik affects both adult and child. But in both cases, neither gives up hope of someday going home to Israel. As seven year old Dina Yoffe says: that if the bluebird flies from one country to another and brings happiness with him, then "I know that most of all he lives in Eretz Yisrael, as truly, the very happiest people live there."



UPDATES ON PROMINENT REFUSENIK CASES

A serious accident has befallen YULI EDELSSTEIN while serving a 3 year sentence in a slave labor camp in the town of Ulan-Ude. The former Moscow Hebrew teacher suffered a broken thigh in February after falling from a height during a tree-cutting operation. Without surgery, physical therapy, and proper diet, Yuli could become a permanent invalid. Neither his mother nor his wife have been permitted to stay with him. Friends of EDELSSTEIN wrote an appeal to demand his early release from imprisonment, which has been filled with beatings for trying to remain an observant Jew.

VLADIMIR LIFSHITZ of Leningrad became the first Jew to be arrested in the Soviet Union following the Geneva Summit talks. He was convicted of "defaming the Soviet state and social system" in a March trial, although he engaged in nothing besides making written protests and appeals when his son was rejected from the university and when Hebrew teachers were being prosecuted. Before his trial, LIFSHITZ was beaten by inmates of the prison, and required lengthy hospitalization. Some 130 U.S. Congressmen have written to Premier Gorbachev to ask for clemency in this case.

The 18-month sentence served by ALEXANDER KHOLMIANSKY expired in February, and he was released to his family in Moscow. The 34 year old computer engineer and Hebrew teacher had been arrested for possession of a revolver which was planted in his apartment. Our newsletter reported last summer that KHOLMIANSKY was awarded an honorary doctorate of Hebrew Letters in absentia by Hebrew Union College.

Also in February, NAHUM MEIMAN appealed to Soviet officials to allow his 53 year old wife Inna to be treated abroad for inoperable cancer. Oncological centers in the U.S., Israel, France, and Sweden have accepted her for cancer therapy not available in the USSR. Nahum has been a refusenik since 1979, when authorities denied his request to emigrate because he had performed classified mathematical calculations over 30 years ago. He had been a member of the Helsinki Monitoring Group and worked with Andrei Sakharov in human rights activities. The Soviet chief of the Visa office has classified his wife as a security risk and so far refuses to let her depart.



Vladimir Lifschitz
Systems analyst/mathematician from Leningrad

PRISONER OF ZION

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE

If you have not yet made your 1986 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 _____

THANKS THANKS THANKS THANKS THANKS THANKS THANKS THANKS THANKS



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