

- A HANUKAH LETTER FROM MOSCOW -

For Parents and Teachers

Introduction

This information and activity booklet is intended to introduce young children to the idea that Jewish people in the Soviet Union are not free either to express themselves Jewishly or to emigrate to other countries. This booklet was developed in order to achieve the following goals:

- (1) To introduce children to the idea that the Soviet Union is a large country with much beauty but misguided policies regarding human rights.
- (2) To encourage children to learn more about the Jews of the Soviet Union and the Refuseniks.
- (3) That Refuseniks are people of all ages to whom the child can relate.
- (4) To serve as supplemental material if students have been learning about the Jews of the Soviet Union.

Teachers may want to use this material in conjunction with a speaker from the Soviet Union. Parents may wish to follow up with adopting a Soviet Jewish family and writing letters.

Background Information

Approximately two million Jews live in the Soviet Union today. Of this number some 380,000 Jews have requested affidavits from Israel which is the first step in the emigration process. Jews who have been refused permission to leave are known as "Refuseniks." There are about 15,000 Refuseniks today. Some 1,200 have been in refusal for over 10 years. Thousands of applications have not been processed. Except for a few underground schools in larger cities there are virtually no formal means for Jews to learn about their religion and culture.

Once a family formally requests an exit visa it is not uncommon for them to find their mail and phone service discontinued, to be fired or demoted at work, and to have their children harassed in school. In some cases family members are threatened, beaten or even imprisoned.

The main Jewish population areas are Moscow (285,000) Leningrad (165,000) Kiev (170,000) and other urban centers such as Odessa, Kharkov, Baku, Tashkent, Kishner, and Minsk.

While Soviet Jews are disproportionately represented in professions this situation is now changing dramatically.

According to the American Jewish Committee, from 1968 through February of 1986 265,822 Jews left the USSR. The peak year was 1979 when 51,320 Jews left. The recent "Glasnost" or openness policy of the U.S.S.R. has recently seen an increased number of emigrants but it is feared by many that this may turn out to be a propaganda effort which will close the gates on the remaining tens of thousands.

Through quotas and anti-semitic hiring policies professional job opportunities are shrinking and places at the most prestigious universities are restricted.

When a Soviet Jew applies for permission to emigrate months or years may elapse until permission is finally granted. The emigration process consists of numerous steps including the obtaining of permission from the applicants' parents regardless of the applicants' age, and permission from a divorced spouse is needed when children from that marriage are involved. Large sums of money is paid if an application is accepted including 500 rubles for each family member to leave.

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ACTIVITY IDEAS

These could be grouped as a special section at the end of the booklet.

Activity #1

Find the Soviet Union on the map. Color it in.

Activity #2

Unscramble the names of these cities in the Soviet Union.

Moscow Leningrad Odessa Kiev

(add Jewish population totals?)

Activity #3

Cut and paste. Cut out the picture of these places in the Soviet Union and paste or tape them on the city where they belong.

Great Synagogue of Moscow

Red Square

Leningrad Synagogue

Activity #4

MAZE : Help the Refuseniks arrive in Israel.

Activity #5

Word Search

x c b d a b c

f g x y z--

Soviet

Jewish

Israel

Kipah

Torah

United States

Moscow

Mezuzah

Hebrew

Activity #6

Send a Hanukkah Greeting Card to a Refusenik Family.
Cut out and use postage

Activity #7

Write a letter to the Soviet Consulate asking them to let the Refuseniks go free.

Dear Mr. _____

Date _____

My name is _____ and I am _____ years old.
I hope you will let the Jewish people who live in
the Soviet Union leave if they want to.

Sincerely,

Activity #8

Word Search: There are six names of Jewish holidays hidden in this puzzle. Help Masha find them all.

Activity #9

Crossword Puzzle

- Across: 1. _____ Union
2. In December we light a menorah at _____.
3. Before lighting a candle we say a _____.
- Down: 1. The girl in our story was named _____.
2. She lit eight _____.

Activity #10 - For Teacher or Participant

Questions to Discuss

1. Why do Masha's family want to leave the Soviet Union?
2. Why does Masha want to learn about Judaism?
3. How are the Refuseniks like the Maccabees?
4. How can we help the Refuseniks?
5. How can we learn more about the Jews of the USSR?

Records, Bibliography