

Soviet Jewry - Kit III: Holocaust & Israel

Contributed by: Enid L. Wurtman's Soviet Jewry Archives on the History of the Zionist Movement from the Soviet Union

Source I: Anne Frank

July 15, 1944

“It’s really a wonder that I haven’t dropped all my ideals because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet I keep them, because in spite of everything, I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can’t build my hopes on a foundation of confusion, misery and death... I think... peace and tranquillity will return again. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever approaching thunder that will destroy us too. I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too, will end and that peace and tranquility will return again. In the meantime, I must uphold my ideals, for perhaps a time will come when I will be able to carry them out.”

Source II: Natasha Korenfeld, Russian Immigrant to Israel. After her poem was published in the West during the 1950s, her family was finally granted permission to leave for Israel in 1976. Her dream of Israel and freedom is recounted here.

The Poem of My Land

At Passover there is matzah
In every Jewish home
There are in my Israel
Fortresses and palaces

There are schools and stadiums
Automobiles, homes...
This is my beloved country.

Matzah is what our forefathers ate
They were baked in the sun, in the hot desert,
They were going home, relieved from slavery

And a miracle happened
Moses went up the mountain
And brought down the Ten Commandments
For the People of Israel.

He accomplished his mission,
He brought his people home
But Moses did not live to see his native land.

Oh Israel! I promise you
That I shall come to you.
But not now. We have to wait until
God will hear our prayers.

".....As we had planned, we went to the synagogue on Rosh Hashanah. All of us - the men, women and children of the Israeli legation - dressed in our best clothes, as befitted Jews on a Jewish holiday. But the street in front of the synagogue had changed. Now it was filled with people, packed together like sardines, hundreds and hundreds of them, of all ages, including Red Army officers, soldiers, teenagers and babies, carried in their parents' arms. Instead of the 2,000 odd Jews who usually came to the synagogue on the holidays, a crowd of close to 50,000 people was waiting for us. For a minute I couldn't grasp what had happened - or even who they were. And then it dawned on me. They had come, these good, brave Jews - in order to be with us, to demonstrate their sense of kinship and to celebrate the establishment of the State of Israel. Within seconds they had surrounded me, almost lifting me bodily, almost crushing me, saying my name over and over again. Eventually they parted ranks and let me enter the synagogue, but there too, the demonstration went on. Every now and then, in the women's gallery, someone would come to me, touch my hand, stroke or even kiss my dress. Without speeches or parades, without any words at all really, the Jews of Moscow were proving their profound desire - and their need - to participate in the miracle of the establishment of the State of Israel, and I was the symbol of the State for them.

I couldn't talk, or smile, or wave my hand. I sat in that gallery like a stone, without moving, with those thousands of eyes fixed on me. For thirty years we and they had been separated. Now we were together again, and as I watched them, I knew that no threat, however awful, could possibly have stopped the ecstatic people I saw in the synagogue that day from telling us, in their own way what Israel meant to them. The service ended, and I got up to leave; but I could hardly walk. I felt as though I had been caught up in a torrent of love so strong that it had literally taken my breath away and slowed down my heart. I was on the verge of fainting, I think. But the crowd still surged around me, stretching out its hands and saying "Nasha Golda" (our Golda) and "Shalom, Shalom" and crying.

It was impossible for me to walk back to the hotel, so although there is an injunction against riding on the Sabbath or on Jewish holidays, someone pushed me into a cab. But the cab couldn't move either because the crowd of cheering, laughing, weeping Jews had engulfed it. I wanted to say something, anything to these people, to let them know that I begged their forgiveness for not having wanted to come to Moscow and for not knowing the strength of their ties to us. For having wondered, in fact whether there was still a link between them and us. But I couldn't find the words. All I could say was one sentence in Yiddish ... "A DANK EICH VOS IHR SEIT GEBLIEBEN YIDDEN" Thank you for having remained Jews."