

A Challenge To Congregations

**Model Programs In
Pittsburgh, San Francisco
Show How Synagogues Can
Integrate Soviet Emigres Into
Religious Life**



REACHING OUT: Rabbi Martin Weiner, right, helps a newly-arrived Soviet Jewish family read from the Torah in the sanctuary of San Francisco's Reform synagogue Sherith Israel. Looking on as young Eduard Chernyak uses a yad to point to the day's portion are his parents, Alex and Paulina. Sherith Israel's outreach program for Soviet emigres was singled out for effectiveness at the biennial convention of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, central body of Reform Judaism in the U.S. and Canada. Rabbi Alexander M. Schindler, president of UAHC, told the convention delegates that most congregations are not doing enough to bring arrivals from the U.S.S.R. "into our synagogues and homes."

In San Francisco, 41-year-old Mary Dubrovskaya, a Soviet emigre economist, walked into a chavurah (fellowship) meeting at Reform Congregation Sherith Israel two weeks after arriving from Kiev and learned for the first time what Shabbat, Passover and keeping kosher were all about.

In Pittsburgh, a newly-arrived Russian Jewish couple and their two children sat down in Rodef

Shalom Temple to be introduced* to a "mentor family" — American Jews who had accepted the responsibility of helping to integrate the emigres into Jewish communal and religious life.

These programs were described as "outstanding examples of effective outreach to Soviet immigrants" at the recent convention of the UAHC, central body of Reform Judaism in the U.S. and Canada. At a session addressed by Shoshana Cardin, chairman of the National Conference on Soviet Jewry, the two Reform synagogues were singled out for "remarkable success" in setting up model programs that can be replicated by other congregations across the country.

Marshalling Jewish Community Resources

At Sherith Israel, an historic structure that survived the devastating San Francisco earthquakes of 1906 and 1989, more than 100 Soviet Jewish emigres now regularly attend services. In Pittsburgh, some 60 Russian Jewish families have been integrated into synagogue life.

In each case, the Reform rabbis who helped organize the program point out that success was based on sound pre-planning and the recognition that, to be effective, an outreach program for Russian Jews cannot be carried out by an individual congregation but must involve the marshalling of a number of community institutions and resources.

Sherith Israel's Rabbi Martin Weiner credits the joint efforts of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Jewish Family and Children Service and the area's Jewish community centers for establishing a model program for welcoming new Jewish emigres. Among the special programs organized by Congregation Sherith Israel, in conjunction with the Jewish Family and Children's Service, is the chavurah or fellowship group, which meets regularly to study Jewish tradition, observe the holidays and view Jewish films. The congregation has also set up a special program for Soviet teenagers to introduce them to American Jewish life.

'A Passion For Jewish Learning'

Typical of the emigres who have come to depend on Temple Sherith Israel's chavurah as a lifeline to the Jewish community are Vladimir and Marina Gelman, who arrived in San Francisco a year and a half ago from Kiev. But something was missing. Although they joined other Russian families in community celebrations, they decided they needed more religion in their lives. For more than a decade before leaving Kiev, they had secretly studied Zionism and Jewish history.

Someone told them about a monthly chavurah group for Soviet emigres at Congregation Sherith Israel. At Friday night services, they joined some 50 other Russian-speaking Jews, enjoyed a Shab-

bat dinner and afterward learned a repertory of traditional songs. "It was exactly what we wanted, a sense of belonging to a community," Mr. Gelman said.

Since then, the Gelmans have been regular members of the chavurah and have brought relatives and friends to meetings, too. One of the most useful purposes served by the friendship meetings, according to Vladimir Gelman, is the opportunity for emigres to exchange experiences and to serve as a support group for each other.

Rabbi Martin Weiner of Sherith Israel, who played a key role in founding the chavurah, says he is "overwhelmed by the passion for Jewish learning that seems to inspire the recent new wave of emigres."

Unlike many of the Jews who came from the Soviet Union in the 1970's, the current arrivals "are eager to open themselves to Jewish life," he says.

Matching Up Families

The program for Soviet Jews in Pittsburgh, while markedly different from that in San Francisco, has been no less effective. Working with the Pittsburgh Jewish Family and Children's Service, as well as

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Waldheim Meets Arafat In Tunisia

VIENNA (JTA) — Austrian President Kurt Waldheim made a three-day visit to Tunisia recently, which included a meeting with Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasir Arafat.

Waldheim, accompanied by Foreign Minister Alois Mock and Austrian businessmen, also met with his Tunisian counterpart, President Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali.

According to the Austrian press agency APA, Waldheim used the occasion of that meeting to criticize Israel's "brutal suppression of the intifada."

He described Israel as the chief obstacle to peace in the Middle East.

Waldheim also met with the secretary-

general of the Arab League, Chedli Klibi.

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