

VISITS TO JEWISH POPULATION CENTERS AND SUMMER CAMPS

IN UKRAINE

July 14-30, 1997

Following is a report of a visit by the author to three Ukrainian cities (Kyiv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv) and five Jewish summer camps in Ukraine during the latter part of July 1997. The major purposes of the trip were (1) to speak with rabbis and others in the cities visited, and (2) to visit summer camps in Ukraine operated by Jewish religious groups and by the Jewish Agency for Israel (Sochnut).

The first section of this report includes reports on discussions in the three cities. Reflecting both the summer season (when many people are traveling) and the focus on Jewish camps, the agenda in the cities was less comprehensive than has been the case during previous visits. The second section of the report concentrates on summer camps.

Visits to Cities

Kyiv

1. Rabbi Yaakov D. Bleich, Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine, was present in Kyiv during my stay in the city. He had been out of the country since March, returning only periodically for a few brief visits since then. He is planning to return to the Ukrainian capital with his family during the latter part of August.

2. The **Ukrainian Jewish Congress** was a major focus of discussion with Rabbi Bleich (and with others). In an attempt to emulate the *Russian Jewish Congress*, the UJC had been established by Vadim Rabinovich in April 1997 at an assembly hastily called in Kyiv during the intermediate days of Pesach. Mr. Rabinovich had emigrated to Israel some time earlier, but continues to spend much of his time in Ukraine, where he is engaged in various business ventures. A wealthy man, Mr. Rabinovich underwrote the costs of the initial assembly and the attendance of many of its participants. The assembly was poorly organized and concluded in confusion and some rancor.

The Ukrainian Jewish Congress is widely perceived as deriving its political support from *Tsirei Chabad* (*Young Chabad*), the sponsor of Rabbi Moshe

Asman, the chief Chabad representative in Kyiv since 1996. The effective operational base of Tsirei Chabad is in Israel; its political philosophy is close to that of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is said to endorse its activity in Ukraine. Rabbi Iosif Aronov of Israel and Rabbi Yonah Prus, an American resident of England, are closely associated with Tsirei Chabad. Relations of many Chabad rabbis in Ukraine outside Kiev with Tsirei Chabad are tenuous.

Unlike organizers and leaders of the Russian Jewish Congress, Mr. Rabinovich declines to pledge specific amounts of personal funds to the Ukrainian Jewish Congress. He has suggested that his deputies, i.e., other wealthy Ukrainian Jewish businessmen, might contribute \$50,000 annually to the UJC, whereas “second-tier” donors to the Russian Jewish Congress contribute \$500,000 annually. Although the standards of wealth in Russia are higher than in Ukraine, the discrepancy between proposed obligations of Russian and Ukrainian Jewish benefactors to their respective national philanthropic organizations is extraordinary.

Rabbi Bleich and others are encouraging Mr. Rabinovich to endorse a second session of the Ukrainian Jewish Congress, to be held in November, with a well-planned and public agenda, fully legitimate delegates, and fair elections. Whether the Ukrainian Jewish Congress can become an effective organization remains to be seen. Nonetheless, the bold approach of Mr. Rabinovich, joined with his own financial resources and those of his colleagues, cannot be ignored.

3. The Ukrainian Jewish Congress is the third umbrella-type national Jewish organization to appear in Ukraine. The first two are: (1) the **Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine**, also known as the Ukrainian **Vaad**, which is associated with Rabbi Bleich and Iosif Zissels, and (2) the **Ukrainian Jewish Council**, associated with Ilya Levitas and Arkady Monastirsky. In 1996 and 1997, the leadership of the two organizations convened exploratory discussions about a potential merger. However, in mid-1997, Mr. Monastirsky broke from Mr. Levitas; the former has established a fourth national Jewish organization, the **Ukrainian Jewish Fund**.

4. The **Jewish Pedagogical Center of Ukraine**, established in 1993 by the Ukrainian Vaad, is undergoing a leadership transition. Professor Marten Feller, the director of the Center, is retiring from administrative responsibilities and will be replaced by Flora Shevelenko. Professor Feller will continue to be associated with the Center, but will focus on publications.¹ Reflecting both budgetary pressures and management overload, the Center is re-defining its mission.

¹ Professor Feller is editor of a forthcoming multi-volume encyclopedia on Ukrainian Jewry.

5. Rabbi Bleich discussed several factors related to enrollment at **Ukrainian Jewish schools** in general and at the Kyiv day school (**Gymnasium 298**) sponsored by his movement, the Karliner-Stoliner hasidim. In general, enrollment patterns reflect the considerable Jewish emigration from Ukraine that has occurred in recent years. The number of Jewish Sunday schools has decreased significantly.²

Gymnasium 298 enrolled 613 pupils at the beginning of the 1996-1997 school year. By the end of the school year, 96 of these youngsters had emigrated from Ukraine. Fifty-six pupils went to Israel (some with families and some alone on high school in Israel programs), 27 to the United States, six to Germany, four to Canada, two to England, and one to Australia. Rabbi Bleich commented that a far greater proportion of Jews from the non-day school population went to Germany. The Kyiv school tries to arrange placement of its emigrating pupils in Jewish day schools in destination communities.

Of the 33 youngsters who graduated from School 298 high school in 1997, 17 went to Israel, almost all of them alone (without families). School 298 tries to direct them to religious-based Israeli educational institutions for absorption programs and post-secondary education. Three other graduates went to the United States, and one emigrated to Canada. The remaining 12 graduates are planning to stay in Kyiv, at least for the time being; most will enroll in local institutes and many will remain in contact with the Jewish community.

Of the 31 graduates in 1996, 12 went to Israel and four have settled in the United States. Fifteen remain in Kyiv.

Rabbi Bleich expects 1997-98 enrollment at School 298 to be comparable to that of 1996-97.

6. Shortly after he returns to Kyiv on a fulltime basis in mid- to late August, Rabbi Bleich hopes to convene a one-day “summit meeting” with other key rabbis from Ukraine and Russia to discuss approaches to potential donors for **day school food subsidies**. All of the day schools provide at least one free hot meal per day to all pupils and teachers; many schools provide two major meals and a snack, and at least one operates its dining hall throughout the weekend so that children from impoverished families will not go hungry between the close of

² As families emigrate, the Jewish population decreases and the potential Jewish enrollment pool shrinks. Many Jewish families appear to perceive Sunday schools mainly as preparatory programs for aliyah, perhaps reflecting to some degree the Israeli orientation of the majority of these schools. Most receive financial support and curriculum guidance from the Israel Fund for Culture and Education in the Diaspora, an Israeli government agency that promotes aliyah.

school on Friday afternoon and its reopening on Monday morning. The Ukrainian government no longer subsidizes school lunches.

Approximately 9,000 youngsters attend the 45 Jewish day schools in the post-Soviet successor states. For many families, the primary attraction of such schools is less the Jewish content of the curriculum than the nutritious school meals that are served to pupils, free bus transportation, and various features of the secular education component of such schools that have fallen victim to post-Soviet chaos in non-religious public schools, such as classes in English and computer use. Many of the Jewish day schools in the successor states are highly regarded for their secular studies.

7. Another matter that Rabbi Bleich intends to address after his return to Ukraine in August is the increasing activity of **Christian missionaries that target Jews**. He is aware of approaches by missionaries in a number of cities; some rabbis (for example, Rabbi Moishe Moskowitz in Kharkov and Rabbi Avrum Wolf in Kherson) have been able to enlist the support of municipal officials in deterring missionary work among Jews, but the missionaries are very persistent.

Publications will reach the largest number of people. Legal action may be appropriate on the grounds that missionaries are deceiving people when they offer various humanitarian services under false pretexts or try to persuade Jews that they can be both Christian and Jewish at the same time.

8. Rabbi Bleich said that he regards **International Solomon University** in Kyiv as a "good, non-Jewish university" in Kyiv, comparable to **Kiev-Pechersk National Mathematics Lycee**, a local school that affiliated with **ORT** in 1996, as a good, non-Jewish lycee. Although Rabbi Bleich finds various aspects of ISU objectionable, he acknowledges that the rector of ISU, who is emigrating, is an excellent administrator.

(International Solomon University was established in 1992 as a broadbased private university under Jewish auspices. Currently enrolling about 1,000 students, it offers curricula in humanities, Jewish studies, engineering, and other fields. The institution remains controversial among many observers of the Kyiv Jewish community because of its very high non-Jewish enrollment.

(Kyiv-Pechersk National Mathematics Lycee was established in 1961 as an elite public school specializing in mathematics. Although it apparently enrolls a substantial number of Jewish pupils, the proportion of Jewish registration could not be determined during a visit by the writer in March 1997. The Judaic content of its curriculum is minimal.)

Among the objections of Rabbi Bleich and others to ISU, Kyiv-Pechersk Lycee, and similar institutions in other communities is that significant Jewish resources

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are committed to institutions with (a) relatively small Jewish enrollment, and/or (b) negligible Judaic program content. Further, the presence of so many young non-Jews in such settings does little to encourage endogamous Jewish marriage in a society where the intermarriage rate already exceeds 70 percent. Concurrently, most Jewish educational institutions dedicated to transmission of Jewish values and content are seriously underfunded.



9. In later discussions with Rabbi Peretz Charach), a Karliner-Stoliner hasid who is Chief Rabbi of Khmelnytsky, Rabbi Charach said that he expects to leave Khmelnytsky after the Jewish holidays in October because “there are no young Jews left in Khmelnytsky”. He and his family will move to **Kyiv**, where Rabbi Charach will become **director of Karliner-Stoliner youth activities in Ukraine**.³ (See section on Yad Yisroel summer camp, beginning on page 13.)

Rabbi Peretz Charach and Esther Charach in Khmelnytsky, May 1996.

10. Julie Davis Fisher is the new human rights specialist at the **U.S. Embassy in Kyiv**. Her previous position was that of vice-consul in the same embassy. In speaking about repeated difficulties concerning **shipments of humanitarian aid** to Ukraine, Ms. Davis said that no resolution to the problem is in sight. The United States government is engaged in very serious discussions with the government of Ukraine, which still wants to impose taxes on all aid. Local officials are applying unofficial “import taxes”, i.e., demanding bribes for the release of goods from customs. This problem is just one aspect of endemic corruption in Ukraine. Another factor leading to extortion is that many

³ Formerly known as Proskurov, the city was renamed after Bogdan Khmelnytsky in 1954. Bogdan Khmelnytsky was the Cossack leader whose troops massacred about 100,000 Jews in 1648-1649. Many Ukrainians perceive him as a great Ukrainian patriot who was instrumental in awakening a sense of Jewish nationhood. Fewer than 3,000 Jews live in Khmelnytsky, the majority of whom are elderly. During his several years in the city, Rabbi Charach and his wife Esther developed a vigorous youth program that strongly encouraged Jewish youth to emigrate to Israel.

government employees receive very low salaries -- and sometimes the state is months late in paying wages. Several European governments have advised philanthropic groups in their countries to divert aid shipments from Ukraine to other nations with more responsible humanitarian assistance policies.

The militia, i.e., municipal police and highway patrols, have their own agenda, said Ms. Davis. They also must supplement miserly salaries that are sometimes paid months late. Their need for funds accounts for the large number of cars signaled over to the side of the road on the whim of an officer. Sometimes the officers only want to flaunt their power, but often they demand ten hryvnia (approximately \$6.00). The judicial system in Ukraine is also prone to **corruption**, responding to behind-the-scenes payments intended to sway opinions. Ms. Davis said that much of the press, although free, is subject to coercion because almost every publication receives some funding either from government agencies or from government officials [who had become wealthy through corruption].

Ms. Davis said that she and others in the Embassy were looking forward to the return to Kyiv on a longterm basis of Rabbi Yaakov D. Bleich. The Embassy has come to rely on him for accurate information and useful insight. Problems caused by his absence are compounded by the fact that he has no deputies. For example, the Embassy finds it difficult to address two incidents that have arisen in recent weeks because no other individual in the Jewish community with national credibility is available to provide guidance. In the first such incident, the Embassy learned from a report on Ukrainian television that the Jewish cemetery in **Khust** was defaced on July 21. Several calls to municipal officials in Khust had elicited different and even contradictory responses and the Embassy still does not know whether the defilement was a matter of random vandalism by adolescents or a more serious antisemitic attack by an organized group.⁴ In the second such incident, the Embassy had learned that the historic Jewish cemetery in **Uman** had sustained significant damage during recent torrential rains. The damage should be repaired in the nearest future before additional rain, wind, and visitor traffic causes further degradation.⁵ Ms. Davis did not know whom to contact in Rabbi Bleich's absence.

Regarding the **Brotsky synagogue** in Kyiv, Ms. Davis said that Rabbi Moshe Asman and his Chabad congregation assumed official control over the structure on July 1. According to official agreements, the puppet theater that had moved into the building in the 1950s should vacate the premises by the end of 1997.

⁴ Khust is located in western Ukraine, in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. Prior to 1945, it was part of Carpathian Ruthenia, i.e., eastern Czechoslovakia.

⁵ Located in the southern part of Kyiv *oblast*, Uman is the site of the tomb of Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav. Thousands of pilgrims visit Uman annually. Only a few hundred Jews reside in the city today.

The United States government fully supports Jewish communal efforts to reclaim the synagogue. However, it is clear to all that the puppet theater management is not interested in leaving the synagogue to occupy its assigned new site. Chabad officials, U.S. diplomats, and other concerned parties all are trying to avoid giving the impression that a Jewish group intends to evict local children from their beloved puppet theater.⁶ A further complication may be that a modeling agency appears to have moved into the synagogue and recently presented a fashion show there. Although the puppet theater management accommodates several other commercial tenants (without consultation with the synagogue), the appearance of a modeling agency on synagogue premises is especially unfortunate as modeling in Ukraine is often associated with prostitution.

Dnipropetrovsk

10. Operations of the **Joint Distribution Committee** are in a period of transition in Dnipropetrovsk. The city has been designated as headquarters for the new eastern Ukraine region of JDC. Yitzhak Averbuch, who formerly directed JDC operations in the Volga region of Russia, is the first director of the new region.⁷

Rabbi Menachem Lepkivker, formerly the onsite director of the Kharkov project of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations (New York) is the new JDC director for Dnipropetrovsk.⁸ He was due to assume his Dnipropetrovsk responsibilities in late August, but was in the city in late July to find an apartment and attend to other matters before bringing his family to Ukraine from Israel. Mr. Averbuch and Rabbi Lepkivker drove out to the Chabad camp one evening to join Rabbi Kaminezki and me for supper.

11. Irina Sviridenko, formerly director of extra-curricular activities at a large school, has been appointed Director of the *Общинный центр (obshchiny tseentr*; community center) section of the local *hesed*, **Shaarei Hesed**, that is sponsored by the **Joint Distribution Committee**. She explained that the community center

⁶ See the author's most recent previous trip report *Travel to Jewish Population Centers in Ukraine - March and April 1997* (Chicago: the author, 1997), pp. 3-4.

⁷ Other large Jewish population centers in the eastern Ukraine region are Kharkiv and Donetsk. A number of smaller Jewish populations are also included.

⁸ See *Travel to Jewish Population Centers in Ukraine, op. cit.*, pp. 25-27.

section includes all non-welfare activity in the hesed, i.e., the library, a women's club, a youth club, the Simcha children's arts program, the Tsivos Hashem program, and "many ideas".⁹ Ms. Sviridenko was in the process of registering the community center with local authorities.

The center recently sent six young people from the Simcha group to a Moscow competition to demonstrate their computer animation skills. The Dnipropetrovsk youngsters won a prize.

In September, the Center will sponsor a **Jewish book festival** under the guidance of JDC, which is planning similar book festivals at this time throughout the successor states. A variety of different activities focusing on Jewish books and culture will occur. Some events will take place outside Dnipropetrovsk in smaller Jewish population centers, such as **Kriviy Rih** and **Dniprodzherzhinsk**.

On a longterm basis, the Center will serve as the host for regional seminars of Jewish youth leaders and other workers in the Jewish community.

When asked about the Center budget, Ms. Sviridenko responded that JDC had not yet informed her about budgetary provisions. She readily acknowledged that this lack of information created planning problems.

12. **Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki**, Chief Rabbi of Dnepropetrovsk, commuted into the city every day from Sunday through Friday from the Chabad summer camp in Novomoskovsk. Chany Kaminezki and their four young daughters remained at the camp throughout the summer.

13. Rabbi Kaminezki expects enrollment at his **day school** to increase to at least 700 pupils and perhaps as many as 750 in September after several years of decline due to heavy emigration from the city. The economy in Dnipropetrovsk remains very depressed and emigration continues to be high, but enrollment is beginning to recover nonetheless. The school will utilize several new classrooms in the "third building" to accommodate the additional pupils.

The "second building" on the school campus was undergoing extensive renovation during the summer months. This building accommodates the yeshiva high school, a library, two sports halls, and other special-purpose facilities.

⁹ Tsivos Hashem is a Chabad youth program that is housed within the hesed building. Chabad provides its own youth leader for the program, but Ms. Sviridenko determines its role within the overall hesed.

Both the façade and the dining hall of the main building were also in need of major repair, but Rabbi Kaminezki said that funds were not available for such work in the immediate future.

In addition to enrolling a large number of new pupils from the general Jewish population in September, Rabbi Kaminezki and the school administration hope to begin a class for approximately 10 Jewish “invalid children” of primary-grade age, i.e., youngsters with various physical handicaps. If such a program is initiated, it will be the first Jewish school in the post-Soviet successor states to teach such children. Few educational or socializing opportunities are available to handicapped youngsters in the successor states; most are isolated in their apartments, living with parents who are forced to forgo employment in order to care for their children.¹⁰

14. Construction on the **homes for Jewish street children** that Rabbi Kaminezki is developing in Dnipropetrovsk is nearing completion. Both should be ready for occupancy by September as planned. Rabbi Kaminezki and his staff are now working on furnishing the two buildings. The homes already had been dedicated so as to accommodate the travel schedule of Esther Benenson, the principal donor, who had arrived in Dnipropetrovsk with an entourage of family and associates in June.

Each building is designed to house 50 youngsters plus houseparents. The girls' building, which is a new structure, is within walking distance of the day school. Boys will be accommodated in a remodeled synagogue and will require bus transportation to reach the school. Rabbi Kaminezki has applied to the Pincus Fund of the Jewish Agency for financial assistance in absorbing the children in special classes that will prepare them to join the regular day school classes.

15. **Beit Chana**, the Chabad *michlala* or pedagogical institute, expects to enroll at least 130 young women during the 1997-98 academic year, an increase from its 1996-97 enrollment of 80.¹¹ A group of about 35 second-year Beit Chana students was in Israel during the summer of 1997, studying for ten weeks at Machon Gold. Fifteen other Beit Chana students were working as counselors during the girls' session of the Chabad camp in Dnipropetrovsk. Levi Levayev, the major patron of the Chabad support organization *Or Avner*, and the Pincus

¹⁰ *Shaarei Hesed* already works with handicapped youngsters and their families on a limited basis. The Chabad camp also accommodated invalid children and their parents in a one-week pre-camp session in June. A critical problem in programming for this population is the lack of qualified professional personnel.

¹¹ Local radio stations read advertisements for the institute during the spring and summer.

Fund of the Jewish Agency each provide about 40 percent of the Beit Chana budget; Rabbi Kaminezki raises the remaining 20 percent.

16. The **Open Jewish University** of Dnipropetrovsk was established in 1993 to provide learning opportunities for adults in various spheres of Jewish studies. It offers five subject concentrations: (1) Fundamentals of [the Jewish] Religion; (2) Jewish Life -- tradition, fundamentals of belief, holidays, classic texts and commentaries; (3) History of the Jewish People; (4) Jewish Civilization -- literature and art; and (5) Languages -- Hebrew and Yiddish. Most classes meet on Sundays in Dnipropetrovsk, but several courses have been offered in Dniprodzerzhinsk, Zaporizhya, and other nearby Jewish population centers. The Open Jewish University receives funding from the Joint Distribution Committee, the Pincus Fund of the Jewish Agency, Or Avner, and the governing body of the Dnipropetrovsk synagogue.

According to data provided by the Open University, 127 people were enrolled in 1996-97. Their average age was 38, and most were graduates of universities or institutes. Due in part to substantial emigration from the area, the number of enrollees is lower than expected and is declining further.

With support from JDC, the Open Jewish University has recently published paperback textbooks entitled *Foundations of Judaism* by Boris Mazo, *The Jewish Way of Life -- Traditions and Ritual* by Arkady Zaltzman, *History of the Jews of Russia, the USSR, and Ukraine* (2 vols.) by Anatoly Varshavsky, and *Israel -- History and Modernity* by Viktor Lehrer.¹² All of the authors are instructors in the Open Jewish University.

17. Rabbi Kaminezki shares the view of Rabbi Bleich that **Christian missionaries** have become more aggressive in recent months. Rabbi Kaminezki said that the problem is particularly acute in cities such as Kriviy Rig, where no rabbis are present to monitor the situation. He also agreed that a large-scale distribution of anti-missionary literature would be very helpful. The synagogue governing body has already printed and distributed an anti-missionary brochure,¹³ but a more intensive and systematic publishing effort is required if missionary efforts are to be frustrated.

¹² Each of the texts is published in the Russian language. Translations of the titles are by Betsy Gidwitz.

¹³ The brochure is a Russian-language adaptation of material developed by the U.S.-based anti-missionary organization *Jews for Judaism*.

18. Several architectural plans are being considered for the renovation of the **Golden Rose Choral Synagogue**, which was returned to the Jewish community in late 1996 after several years of acrimonious exchange with the clothing factory that was using it as a warehouse. It is Rabbi Kaminezki's intention that the facility be converted into a multi-purpose community building with a large assembly room (to be used variously as a synagogue, wedding hall, concert center, or other large gathering place) along with several smaller activity rooms and communal offices. Funding will be provided by the family of George Rohr, an American who has supported the renovation of other Chabad synagogues in the successor states.

19. Rabbi Kaminezki reported that the synagogue had identified the individual who stole the congregation's only **Sefer Torah** in April. The thief is a Georgian Jew who had lived in Dnipropetrovsk for some months; he had represented himself to the Jewish community as a businessman and had joined the congregation, apparently in preparation to seize the Torah. On the night that he actually cut the Torah parchment away from its rollers and removed it from the synagogue, he had remained at the shul after the *Maariv* service to chat with other worshippers and the security staff and to have a cup of tea with the "regulars". Investigation by the synagogue and the municipal police suggest that he managed to introduce a substance into the tea of the custodian that later reduced the custodian's alertness.

Shortly after the Torah disappeared, the individual also disappeared. Only after he was identified as a suspect was it remembered that he had always refused to be photographed during various celebrations in the synagogue and larger community. Dnipropetrovsk police have been in contact with Georgian police about recovery of the Torah as it is known that the thief returned to his homeland with it; however, Georgian authorities do not seem eager to pursue the case. If the Torah is not returned through official channels in the very near future, Rabbi Kaminezki will contact individuals in the Georgian Jewish community for assistance.

When news of the Torah theft became public, the congregation received several offers of replacement Torahs from Israel and the United States. The synagogue accepted the offer of an Israeli donor and expects the new Torah to arrive before Rosh Hashana. Notwithstanding, the generous gift of a new Torah, a very bitter taste remains because the original Torah, which had been especially commissioned for Dnipropetrovsk, had been stolen by a fellow Jew.

Kharkiv

20. Renovation of the choral synagogue in Kharkiv, a significantly riskier project than that in Dnipropetrovsk as control over the Kharkiv structure is still contested, is also under way. Rabbi Moishe Moskowitz, a Chabad hasid from Caracas, has been using the synagogue for some years as an office, site of a JDC-supported soup kitchen, and a truncated synagogue facility. Eduard Khodos, a disagreeable and contentious individual has long occupied the upper floors of the building and has blocked use of the spacious sanctuary. With only the vestibule of the synagogue available for synagogue services, Rabbi Moskowitz has still managed to attract 150 people for Shabbat observance.

In mid-1997, having received funds from George Rohr, Rabbi Moskowitz decided to proceed with renovation of the synagogue despite threats from Mr. Khodos. The sanctuary has been opened (although it is unusable) and repairs have begun on the cupola. Gutters and downspouts are being replaced. Renovation will continue in stages, depending on the response of Mr. Khodos.

21. Rabbi Moskowitz said that inquiries from and interviews with families during the spring and summer point to a substantial increase in enrollment for the **Kharkiv Chabad day school** in September. Whereas enrollment was approximately 400 pupils during the 1996-97 school year, enrollment for the 1997-98 school year may be almost 500. He was unable to offer an explanation for the increase, noting that the upper school was still in very unattractive quarters and, unlike many other schools in the city, it has no computer laboratory.

22. **Jewish emigration** was continuing at a significant rate because the local economy remained very depressed. Many Jewish families, even those with children in the day school, were going to Germany, a "purely economic" decision.

Visits to Jewish Summer Camps

23. The author visited five Jewish summer camps in Ukraine. Two, in Khmel'nitsky and Dnipropetrovsk, are operated by the Jewish Agency for Israel (Sochnut). The other three are sponsored by religious groups -- two by Chabad and one by Karliner-Stoliner hasidim.¹⁴

Sochnut camps are co-educational and are strongly focused on Zionism and promotion of aliyah. The majority of campers are adolescents, age 14 and older,

¹⁴ The writer was a guest of the Karliner-Stoliner camp for four days and a guest of the Chabad camp in Dnipropetrovsk for eight days.

as this age group is perceived to be considering their options for further education and for careers. Reflecting the high rate of intermarriage among Soviet and post-Soviet Ukrainian Jews, many of the campers are halakhically non-Jewish; however, all are Jewish according to the Israeli Law of Return and each is considered by Sochnut to be a candidate for aliyah.¹⁵ Due to severe budgetary constraints affecting the Jewish Agency, the length of camp sessions has been cut back to only nine days. Further, most Sochnut offices limit each youngster to two or three summers at camp so as to reach the largest number of Jewish adolescents as possible.

The camps sponsored by hasidic groups operate separate sessions for boys and for girls -- the Karliner-Stoliner group and Dnipropetrovsk Chabad offering four week sessions for each, and Kharkiv Chabad offering three-week sessions for each. (By coincidence, the writer visited each of the three camps during its session for girls.) Almost all campers are halakhically Jewish. The camps enrolled a much broader age range, including some youngsters as young as six. Although both the Karliner-Stoliner and Chabad hasidic camps register campers from their own day schools, they also endeavor to recruit youngsters with no day school background so as to provide a positive Jewish experience for boys and girls with no previous exposure to Jewish tradition and culture. Some children return to the same camp summer after summer.

Most Jewish camps in the post-Soviet states are rented on a seasonal basis from factories or other institutions that operated them for the children of their employees during the Soviet period. With the loss of heavy subsidies that sustained the camps in the USSR, the owner-institutions are no longer able to offer camping experiences to employee families and are eager to rent the sites to organizations with foreign sponsors. The Chabad camp near Dnipropetrovsk differs from this pattern as it is actually owned by the Chabad synagogue community in Dnipropetrovsk; it may be the only Jewish camp in the successor states that is owned by a Jewish organization.

All of the camps are heavily subsidized by the sponsoring institution. Token fees are charged each camper, but these are adjusted when requested. Most of the camps accept some youngsters whose families are unable to pay even a symbolic amount. Some youngsters arrive at the camp with all of their clothing and other items for four weeks in one small plastic bag.

24. Yad Yisroel camp in Khmelnytsky. Karliner-Stoliner rabbis direct Jewish communities in three Ukrainian cities: Rabbi Yaakov D. Bleich in Kyiv, Rabbi Mordechai Bald in Lviv, and Rabbi Peretz Charach in Khmelnytsky. The

¹⁵ Jewish law (*halakha*) defines a Jew as an individual whose mother is Jewish. The Israeli Law of Return grants citizenship to an individual with at least one Jewish grandparent or to a non-Jew married to a Jew.

movement sponsors day schools in both Kyiv and Lviv. As noted earlier in this report, Rabbi Charach expects to leave the Khmelnitsky community (which has been too small in post-war years to support a day school) later in 1997 to become the director of Karliner-Stoliner youth activities in Kyiv. Unlike Chabad rabbis, who operate independently, the three Karliner-Stoliner rabbis appear to serve under direction from Yad Yisroel (their administrative and support organization in Brooklyn) and their movement central office in Israel.

Prior to 1997, Yad Yisroel operated two separate seven-week summer camps in Ukraine, a boys' camp in Khmelnitsky and a girls' camp near Kyiv. Financial constraints forced a consolidation of camp operations into eight weeks at the Khmelnitsky site.

The camp is in a picturesque rural area in which at least four other camps and several health sanatoria are located. The Karliner-Stoliner camp is fairly compact, dominated by five large buildings (two dormitories, an auditorium, a kitchen and dining hall, and a building that houses showers and an indoor swimming pool). Several smaller bungalows accommodate staff and others associated with the camp. The terrain is hilly. The camp is within easy walking distance of a lake, but no activity takes place on the lake. Uniformed security personnel in combat dress protect the camp.¹⁶

Although the camp can accommodate more than 250 campers, only about 160 girls were present. Uncertain until late spring about their ability to fund the camp, the Karliner-Stoliner movement delayed registration until Yad Yisroel finances were secure before beginning to recruit campers. The July session, which had been designated for girls, was thus under-enrolled. With more time to recruit campers for its August session, the movement anticipated a capacity registration for the boys' encampment.

Campers during the girls' session were said, officially, to range in age from eight to 18. However, counselors reported (and appearances suggested) that some girls were as young as six. About 40 percent were from Kyiv, 20 percent from Lviv, 20 percent from Khmelnitsky, and 20 percent from various small Jewish population centers in central and western Ukraine.¹⁷ Only about 30 percent of the girls attended the Karliner-Stoliner day schools in Kyiv or Lviv. In previous years, about 60 percent of the campers were also day school pupils, but when the uncertainty of 1997 funding forced a curtailment in recruitment efforts, the movement decided to focus on girls who had not been exposed to Judaism through day schools. By the time in late spring that operation of the camp was

¹⁶ One guard was attired in the uniform of a U.S. army paratrooper, complete with insignia.

¹⁷ Some of the latter were from Berdichev, whose rabbi expressed the hope to this writer in 1996 that youngsters from that city would be able to attend the camp. Rabbi Shlomo Breuer, a Skverer hasid, visited the Berdichev campers when this writer was at the camp.

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assured, many of the day school girls had already made other arrangements for July.

According to Rabbi Peretz Charach and his wife Esther (Esti), who direct the camp, operating costs of the eight-week camp season are about \$100,000. Campers are charged ten hryvnia (about six dollars) for a four-week session “so that they appreciate it,” but many families pay only five hryvnia. At least 70 percent of the campers return from one year to the next, the remainder either emigrating or outgrowing the upper age limit.

The Charachs, whom the writer first met during a visit to Khmelnytsky in 1996, appear to be dedicated to their mission and very effective leaders and teachers of children, adolescents, and young adults. Committed Zionists, they recruited a number of older campers to continue their high school education in a new Karliner-Stoliner boarding school in Jerusalem that is geared to the needs of Russian-speaking girls.

Sixteen young women led the campers as counselors on a day-to-day basis. Most were 19 or 20 years old and the majority were Americans from Borough Park, but their numbers also included several Israelis and at least one young woman from Switzerland and another from Canada. In a meeting with the writer,¹⁸ only five said they were from hasidic families. All were Orthodox, and most of the North Americans had attended Beis Yaakov elementary and high schools. They were currently enrolled in various Orthodox seminaries. None



appeared to speak Russian. They received no salaries for their work at the camp, and they or their families paid for their transportation to or from camp.

Although lacking fluency in Russian, a counselor in the Yad Yisroel camp is successful in teaching campers about Judaism.

¹⁸ See below.

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They viewed this volunteer experience as a privilege, an opportunity to work with [Ukrainian Jewish] girls less fortunate than themselves. They had learned about the camp from friends and relatives who had worked at the camp previously; they applied for counselor positions through the Yad Yisroel office in New York or the Karliner-Stoliner movement in Israel or by contacting Rabbi Charach in Khmelnitsky. Those who were attending seminary programs in Israel were interviewed there by Esti Charach.

In addition to the staff counselors, three women in their mid-twenties were employed as senior counselors. They not only supervised the younger counselors, but also did most of the program planning and scheduling. Because of their additional responsibilities, they received salaries. Each had been a counselor at the camp for at least three previous summers and each spoke some Russian. One had been at the camp every summer since its inception seven years previously and also had taught one year at the Karliner-Stoliner day school in Kyiv.

The camp program included small-group lessons in Hebrew and Jewish tradition as well as arts and crafts, music (mainly group singing) and drama, swimming, games, and occasional excursions to places of interest. Classes in Hebrew and tradition were often very small as efforts were made to accommodate the different knowledge levels of girls who attended day schools, girls who did not attend day schools but had previous camp experience, and girls who had no earlier Jewish learning opportunities at all. In addition to a routine daily schedule and observance of Shabbat, certain days were set aside for special programming. For example, Chanukah, Purim, Pesach, and other holidays were

celebrated so as to familiarize campers with the Jewish calendar in a 'hands-on' manner.



Campers and counselors celebrate Purim in July at the Yad Yisroel camp in Khmelnitsky.

A group of older girls (age 15 and above) elected to enroll in an intensive Jewish learning program that was known as "seminar". Rabbi Charach, Esti Charach, and the senior counselors all worked with this group, which seemed to develop

its own identity and to enjoy their classes (and a special status that developed therefrom).

The camp served three meals daily as well as snacks in mid-morning and mid-afternoon. Lunch and supper were both preceded and followed by singing, much of it boisterous. Prior to each meal, campers gathered at the entrance to the dining hall where counselors led them in various songs and chants, some of them nonsensical, in several languages (Russian, Hebrew, and English, although few campers understood English and their Hebrew was very uneven). Each age cohort was permitted to enter the dining hall separately; age groups were assigned specific tables, each of which was headed by the counselor for that group.

Immediately after tables were cleared (by campers assigned to that task), a senior counselor mounted a chair in the middle of the dining hall. Using a bullhorn, she signaled the campers to stand on their chairs and she proceeded to lead them in several songs, many of them quite loud and accompanied by intricate hand movements. Occasionally, the senior counselor would jump down from her chair and run over to a table to encourage girls who seemed insufficiently energized. The majority of veteran campers seemed to know all or most of the words to the numerous songs, even those in Hebrew. *Birkat Hamazon*, the traditional blessing after meals, was also sung; although song sheets with a Russian transliteration of the Hebrew text were distributed, many of the campers appeared familiar with the blessing.

Each day's schedule was posted on a bulletin board near the dining hall. Despite unpleasant weather, campers seemed constructively occupied and happy throughout the four days that the writer spent at the camp. Notwithstanding language barriers, many of the counselors seemed to have developed close relationships with campers in their group; most counselors learned a few key words in Russian, some campers spoke a sort of pidgin English and/or day school Hebrew, and generous use was made of informal sign language and gestures.

Shortly before my departure from the camp, I met with the counselors to consider several questions. A very lively discussion ensued. When asked about the **major differences** between the Yad Yisroel camp and [mainly Orthodox Jewish] girls' camps they had attended in the United States, the counselors responded:

- Many girls at the Yad Yisroel camp seemed to come from unstable and unhappy homes; the majority of parents seemed to be divorced; few of the girls had siblings; many campers lived in poverty and resented constraints on their lives imposed by family financial distress.

- Because most campers were also deprived of a positive Jewish identity, the counselors felt a certain urgency to instill Jewish learning and Jewish pride that was unnecessary in American Orthodox Jewish camps where most youngsters had strong Jewish backgrounds.

- The family and Judaic deprivations affecting Yad Yisroel campers led many of the counselors to develop an emotional investment in the girls that was more intense than ties that evolved in their American camping or teaching experiences; because language barriers impeded communications, both counselors and campers were forced to express themselves “differently”.

- Counselors were surprised at the tactlessness with which the campers addressed each other and the counselors as well; girls asked them how much they weighed, whether their parents treated them well, and whether their families were wealthy.

When asked what **benefits their volunteer work at the camp brought to the campers**, the counselors responded:

- The girls could observe how “civilized people”, i.e., the counselors, behave regarding personal hygiene, table manners, and other issues of conduct; many campers had been deprived of positive parental and school influence in such matters.

- The girls would learn that religiously observant people, i.e., the counselors, were normal people and not strange or exotic.

- The girls would see Jewish observance as positive.

- The girls would benefit from the affection that counselors felt for them; many girls appeared deprived of affection in their troubled homes; many counselors maintain contact with campers throughout the year, sending letters and holiday greetings.

- On a material level, the campers were extraordinarily grateful for small, inexpensive gifts that counselors brought them (upon advice from their predecessors); it was clear that many girls had few personal possessions beyond absolutely essential clothing and footwear.

When asked **what they, the counselors, gained from the experience**, the counselors responded:

- Fatigue [accompanied by laughter].
- The counselors felt a renewed sense of appreciation for their own upbringing, particularly their strong, intact families and positive Jewish homes and Jewish education.

When asked **their priorities for changes in the camp**, counselors responded:

- More counselors

The camp is clearly understaffed at both the counselor and management levels. Counselors had little free time. Several counselors became ill during the season, apparently in part from overwork and lack of sleep.

- More medical staff in the camp, including a child psychiatrist.
- A lifeguard for the swimming pool.

Most of the counselors said they were comfortable swimmers, but none was a qualified lifeguard. Further, they were so busy trying to teach swimming (for which many were also unqualified) and to look after basic discipline that elementary pool safety was often overlooked.

- More showers.
- More clothing for campers.

Aware that many campers did not possess suitable apparel for a camp experience, Yad Yisroel had sent a container of appropriate clothing to the camp. Ukrainian customs authorities had delayed release of the container until late in the camp season.

The counselors also expressed some reservation about the presence in camp of *воспитательницы* (*vospitatel'nitsy* or upbringers), a Russian occupation of childcare workers responsible for non-professional aspects of education.¹⁹ Some counselors felt that the presence of these women, several of whom were middle-age teachers, threatened their own authority with the campers.

¹⁹ In a camp setting, *vospitatel'nitsy* live with campers and are responsible for their supervision during chores, preparation for bedtime, waking and dressing, showers, etc.

The last question posed to the counselors was: **What future do you wish for the campers?** The counselors were asked to consider three options: (1) that the girls remain in Ukraine, attend one of the Jewish day schools in Ukraine, and endeavor as adults to build a Ukrainian Jewish community; (2) that the girls emigrate to Israel, either with their families or alone, and attend a religious day or boarding school/seminary in Israel; or (3) that the girls emigrate to the United States. The question elicited no consensus answer. The only suggestion offered by more than a few counselors was that girls who live in unstable homes should be provided with a more favorable environment for the remainder of their childhood and adolescence, but no strong views were expressed on the location of that environment. One counselor said that a seminary for religious girls should be developed in Ukraine, another suggested that any Jewish educational effort in Ukraine for young people should also involve parents, and a third commented that the strongest girls would find some way to leave Ukraine.²⁰

25. Sochnut (Jewish Agency for Israel) camp in Khmelnytsky. The Jewish Agency for Israel camp in Khmelnytsky is located on the same road as the Yad Yisroel camp. The Sochnut camp is co-educational and holds two nine-day encampments, each for 150 youngsters between the ages of 12 and 16. The campers are from Khmelnytsky *oblast* and three other *oblasts* in central Ukraine.²¹

The site of the camp is compact, consisting of three large buildings (two dormitory structures and a central lodge that contains the kitchen and dining hall, a small auditorium, meeting rooms, offices, infirmary, and sleeping quarters for various administrative staff), a large soccer field and an outdoor basketball court, and several small service buildings. The camp buildings appeared to be in better condition than those in the Yad Yisroel camp.

The camp director was Eva Khramtsova, a resident of Khmelnytsky who directs Sochnut operations in Khmelnytsky *oblast*. Ms. Khramtsova, who previously was a section chief in a military factory, plans to emigrate to Israel with her (non-Jewish) husband in the near future. Their daughter lives in Haifa and their son,

²⁰ About half of the counselors had left the meeting to tend to campers by the time this question was asked.

²¹ An *oblast* (*область*) is an administrative region in Ukraine (and Russia) with authority between that of a county and a state in the United States. Ukraine contains 26 *oblasts*, two of which are cities with *oblast* status; these are the capital city of Kyiv and the military district/seaport of Sevastopol. The territory around Kyiv is an *oblast* separate from Kyiv itself. Jewish population centers in *oblasts* served by the Khmelnytsky camp are small, consisting of fewer than 8,000 Jews. (Sochnut operates a camp in Lviv *oblast* that enrolls youngsters from western Ukraine and a camp near Kyiv that serves Kyiv and Kyiv *oblast*. Youngsters from other regions attend other camps, such as the one in Dnipropetrovsk. See pp. 25–26.)

who was enrolled at the camp, would soon go to Israel in the Na'aleh 16 program.²²

Ms. Khramtsova said that many of the campers were from intermarried families. Although some were not Jewish according to halakha, all were Jewish according to the Law of Return. In response to a question, she said that most were likely to emigrate to Israel -- some in the Na'aleh 16 program and others in Chalom.²³ The economy in the area served by the camp is severely depressed, and most of the campers live in poverty. Few opportunities exist for young people to build decent lives locally. Many local universities and institutes -- particularly the more prestigious ones -- demand that Jews pay heavy bribes for admission. When questioned, personnel at some of these institutions acknowledge that their admissions practices are discriminatory; Jews should pay more than others, they say, because most Jews will go to Israel and thus will not use their education to benefit the country. Ms. Khramtsova commented that such a policy is just the current version of continuous antisemitism *от поколения до поколения* (*ot pokoleniya do pokoleniya*; from generation to generation). "They don't like us here," she said.

The local economic situation was so desolate that even recent *olim* (immigrants in Israel) send money to family members still in Ukraine. Their daughter in Haifa sends them money because Ms. Khramtsova's husband has been unemployed for some time with no likelihood of finding any work. She believes she is fortunate to be working for Sochnut, which pays her salary on time.

²² Na'aleh 16 is a program in Israel for high school students.

²³ Chalom attracts high school graduates for training in specific careers that are in demand in Israel, such as dental assistants or computer programmers. Ms. Khramtsova said that the Chalom program was very popular locally, but required significant adjustment for maximum effectiveness. First, the current timetable calls for candidates to take qualifying exams in April; they are notified of results only in September or October. However, by September, many candidates become impatient and, fearing that they would not be accepted in Chalom, they enroll in local courses so as not to lose the academic year. Once they begin local courses, they usually finish them and then remain in the area to find work geared to their training. They may also marry locally, sometimes to a non-Jew who does not want to go to Israel. Thus, Israel loses the potential immigrant. Ms. Khramtsova suggested that the exams be administered in winter and results be available in April so that candidates can make specific plans for the next stage of their education; under such a timetable, it is more likely that those eligible for programs in Israel will actually enroll in such programs. Second, Chalom should offer training opportunities in more fields. The most popular courses, said Ms. Khramtsova, are in hotel management, computers, bookkeeping, and for training as nursing or dental assistants. Young men from the Khmelniisky area would also be interested in courses for drivers or auto mechanics, and some young women would like to train as pre-school teachers.

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Recurring budget problems in the Jewish Agency had forced curtailment of the camp season from 17 days a few years ago to nine days this season. It has been very difficult to compress 17 days of programming into nine. Because the intent of the camp is promotion of aliyah, nearly all programs focus on Israel and there is no longer time for sports, games, or other activities that do not relate to Israel. Campers study Hebrew every day. They hold festivals to highlight Israel cities, they celebrate Jewish and Israeli holidays, and they also commemorate the Shoah and other episodes in the history of the Jewish people.

An Israeli counselor uses a map to teach adolescents about Israel in a Jewish Agency summer camp in Khmel-nitsky.

On the day that this writer visited the camp, mixed-age groups of campers were preparing “advertisements” or displays featuring the more prominent characteristics of about six Israeli cities. For example, the Jerusalem group had built a small replica of the Western Wall and handed out paper and pencils to passersby so they could write messages to be placed in the “wall”. A group promoting Eilat had made a large mural of a beach, in front of which paraded several girls in swimming suits. The Beersheva team created a Bedouin tent in which costumed campers served “Bedouin coffee” to visitors. Campers and counselors voted on the displays to select the best one.



Earlier in the same day, campers had Hebrew lessons in small groups and had seen a video on the Six-Day War. They were also scheduled for Israeli dancing and other activities. In common with the nearby Yad Yisroel camp, the daily schedule was posted in a prominent location.

Six counselors from Israel, all of them young women, were the senior counselors at the camp. They were joined by local young adults (who had completed Sochnut training courses) in providing leadership for the campers. The Israelis had brought with them various supplies for the camp, including a large amount of arts and crafts materials that are unavailable locally.

The Sochnut camp provides campers with three meals and two snacks every day. Most of the youngsters subsist on a diet of potatoes at home, said Ms. Khramtsova. The fee for the nine-day camp was eight hryvnia (about \$4.80) to those who could afford it, but many campers paid no fee at all. Ms. Khramtsova

said that operation of the camp costs \$2,000 per day, including food, staff salaries, and rental of camp premises.

During the five to six hours that I visited the camp, the campers all appeared happy and occupied with camp activity. Notwithstanding the brevity of the camp session, Ms. Khramtsova seemed to know many of the campers personally, perhaps from her work as Jewish Agency representative in the area during the remainder of the year. Her relations with Israeli and local staff also seemed very positive.

26. Chabad camp, Dnipropetrovsk area. Located in Novomoskovsk, a 20-minute drive across the Dnipro River from Dnipropetrovsk, the Chabad camp is known by its name of *Dubrava* from the Soviet period and, reflecting its current ownership, also as “Camp Gan Israel Or Avner – Chabad Lubavich”. It was purchased by the Dnipropetrovsk synagogue from a financially-troubled construction company for \$50,000 in 1992.

On the shore of the Samara River, the camp is adjacent to a “tour base”, i.e., a camp ground, and close to one other camp and several other summer institutions. Its proximity to a stagnant river doubtless contributed to a severe mosquito infestation that seemed impervious to repeated sprayings.

The two most prominent buildings in the camp are the dining hall/kitchen and a semi-enclosed auditorium. Sleeping accommodations for campers are in several long single-storey buildings. Lavatory facilities are primitive and located a modest distance from camper housing. A rusting above-ground swimming pool is sited near the camp entrance. The camp lacks an enclosed central lodge or other indoor structure for rainy-day activities, arts and crafts, classes, or other programming that should be done indoors. In general, existing facilities are in poor condition.

The camp operates two four-week sessions, each accommodating 150 campers -- girls in July, and boys in August. Both sessions were at capacity in 1997, each with waiting lists.²⁴ Almost all of the campers are from Dnipropetrovsk, but only about 50 percent are enrolled at the large Dnipropetrovsk Jewish day school. In common with his colleagues in the Karliner-Stoliner movement, Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki recruits campers who do not attend day school so that additional youngsters can experience Jewish tradition and culture. Because of its proximity to the city of Dnipropetrovsk, the camp invites parents and other family members to visit campers on Sundays

²⁴ In addition to the two four-week sessions, shorter pre-camp sessions were operated in June for handicapped children and for boys from the yeshiva high school. In cooperation with the Chabad rabbi in Donetsk, a separate camp at a different site was operated for older girls from Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk who were interested in a more intensive Jewish learning experience.

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Officially, the camp charges campers 50 hryvnia (approximately \$30) for a four-week session. Most families pay 10 to 20 hryvnia (\$6 to \$12) per child, and some pay no fees at all. Rabbi Kaminezki estimated the operating costs for the camp over the entire summer to be \$35,000, significantly less than those for camps of comparable size that must be rented from other owners.

Joining campers were a large number of non-camper young children, including 10 boys (at both the boys' and girls' sessions), who are offspring of camp staff, about five hesed clients (elderly Jews) on week-long vacations, and a half-dozen or so other adults with some connection to the Jewish community who had no official responsibility at the camp. No programming was available for any of the non-camper groups, except for attendance at plays, songfests, religious services, etc.

Fifteen students from Beit Chana, the michlala or teachers' seminary in Dnipropetrovsk, served as unpaid counselors during the girls' session. Their work was perceived as practice-teaching for which monetary compensation was unnecessary. Most were 19 years old; it appeared that none had any previous camp experience, either as a camper or counselor. They led prayers, some religious classes, arts and crafts, games, group singing, drama, and other activities. The camp had neither a director nor head counselors; no Israeli or American Jewish instructors/counselors were present.²⁵ In common with the Yad Yisroel camp, Dubrava also employed *vospitateľ'nitsy* to help in the supervision of campers.

Rabbi Kaminezki, his wife Chany, and their four young children resided in a camp bungalow throughout the camp season. Rabbi Kaminezki commuted into the city of Dnipropetrovsk Sunday through Friday. Preoccupied with care of their children, Chany Kaminezki was unable to assume any significant leadership role in the camp. However, she was very visible and served as a resource on questions of Jewish practice.

Rabbi Kaminezki gives a *shiur* (lesson) on Shabbat afternoons, attracting a small group of adults in the camp. Support staff and one of the hesed clients attended the *shiur* at which this writer was present. It quickly became a question-and-answer session, with several individuals asking the rabbi to explain several very fundamental points of Jewish law and custom.



As in the other camps visited by the writer, the campers at Dubrava seemed quite happy. Rabbi

by an experienced head counselor

Kaminezki was delighted that the Beit Chana students, most of them ignorant of Judaism before entering Beit Chana two years previously, were able to lead campers in prayer and teach basic Judaism to campers.

Three counselors, all of whom are Ukrainian Jewish students at the Beit Chana Jewish Women's Pedagogical Institute in Dnipropetrovsk, lead prayers at the Chabad camp near Dnipropetrovsk.

However, the inexperience of the students/counselors and their lack of supervision by a senior counselor and/or a camp director were apparent in several ways. At almost any time of day, small groups of campers milled about without any attention from counselors. On most such occasions, they were absent from some planned activity, but the activity failed to attract them and no one appeared to look for them. A few of the girls repeatedly stopped by the Kaminezki bungalow to play with or "look after" the Kaminezki children, occasionally for several hours at a time. No schedules were posted in the camp. The camp lacked a sense of cohesiveness. It often seemed devoid of spirit.

Rabbi Shmuel Kaminezki and Chany Kaminezki recognized the "drift" in the camp and discussed potential resolutions. Reliance on the Beit Chana students had its advantages, both in eliminating the communications and cultural incompatibilities inevitable with foreign staff and in providing superb experience for the Beit Chana students. It also reduced transportation costs, telephone bills, etc. However, it is likely that most of these benefits can be retained and the camp improved significantly by the appointment of a camp director and several experienced senior counselors to supervise program development and implementation and to work with the Beit Chana students in improving their counseling skills.

27. Jewish Agency (Sochnut) camp near Dnipropetrovsk. The Jewish Agency for Israel operates a camp near Dnipropetrovsk that accommodates 148 adolescents in each of two nine-day sessions and 100 college students in a separate six-day session.²⁶ The Dnipropetrovsk camp enrolls campers in the region extending from Dniprodzerzhinsk in the north to Melitopol and Berdyansk in the south and Kriviy Rih and Kirovohrad to the west. Other Sochnut camps in eastern Ukraine are located near Kharkiv and near Donetsk.

²⁶ In common with the Sochnut camp near Khmelniysky, many of the campers are from mixed families and are not halakhically Jewish. However, they are all eligible for Israeli citizenship under the Law of Return.

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This writer first met with Israel Rashal, the outgoing Sochnut director for the Dnipropetrovsk/Donetsk region, in an earlier visit to Dnipropetrovsk in March. Mr. Rashal strongly favors limiting enrollment in Sochnut camps to youngsters age 14 and older because they are old enough to consider aliyah to Israel in the near future, e.g., in the Na'aleh 16 program at age 16, Chalom after high school, or another program geared to young people. To target programming to specific age groups, Mr. Rashal and regional Sochnut youth shaliach Raviv Karasuk reserved the first camp session (which was visited by the writer on its second



day) for 14- and 15-year olds, and the second session for 16- and 17- year olds. Mr. Karasuk, who seemed to be a very skilled youth leader, was the actual camp director.

Raviv Karasuk (facing camera) uses game format to teach Hebrew at Sochnut camp in Dnipropetrovsk.

The camp employed 21 counselors, including ten local Ukrainian Jewish young adults who work as youth leaders in various regional population centers during the rest of the year. Most had attended several Sochnut training courses, the results of which were obvious as they mobilized adolescents to participate in re-enactments of several topics in the history of Zionism. Seven Israeli youth leaders, not all of whom speak Russian, were also assigned to the camp; they were assisted by three local people who were both counselors and translators. The camp also employed another local person who is a skilled teacher of Israeli dance.

The theme for the camp was *Israel from Legend to the State*. Sochnut in Jerusalem had prepared curricula and program material to cover such topics as the Uganda movement, Theodore Herzl, Russian Jewish history, the Shoah, various aliyot, and "Israel -- the reality". On the day of my visit, campers and counselors were re-enacting various episodes in Russian Jewish history. In a formal education format, the content would have been unbearably arcane and tedious to adolescents; however, the re-enactments that I saw seemed to engage the teens. They had been assigned to about six teams and were well-equipped with appropriate props and crafts materials.

Programs focusing on *Israel from Legend to the State* continued over five days. The campers also had informal Hebrew lessons and engaged in other activities

during this period. Parents were invited to the camp on Saturday, which was noted as Shabbat but not observed in an Orthodox manner.

The camp is located on attractive property. All campers sleep in one large building. The dining hall/kitchen and a central activities facility are other large structures. The site also contains several smaller buildings. Maintenance seemed adequate in most areas.

Mr. Rashal said that the overall cost of the camp was \$20 per day for each camper. Rental of the camp site plus food and staff expenses accounted for \$17.50 and the remaining \$2.50 was required for transportation and security. Campers were asked to pay the cost of one day, but first-year campers were given a discount. In order to permit the maximum number of area youngsters to participate in Sochnut camps, campers were allowed to enroll in the camp for only three summers. The camp had a waiting list that could be addressed only by adding more sessions, an option that was unavailable due to inadequate funding from the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem.

28. Chabad camp near Kharkiv. The Chabad movement in Kharkiv, headed by Rabbi Moishe Moskowitz, operates a summer camp in the village of Lubatin, about a 40-minute drive to the west of Kharkiv.²⁷ The camp offers two three-week sessions, each accommodating 120 campers -- boys in June/July and girls in July/August. About 50 percent of the campers are also enrolled in the Chabad day school in Kharkiv. Campers are charged a "symbolic fee" of 15 hryvnia (about nine dollars). According to Rabbi Moskowitz, the families of more than 90 percent of the campers pay the full fee.²⁸

Ten American counselors who had just completed a Chabad two-year teachers' seminary in New Jersey led the girls' camp, backed up by seven local young women (several of whom had dual responsibilities as counselors and interpreters) and eight teachers from the Chabad day school. The teachers

²⁷ The writer has visited Kharkiv on at least four different occasions, most recently in March 1997. She is well acquainted with Rabbi Moishe and Miriam Moskowitz.

²⁸ Two other Jewish summer camps are located in the Kharkiv area. The Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (O.U.), which operates a high school and youth center in Kharkiv, also operates a co-educational three-week summer camp; because it was just beginning its season when I was in Kharkiv, I did not visit it. The Jewish Agency camp serving the Kharkiv region was due to begin the first of its two sessions in August, i.e., after I had departed. Rabbi Moskowitz said that some Jewish youngsters would attend two camps during the summer; boys who attended his camp in June and early July would be able to attend either the O.U. camp or the Sochnut camp as well. Girls who attended the Chabad camp in July and early August would be able to attend the Sochnut camp also. He readily acknowledged that some of the older pupils at his day school preferred the O.U. and Sochnut camps to the Chabad camp because the former are co-educational.

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served as *воспитательницы* (*vospitatel'nitsy* or “upbringers”), childcare workers who live with campers and supervise them during chores, preparation for bedtime, waking and dressing, showers, etc. Rabbi Moskowitz paid 50 percent of the airfare of the American counselors, but their work in the camp was on a volunteer basis. One of the ten Chabad young women had been designated as head counselor.

Rabbi Moskowitz said that camp parents were pleased that Americans were the primary staff members as their presence was considered “prestigious” and parents hoped that their children would learn some English from the counselors. Rabbi Moskowitz also said that participation of the *vospitatel'nitsy* was valued because some parents viewed the American counselors as too young and inexperienced to care for their children.

Rabbi Levi Reitzes and the latter's wife Esti, associates of Rabbi Moishe and Miriam Moskowitz, are at the camp throughout the six-week season. The Moskowitzes remain in the city of Kharkiv throughout the summer, but they commute to the camp on a regular basis, one or both of them spending several hours at the site almost every day.

The camp property, which is rented from a local factory, is quite compact. Major buildings include two large dormitories, a dining hall/kitchen, and a semi-enclosed auditorium. An inground outdoor swimming pool is not used because it is very expensive to operate. Rabbi Moskowitz said that the institution that owns the camp is gradually selling its furnishings, such as beds and bed linens, in a continuing effort to derive funds from the property; in fact, prior to the opening of camp, Rabbi Moskowitz had worried that an insufficient number of beds would be available for campers.

The camp program was similar to that in the Dnipropetrovsk Chabad camp. During the short period that this writer was at the camp, the campers seemed happy and the counselors seemed to have a strong sense of direction and to work well with the campers. The Moskowitzes were so pleased with the American counselors that several were asked to stay on in Kharkiv for the following school year to be teachers and youth leaders. However, it seemed unlikely that any would do so as each had signed contracts for specific teaching positions in the United States.

As in the Yad Yisroel camp operated by Karliner-Stoliner hasidim, this writer met with the American counselors (seven of the ten) to discuss their experiences in the camp. The session was less satisfactory than the meeting in Khmel'nitsky due to: (1) lack of time; (2) much less prior contact -- and thus a lower comfort level -- between the interviewer and interviewees as the session occurred just several hours after I had arrived in the camp, whereas the meeting in Khmel'nitsky took place at the end of my fourth full day in their camp; and (3) the

periodic appearance of Rabbi and Mrs. Moskowitz, who made no attempt to intervene, but whose recurring presence in the background may have inhibited discussion.

In common with the American counselors in the Yad Yisroel camp, the Chabad counselors said that **they all had learned about the camp** from friends and/or older siblings who had worked at the Kharkiv camp in previous summers. Because most of the counselors were studying at the same Chabad seminary in New Jersey, they had had ample opportunity to share their knowledge of the camp with each other.

None of their parents had objected to their desire to work at a summer camp in Ukraine. Their families all thought it would be a good experience and a mitzvah. The family of one of the counselors was especially pleased that she would be in Kharkiv because the counselor's forebears had come to the United States from the Kharkiv area.

In discussing the **differences between Jewish summer camps in Ukraine and in the United States**, the Chabad counselors cited:

- Their own inability to speak and understand Russian, which caused many communications problems; the local counselor/interpreters were very helpful, they said, but some communications difficulties persisted.
- The large proportion of girls from broken homes and troubled families; these youngsters required substantial attention, but language problems complicated communications.
- Poor personal hygiene practices of the campers, some of which were caused by widespread acceptance of numerous superstitions concerning the origins of various diseases.
- The Ukrainian campers were more appreciative of attention, small favors, and modest gifts, probably because of the emotional and material fragility of their lives in troubled, impoverished families; they rarely complained about anything.

The Chabad counselors thought that **their presence in the camp brought two major benefits to the campers**:

- Creation of a Jewish atmosphere, something many girls had never experienced previously; infusion of a Jewish spirit in their lives.

- Transmission of specific Jewish knowledge to the campers.

However, the **heterogeneous nature of the campers regarding their Jewish backgrounds** -- some with no Jewish education and some who were pupils at the Chabad day school -- created a trying situation; it was difficult to teach Judaism when the Jewish educational levels of campers within any given age group differed so substantially. (Two hours each day in the camp program were devoted to informal Jewish education.)

Regarding **benefits that they derived from their camp counseling experience in Ukraine**, the counselors concurred that the chief benefit was an appreciation for what they had at home, i.e., loving families and strong Jewish backgrounds.

Unlike their counselor counterparts at the Yad Yisroel camp in Khmelnytsky, the counselors at the Kharkiv Chabad camp quickly reached consensus on the **desired future for the Ukrainian Jewish girls** whom they had come to know. The girls should go to Israel and build lives for themselves there, the counselors said, even if family members do not want to accompany them and they must go alone. Several counselors stated that various campers told them that they saw no future for themselves in Ukraine.

OBSERVATIONS

Visits to Cities

29. The emergence of multiple national organizations (in Ukraine) purporting to represent the national Jewish population parallels Jewish communal development in other countries. The acceleration of this process in 1997 reflects both the accumulation of wealth by a number of Ukrainian Jews in the mid-1990s and the prolonged absence from the country of Rabbi Yaakov D. Bleich, Chief Rabbi of Kyiv and Ukraine.

30. Projected increases in Jewish day school enrollments following decreases attributed to emigration are puzzling (and, in any case, will remain only projections until confirmed by actual enrollments in September). Current speculation regarding reasons behind projected enrollment growth center on: (1) material benefits offered by most day schools, such as hot meals and free bus transportation; (2) growing reputations for excellence in general studies in many day schools, in contrast to the ongoing deterioration of secular public schools; and (3) attraction of Hebrew language study and other Judaic courses in day schools to families who are considering aliyah.

Jewish Summer Camps

31. The continuing demand for places in Jewish summer camps may reflect little more than the wish of parents to provide their children with a vacation in which their material needs will be well addressed. Nonetheless, experience in the successor states and elsewhere shows that participation in informal Jewish education such as that available in a Jewish summer camp can be very effective in enhancing the Jewish identity of children and, especially, adolescents. Notwithstanding their enormous cost (and the inability of the vast majority of Jewish families in Ukraine to pay even a small portion of the expense required for their child's attendance at camp), Jewish camping experiences should be made available to more Jewish children and adolescents in Ukraine and the other post-Soviet successor states.

32. Two of the three religious camps visited by the writer -- the Yad Yisroel girls' camp in Khmel'nitsky and the Chabad girls' camp near Dnipropetrovsk -- were seriously understaffed. Whereas financial constraints and/or other factors may preclude these camps from ever reaching the ratio of skilled counselors to campers -- one counselor for every five or six campers -- that is common in better American camps, it is likely that both camps will be able to increase their staff complement significantly without incurring extraordinary additional costs. Their own experience and that of other camps in Ukraine demonstrate that many effective counselors from the United States (and some from Israel) will pay their own airfare (or at least a portion of their airfare) to Ukraine and work as unsalaried volunteers

In addition to engaging more staff counselors, both of these camps require reinforcement of their management ranks.²⁹ The Yad Yisroel camp was able to deal with a medical emergency during the girls' session only because their

²⁹ My visit to the Kharkiv Chabad girls' camp was too brief to assess management at that camp.

director from New York happened to be visiting the camp at the time and was able to assist Rabbi and Mrs. Charach in addressing various issues that arose. It is likely that appointment of additional management personnel will entail additional expense.

Other

33. The principle of accountability requires that donor-supported programs be accessible to donors and their representatives. Thus, thousands of foreign Jewish lay leaders and professionals in the UJA-Federation system (and its counterparts in other countries) have toured large and small Jewish communities throughout the vast territory of Russia, Ukraine, and the other post-Soviet successor states. Their major concerns have been operations of both the Jewish Agency for Israel (Sochnut), whose principal mission is to promote and organize aliyah (immigration to Israel), and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which supports a variety of welfare, culture, and education programs in Jewish population centers in the new post-Soviet states. Both organizations receive their primary American funding from UJA-Federation communities.

Few managers of such programs in the successor states would begrudge the interest of donors. Yet some donor visits disrupt the very activities that they support. Agency staff time is diverted to guest programming and supervision; guests with superficial knowledge (of the successor states, local Jewish populations, and service agencies) often misinterpret what they see and hear and, subsequently, what they convey to others; and the needs of clients may be neglected in favor of the actual or imagined demands of guests.

Perhaps the greatest damage has been done to programs in some of the Jewish Agency summer camps. In several instances, camps have been convened (and then concluded) artificially early in the summer vacation period to accommodate the schedules of foreign guests who would subsequently attend the Jewish Agency Assembly in Jerusalem in late June. Camp sessions, now reduced in duration because of budgetary constraints, have been distorted further to provide rehearsal time for programs to be presented to visiting donors. The visits themselves generate tension among both youngsters and staff.

Similarly, JDC escorts foreigners through the apartments of selected needy Jewish elderly in the successor states, exploiting their poverty and loneliness. Seldom are such visits preceded or followed by serious deliberation among the visitors about preserving the dignity of older Jews.

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Both the Jewish Agency and the Joint Distribution Committee summon professional staff members from distant points to meet visitors in a specific city, a practice doubtless more efficient than transporting donors to multiple points on the service map of an organization. Nonetheless, such travel by professionals is disruptive to the operations of the agency and often of little benefit to visitors who find it difficult to appreciate the role of individuals whose work in distant cities lacks local context. The presence of too many traveling professionals may also undermine the authority of local professionals.

Visits by donors and their representatives to UJA-supported programs in the successor states must and will continue. The organizers of such ventures should be certain that interests of all stakeholders are respected during such visits; current conditions do not justify such assurance.

Betsy Gidwitz
August 20, 1997

UKRAINE



Map of Ukraine

http://www.pathfinder.com/@@XS1WbgcA5*yHdlyS/travel/maps/UKRAINF.html

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