

10,000 Soviet Jews Attended Lubavitch Seders

(JTA) — Some 10,000 Soviet Jews waiting in Italy sat down to what was for most of them their first Pesach seder ever. The Chabad-Lubavitch organization made the seders and sent in rabbinic student volunteers from New York and Israel to lead them.

Like the Hasidic tale of the Jew who still remembered the tree in the forest, but no longer remembered the prayer, for most of these Soviet Jews, "it was a tradition to remember the matzah, but not all the halachot," said Rabbi Yitzhak Chazan, the Lubavitcher rebbe's emissary in Rome, who oversaw the giant operation.

Chazan, in a telephone interview from Rome, said "80 percent might know the details of Pesach" and "some maybe remembered to get matzah, but not to keep kosher for Pesach." But of all the 9,600 Soviet Jews now in Ladispoli and surrounding Italian towns, only "about 1 to 2 percent" have ever experienced a Pesach seder, Chazan estimated.

That is how many Jews are now registered in the transit center in Rome, he said, but Jewish agencies expected a full 10,000 to gather in the Italian towns when Passover began.

"Each day, there are 100 arrivals," Chazan said.

Lubavitch, which is working in tandem with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, held classes for these Soviet Jews on the meaning of Passover, the festival of freedom.

Of the Soviet Jewish children in the Italian towns who have been attending schools administered jointly by Lubavitch and the Joint, "most already knew the 'Ma Nish-tana' (Four Questions), even those who had recently arrived.

In the town of Santa Marinella, Lubavitch announced it distributed a kilo (2.2 pounds) of matzah to each family. "We had a crowd of about 800 to 900 by 6 a.m.," said Chazan. "The local residents didn't understand what was going on. They called the police."

The seders Lubavitch arranged were gargantuan. A seder for 1,200 took place in an athletic field in Ladispoli, which the town's mayor let them use at no charge. In Santa Marinella, 1,800 Soviet Jews sat down in two rooms of one building.

Although it is a time of frustration for the Soviet "waitniks," most of whom wish to come to America as

refugees, the time being spent in Ladispoli and other towns may turn out to be a blessing in disguise.

Chazan likened this time to the 40 years the Jews spent wandering in the desert after leaving Egypt, unlearning their past and preparing themselves anew for entry into a Jewish life.

"It's a good moment for them to get closer to Yiddishkeit," he said. "I think most of them don't get to know something if they go straight to America."

Lubavitch has set up Jewish libraries in Russian for the emigres, and there are shiurim (classes) from 7 a.m. to midnight, Chazan said.

He praised the Joint, with whom he said Chabad had a "beautiful rapport," but bewailed the financial straits it is in as the Soviet influx grows. The Joint was only able to provide 25 percent of the funding Chabad requested, he said, and the only hot food on the seder tables were thousands of hard-boiled eggs.

Students Hosted "Parents Day" at School

The students hosted a special Happy Parents' Day Coffee in honor of Mother's and Father's Day. The parents were treated to a morning of entertainment and service by the children.

The children labored days in advance in preparation for this special event, which served as parents appreciation day. They baked, decorated and frosted individual cakes for their parents. In addition to the many table settings and centerpieces, the children made and presented to their parents beautiful corsages which they pinned on the mothers.

The parents, served coffee and refreshments by their children, were pampered to their hearts delight. Actually, it is a Mitzvah to honor one's parents each and every day of the year, but it is nice that a day is selected to highlight the importance of this Mitzvah.

Students of the kindergarten held a unique musical performance for the parents, under the guidance of Terry Tucker, afternoon and music teacher.

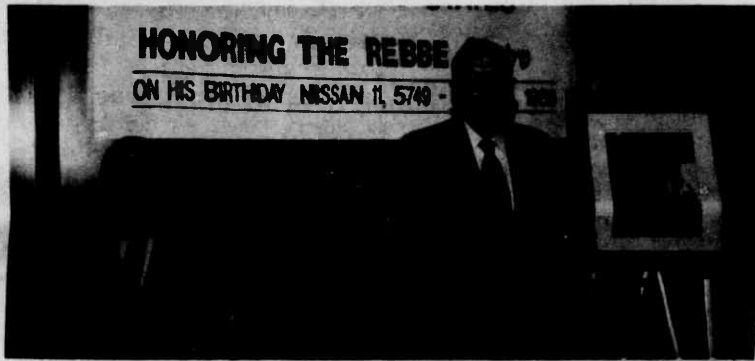


Children performing for parents.



Parents and children enjoyed the cupcakes.

Education Day USA Celebrated



Senator Jesse Helms spoke at the celebration.

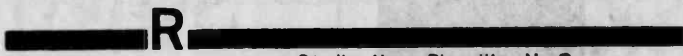
April 16 this year marked the 87th birthday of Rabbi Menachem M. Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe Shlita. Many communities around the world celebrated this day to honor this illustrious Jewish Leader.

A most remarkable celebration was held on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. to mark this day as Education Day U.S.A. A bill passed both houses of Congress designating April 16 as "Education Day" and it was signed by President George Bush in an Oval Office ceremony at the White House.

Congressmen spoke at the Capitol Hill celebration which was attended by hundreds of delegates from all over the country. Each one expressed admiration of the Rebbe's many activities in the field of education.

Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) spoke of his admiration of the work of Lubavitch in Israel, which he personally visited a few years ago on a private mission to that country. Also present were Reps. Howard Coble and Cass Ballinger both from North Carolina.

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