

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON  
RUSSIAN JEWISH IDENTITY  
DECEMBER 19, 2007**

**Gene Rachmansky:** Good morning everyone here in New York, good afternoon in *Yerushalayim*, good afternoon Moscow. I am incredibly incredibly excited to be here this morning, even though I am living in boxes right now, we are moving, so I apologize for being just a few minutes late. We are welcoming this morning one hundred and twenty participants from all over the world, Jerusalem, Moscow and New York. My name is Gene Rachmansky; I am the Chair of the Russian speaking task force of the Commission on Jewish Identity and Renewal here in UJA Federation in New York.

Today we are going to be presenting the findings of a groundbreaking study that our task force has been involved with from its inception. The study today is going to focus on Russian Jewish Identity in the FSU. I think it is obvious that they are going to have implications for identity all over the world. But I think the most important thing that we need to understand is, why we are really gathered here today. We could have very easily just received the study or read it, our opinions and comments and kept on going with life as usual. But unfortunately that is not the way this is going to work.

We are here to listen today, we are here to debate, and we are here to try to understand. I for one, as I mentioned, I am incredibly proud of being a part of this process. Judaism to me, and I believe too many of us is a combination of two journeys. One individual and one collective. In this study we asked almost one thousand people about their individual traits and what we must with them together is to try to be some conclusion about how to reengage the collective. Identity evolves and I saw an article just the other day, I think it was yesterday in the Jerusalem Post and it made some conclusions about this particular study and they called, "Identity Involved," and prior to actually wrote a few of these thoughts.

I believe that is the theme that is theme that is going to come out of this particular study and I just want to speak briefly about my own evolution because I think it is very illustrative of some of the things we are going to see in the study. My own evolution has been seismic as a Jewish individual for being forced to go to a Hebrew school at the age of seven as a young immigrant, for the first time being exposed to the concept of Judaism altogether, lashing out a little bit and I hope my son isn't listening because one of the things I did and I will come back to later was I specifically did this. I ordered a pizza with pork sausage to the rabbi's house. It was a very specific reason that I did this as a child and I will get to that later. Daily, I was asked to leave these two schools, these two Hebrew schools, why? For not being Jewish enough, in my opinion that is what they were trying to say to me.

If I look over this particular study, what I find is that some of the most controversial concepts in my very own beliefs for the fifteen to twenty years of my life and I think that these beliefs are the process of evolution and you can see it to be. Through a stroke of Jewish luck, I received an internship at *NaYad* over three thousand dollars, which is an incredible amount of money for a young university student. Then and there in that exposure I waited to my feelings of obligation and sense of gratitude to the entire collective and not just to myself, to recently telling the world famous chef in his very own kitchen in a small private party and dinner and the chef said, "Are there any knives here where restrictions or concerns, any allergies?" and I said, "Yes for me and my wife no pork and shellfish please." He has thrown people out of his kitchen on TV; he didn't throw me out of the kitchen. As a matter of fact, my wife and I had the best

meal of anyone else, because they all got some bad shellfish, true, I am sorry. So here I am today at this conference.

The Jewish collective journey as we in Israel and Moscow has continued as well. We faced wars at a nation, we faced suppression and freedom in the Soviet Union and unprecedented arise in wealth and influence in the Diaspora and globalization. As I mentioned earlier, this is being seen not only in these other three locations, but in broadcast alive over the Internet, to create one giant where I am going today, a Jewish *shtetl* called Planet Earth. It is interesting that in this same Jewish *stedl* is approaching issues of environmentalism and issues that are necessarily considered at the heart of, let us say the Jewish agenda. But there is an evolution occurring.

I hope that my evolution will continue and I am sure that the Jews' evolution will continue. Many of you know the famous loss of our friend Rosenzweig who when he was asked if participated in various Jewish traditions, I think they were specifically referring to *tefillin*, "*adayin lo*, not yet." I think that it is very illustrative that there is a very popular and successful informal and formal education network throughout the Former Soviet Union referred to as a dying law, and it is incredible and it is very inspiring that they have taken on that particular philosophy and name.

Finally, I would just like to say one thing. People are going to read this day, to some people there is going to be old news in here, to others will be a paradigm shift. All I want to say is that the main thing to take of these studies is a sense of urgency. There are hundreds and thousands of people that are potentially there for us to engage with, as brothers, as partners and I was almost lost, let us not lose hundreds of thousands of others. So thank you everyone who works on behalf of Jewish organizations around the

world to put this on the top of the agenda, because I truly believe that this is something that that we need to face and challenge together and not individually. So let us continue our pledge journey.

Now, I would like to begin the presentation, I am going to introduce Professor Asher Arian who is the Scientific Director of the Goodman Center of Applied Social Research in Israel Democracy Institute. But before I do so, I just want to mention that reorganizations that were day-to-day involved in preparing the study, the Institute of Jewish Studies of the CIS the Gutman Center in the Israeli Democracy Institute and the Levada Center in Russia. So Professor Asher Arian, just we are going to run this by me asking you a few questions to each of the panelists.

So the questions to you are if you could please comment on the methodology of that was used to conduct the study and the quality of the this as a piece of academic research and also how the findings compare to those of previous surveys done on Russian Jewry? So Professor Arian.

**Prof. Asher Arian:** Thank you very much. Professor the programs were on for a semester and were based on our terms and that was my dilemma when I was told that I have to ten minutes. It is a daunting task but before I begin I want to express my thanks for the opportunity of being involved in this study. I do want to make an autobiographical part of my father and my mother's parents came from that part of the world for study and they would be very very pleased. My father was very impressed; my father would believe every word I am going to say. So I am very very glad that I was invited to this. I also want to express my deep gratitude to people who were involved in the study of the Government sector of the Israel Department, they are here with us, I will

simply mention their names Dr. Rafael ben Pora, Michael Filipov and Eli Sapir. Thank you to all of you.

This project was a very difficult challenge. We have very rich data sets and questions like this in Israel, in the other countries of the world, in the United States. We don't have exactly these questions of this format in the Soviet Union. An interesting angle was that we have, as you know a million immigrants from the Soviet Union, so we could and we did make a comparison with that group. What we were interested in doing was sampling the Jews in Russia and in the Ukraine. This is a very difficult task. It would be proper, appropriate to draw a representative sample of that group but that is probably undoable this time, because the universe is simply unknown.

I know that we were very innovated and clever in the way we did draw our samples, but I do not believe that we overcame all of the difficulties. What we did was to draw two samples, a representative sample of what were defined as Jewish Activists and then a snowball sample of Jews in these two countries. A snowball sample is really, tell me of other people you know and I will continue and attract the park and the snowball built, obviously if you don't start with a good representative nucleus then the whole ball is spewed one way or the other. So, we don't really know how accurate the snowball sample is, but we do know that we have four or five hundred interviews, lately face-to-face interviews of Jews from this part of the world.

I want to concentrate on the findings that we did discover. It is easy to go on about the shortcomings; it is easy to go on about the difficulties of sampling, but I want to focus on what we did discover and I am doing this in terms of a comparison that the

results of this survey and surveys that have been done in Israel among Jews and among Russian immigrants is Israel as well.

I want to make three points. First, I want to stress the non-religious definition of Judaism by the Russian and Ukrainian response. These are secular non-observant behaviors that are more acceptable. This is the form that is prevalent in the Former Soviet Union, in Russia and in the Ukraine, less so in Israel with the immigrants from the Former Soviet Union in the middle. Let me give you an example. Among many types of questions we asked whether you fast on *Yom Kippur*? Now we all have experience with surveys, I don't know exactly whether respondent hears when he hears "Do you fast on *Yom Kippur*?" Does that mean like my grandfather once told me. "I fasted till lunch. Does it mean I fast every year maybe? We don't know." But we take the responses as they spout.

So, when we asked the question, "Do you fast on *Yom Kippur* among Israeli Jews," seventy-nine percent say yes. This is based on the obvious high Nachman Study of 1999. When we asked the Russian and Ukrainian in this study, "Do you fast on *Yom Kippur*," thirty-nine percent said yes. So seventy-nine to thirty-nine. Among Russian immigrants to Israel sixty percent said yes.

Now, the interpretation of the gaps is an interesting one. Does coming to Israel activate some kind of religious behavior or is the cultural and social setting such as the behavior change, perhaps only the answer changes. But this is the finding that we find across the board, the most religious type expression is found among Israeli Jews, the most of the least religious type of expression of Judaism was found in the Russian study and in the middle of the Russians.

We can compare this for example with studies that Professor Tzvi Gittelman did about ten years ago of Jews in Israel and in this sample for example most of the Russians recorded that they are not married to a Jew nor are they intending to marry a Jew. That is the same result that we found ten years later. It is a non-observant kind of expression of a Jew.

The second point I want to stress is the generational difference that we have found consistently throughout the study. The young see in their Jewishness something much more positive than older. This is a finding of great robustness that has to be understood more. This generational difference talks less about fear of anti-Semitism and more about uniqueness of identity and this, it seems to me is an opportunity and a challenge for all the organizations that deal with this problem.

Third, I want to report the results of the question that we asked, I believe it is in the pamphlet. The question was, what behavior must a real Jew or a true Jew observe? What behavior must he or she do? At is a topical list was to remember the Holocaust. Second, was to defend the honor of Judaism. There is a historical awareness in the definition of Jewishness among Russian and Ukrainian Jews that is noteworthy. I can also report that we have made this comparison with similar surveys that were done years ago and we find the same order. The difference is that this year, for the first time a new element, a new answer that was asked and two, which was low on the list has come forward and is higher and that is the importance of knowing Jewish history. The important of knowing Jewish history becomes a sign as a badge of Jewishness. This too seems to be beyond behavioral, beyond the attitudinal to be an element of great importance with a great problem.

So, I will summarize by saying that these three elements, non-religious definition, the generational problems and the historical awareness are the messages that I want to stress of this study. Thank you.

**Gene Rachmansky:** Thank you very much Professor. Now David Palant, who is the Director at the Institute for Jewish Studies in the CIS will provide us with a summary of the findings and what the Institute really hoped to accomplish with these findings. How they would like to see them used moving forward. So David.

**David Palant:** Hi Gene, hi everybody. First of all I want to welcome all of you, thanks for coming here. Recently I have read in the weekly *torah* portion about *Yosef* about Joseph who goes at his father's request to find his brothers. He meets a stranger in the desert and the stranger asks him, "Where are you going to?" *Yosef* is answering, "I seek my brethren, and I am looking for my brothers."

In the past few decades the Jewish people have been united seeking our brothers in the FSU, first in order to assist them under the yoke of the Soviet regime and later on to help them reconnect to the Jewish people and the Jewish tradition. Rabbi Steinsaltz and his Institute were the first to launch an open educational organization in Russia in 1989 and ever since then we have been there constantly seeking our brothers together with many other organizations.

There is a famous joke about children who wanted to do a good deed and to help an old lady to cross the street. They just forgot one little thing, to ask her if she is actually interested in crossing the street. Indeed, we should ask ourselves, "To what extent do we expect our activities in light of the needs and expectations of our target

population. How do Jews to whom we direct our efforts see our activities and the value system that we offer to them?

The leaders of such a search examination arose about two years ago. It was quite late, but as you say, "Better late than ever," and fortunately we approach our friends in the UJA Federation in New York and they agreed to become partners in this project. Together with the Goodman Center and with the ... Center we carried out this survey. I also want to extend my thanks to all the participants in these big projects and to the organization that helped us to collect information from various communities, especially to the Jewish Agency. A special thanks I to make to the American Joint Distribution Committee, our valued partners for the support of the role of the Rabbi Steinzart in the FSU since 1989.

The scope of the ... in terms of Christians and a number of interviewers in the method and the employment of the research made a meeting in the first of its kind. We had one major goal, to gain better understanding of Russian, Ukraine Jewry and acquire a more accurate idea of what should and should not be done. I am sure that the vast amount of information in this research, the main point of which we are presenting to you today, while its full publication is expected within a few months, we will have all the Jewish organizations that operate in the FSU.

Instead of getting into details of the research finding, let me point to some of the major issues that they bring up. Generally speaking the Jewish identity of Russia and the Ukrainian Jews is paradoxical. They seem to be holding both ends of the rope. They reject in a way the acceptance per premises of the Jewish world. If we thought that they would really adopt the model of Jewishness that we brought along with us, we may find

ourselves wrong. Most of the Jews think that the definition of Jewishness is subjective and totally unrelated to any external factor, such as Lifestyle or the acceptance of specific value system.

For example, thirty-three percent of them think that Judaism is a subjective definition and one way or another fifty-three percent of them don't define Judaism by parents. As such, he or she can be married to a non-Jew, yet it would not be considered assimilation. Assimilation is when a Jew ceases to see himself as a Jew and such assimilation they are willing to fight. Sixty-one percent of the people that were asked said that they think we should fight assimilation, even though forty-seven percent of them are married to non-Jews. So it is quite a bother.

A real majority of the Jews, I am talking about seventy-five percent of them, both those who are active or affiliated or non-affiliated in the Jewish communities are proud of their Jewishness and consider themselves part of the Jewish nation. Eighty percent of the Jews consider themselves part of the Jewish nation. At the same time through many of them, think that hiding the Jewish identity is a convenient solution for living in the Diaspora. Forty-three percent think that hiding their Jewish identity is a convenience; it is more convenient in the Diaspora.

While they support the State of Israel, seventy-one percent, forty-seven percent of them do not see it as a factor that defines their Jewish identity. For most of them the framework that we created for them by their brothers who came from afar and not through their own initiative, are not a Jewish home or focus on belonging. I ma referring to the Jewish establishment, which I do not feel that I can term maybe a Jewish community, because in a way a Jewish community is something like created by the

people and I am not so sure that in Russia, if at least some of the communities, maybe more, if they would have taken the establishment, it would have taken the wars, it is a big question, who would have stayed. Would the people who are still there, would retain and go on keeping the community or not? I think it is a very big question. So I refer it to calling a Jewish establishment.

This is not why this riches was needed, and we after eighteen years of activities in the FSU, the figures in research are for me those many thousands of Jews that I have met and learnt to know better, respect and hopefully also to understand. I know that even though those who formally belong to the establishment do not see themselves as part of it.

What is the bottom line of all this finding? What is the main lesson that it teaches us? I think that the message of the Russian Jewry is the following. We have survived communism and have remained Jewish. Jews without an agenda and we are proud of that kind of Jewishness without an agenda. We passed it on most difficult times and we should respect it rather be criticizes. The essence of Jewishness according to them has nothing to do with where one lives; who one sleeps with; what one eats; who ones parents or who one votes for? We do not have to accept this but we must understand it.

Remember, Russian Jews are the great survivors and should such a situation arise, they will outlive us as well. The experience of standing in front of people and speaking with them without having the slightest notion what they think about us and about what we are saying is very familiar to all those who participated in educational activities in the FSU. We can easily delude ourselves, we believe that their smile expresses consent. It is more difficult to realize that sometime perhaps we do not really understand them.

They want to make a step ahead. They want to become more Jewish. They want to learn and be part of us. Their numbers speak for themselves. Ninety-one percent want to know more about Judaism and learn about Jewish history and tradition. That is what the Russian Jew is telling us and this is what I hear from the numbers and from the people, “For so many years I did it my way. I want the way for the future that I want to work together with you to be mine.”

About a year and a half ago when we decided to establish the *Mela Medi*, the Center for Informal Jewish Education, we realized that we much change our methods and rules of the game. We did not wait for the research results. We realized that the relationship between them and us must be an egalitarian, mutual, interactive and by no means patronizing on our part. We must stop hunting for Jews and start venting with them; closeness; contacts; moving along together; advancing together; learning together how to build Jewish life.

In the final analysis, and I believe it is true to all of us; every individual constructs his own unique form of Judaism. We can assist by providing building blocks and models, but it is they who eventually construct the Jewish home and Jewish identity in whatever way they choose. Just as it is in the words of the Internet as we call it “Web Two,” where we supply the platform and the tools while the contents are being provided by the users.

We can also put in differently, let us talk business. The client is always right. There are not bad clients. We cannot possibly tell a client that he is wrong or not good enough or does not sufficiently belong. The client does not have to do anything; he will buy the goods if he thinks that they suit his needs, if they are worth his while.

If we fail, the failure is ours, either because of the quality of the product or due to the marketing technology. If we succeed and they buy the goods it is not because they turned to be into better Jews, they have been always good Jews, but now they have more, because they got what they wanted.

In return for that they must pay. Sometimes with money, but mostly with partnership. Let them give us their experience in return, and thus help. That helps us find new things that we have long forgotten. Let them teach us what is the meaning of real Jewish memory, such as memories from grandfather's home that can sustain all Jewishness for decades. Things that we have not even had the privilege to forget. They illustrate for us what through Jewish heroism is, what it means to choose an illusive and ill-defined Jewish identity in a hostile world? How many opportunities have we had to choose our Jewish hereditary. Let them share with us their fresh, clean, intellectual and cultural thinking in the content with their values of Jewish tradition and cultural. Things that our minds have become blended to their novelty and beauty, sometimes also to the criticism and doubts.

This sort of payment will enrich us, not less than it will benefit them. I believe that we will eventually see the contribution of Russian Jewry that have made to the Jewish world will far exceed what the Jewish world will have invested in them. With such an understanding faith, meekness and devotion, the problem we are facing will become challenges, tools of growth for the entire Jewish world.

On this day in which we are commemorating the beginning of the destruction of the Jerusalem, may we see the light of the hope of redemption, a redemption that Jews themselves will bring to their nation and to the entire world? Thank you.

**Gene Rachmansky:** Dudi, always a pleasure and always inspiring to hear you speak. I, and I think everyone else in this room should gain great comfort that you are on the frontlines in Moscow addressing these issues with us as partners. So thank you very much.

Now is my incredible honor now to get to what we could call our guests the heart of the lineup. We assembled three incredible speakers, respondents to the study for us today. One in Jerusalem, one in Moscow and one in New York and we are going to begin with Natan Sharansky in Jerusalem and then Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz needs no introduction to this group and to probably most of the English speaking, Hebrew speaking, Russian speaking world. Natan just a brief note.

The other day I had the opportunity to see a preview of the film Refusnik, which obviously you were the star of and there was a room in this building about a hundred and twenty former Soviet Jews, many of them my age and younger and I can tell you this, there was not a dry eye in the house. So Natan it is an incredible honor to introduce you, the floor is your and the podium is yours. We only gave you ten minutes; if you need more don't worry about it.

**Natan Sharansky:** I would like to thank everybody for participating and contributing in this wonderful project. I want to say Professor Arian was complaining that as a professor he doesn't all constitute to his lecture and in just ten short minutes I as a politician who is used to sound bite don't know what to do with these ten minutes on such simple issue.

I was asked how I see the future of the Jewish from the Former Soviet Union? I can say as a Zionist, as a passionate Zionist I see the future of all the Jews, not only of the

Former Soviet Union but also of the United States of America and Europe; I see the future of all the Jews in Israel or in close connection with Israel. One can say if that is the case, then you have to be deeply disappointed with the results of this survey. In fact, I think these surveys are very revealing, very encouraging and I hope also it will put to rest to some of the old Jewish wars that are still taking place sometimes about the Former Soviet Union.

Because I want to believe that the waves of refugees escaping the Soviet Union and are running away from state anti-Semitism is behind us. This I want to believe. I think that every rational Zionist should build his home and encouraging more, a big *aliyah* all through strengthening Jewish identity, through strengthening the desire of Jews to be part of this work, historical chain of Jewish generations, from the exodus of Egypt and continues to these days. From this point really the story is very interesting. First of all the pride in being Jewish, seventy-five percent are proud to be Jewish and among the young generation it is even higher.

I want to say it will take one generation back, the station was almost opposite, in fact to be Jewish it was like illness, so decent people would not even talk publicly about somebody Jewish sitting in the room, because it is like to remind somebody that he has got some very bad disease. Now if old people, other generations still get some positive feeling about their Jewishness, there was some positive meaning in their Jewishness. For young generations when I was the young generation, it was long ago, but for young generations all the meaning of Jewishness was a fantasy so it was negative. So the Jewish pride was absent in the young generation. In fact, we did need Israel, we did need

the Six Day War, and we did need Entebbe in order to bring back this Jewish pride through Israel.

Today, we see how this so-called non-Zionist absolutely assimilated community; Jewish pride is a very strong factor. The second thing is, of course, ninety-one percent want to learn Jewish history. Eighty-eight percent want to learn Jewish tradition. Everybody who came from absolutely assimilated background like myself and then was exposed to Jewish history and Jewish tradition knows what a powerful source of strength it is. What a powerful source or reconnection to the community of discovering your identities. So this again, it is a very important factor.

Finally, there are many interesting things what I want to stress, the final word is when they are asking, "What is the reason for anti-Semitism?" Israel, as the source of policies and the sources of anti-Semitism is the less important factor. I would like to see this same kind of form made in France or in England just in these days when so many Jews are saying that anti-Semitism came to Europe because Israel doesn't do this and doesn't do that. But it shows that while Jewish pride is on the rise, there is no connection in their view between anti-Semitism and the behavior of Israel. So, they are absolutely open and I would say positive to connections with Israel.

I do hope that this gives us an opportunity to finally finish, to end the wars, which I remember continued for the last thirty years when I was still a refusenik in that film which you saw some days ago and until the recent days in Moscow when it was said that true Zionist is not building Jewish communities. True Zionists has to make everything to move Jews, but not to build Jewish communities. You see this shows that it is able to come and say, "Why are you here, why are you not leaving to Israel," unfortunately some

of our leaders are doing to this day, is not the way. Nobody will respond. But if you are coming with the idea of strengthening your connection with Jewish history, with Jewish traditions, why you must be proud to be Jewish and why you should not be ashamed, you should be proud of the position of the State of Israel. That is something that can be heard, the soil is very good and that will be the remains of the future waves of *aliyah*.

Originally I was not supposed to be Zionist, I was supposed to be a specialist in physics and there, that is why until this day I understand everything in terms of physical formulas. When you are talking about the energy and the system, when you speak about connecting energy, energy of the movement and potential energy and what is important then is the sun. Zionist energy is like energy of movement; connecting energy; how to move people; potential energy; the energy of identity, of Jewish community or connection yourself history. There is the energy, which will define whether you have connecting energy there to move to Israel.

So, I do believe that these two important Zionist activities has important parts of the same process and this shows to us that there is a hope, that there is opportunity and there is a lot of work to do to strengthen the Jewish community and to strengthen as the result to strengthen ties. Thank you.

**Gene Rachmansky:** Thank you. What makes me very proud is that primarily when you call me at the Jewish conference can you use analogies for physics and everyone understands what you are talking about it, so thank you very much.

The next respondent will travel one time zone I think to Moscow and we have Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz who is the President of the Institute for Jewish Studies in the CIS, again the organization of the primer scribe in this particular study. Rabbi Steinsaltz,

most of you probably know but if you do not know, has been really one of the leaders and in the forefront of bringing Jewish tradition and Jewish history and Jewish outreach into the Former Soviet Union for the last, I think it is two decades, but one at least, so I give the floor to Rabbi Steinsaltz. It is an honor rabbi.

**Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz:** Thank those that are here and those that I see from afar, hopefully they are not only sitting but also listening, not necessarily to me, but I am sure that there will be lots of wisdom will be heard in this conference, formally and informally.

Now, this survey, which is surely a very necessary thing, it is never complete. We are as this survey at least indicates, we came to know only a part of those who are in any way and any format Jews in the Former Soviet Union, because as the people themselves think, as the feeling of almost everybody that touches the subject is that there are many more that are still, for one reason or another, hiding. Some think they are so well hidden that they hardly remember it and they have the children who find it as a shocking surprise that their parents were Jews. So there are many of these. We didn't yet get to them, but at least there are numbers, there are potentials in that.

Now, the survey, as much as it can tell us anything, it tells us certain things that as my friend Dudi Palant said before, we were working in many ways, I would say intuitively in similar lines. This survey was in a way helped by us, pushed by us but surely not handled by us, so the results they come as a surprise but they come as a very good re-strengthening of a position.

Let me just point to two or three points, which I think are important. One of them is, there are still in Russia and Ukraine and in the other places of the Former Soviet

Union, there are still people who not only are in one way or another identified as being Jews, but people who want to continue it. People that want to do something more or less in order to continue it. People who are fighting against something, which they hardly understand or hardly define, which is assimilation and essentially they are quite right about the fact that assimilation and intermarriage are not identical. Assimilation may lead to intermarriage or vice versa.

But there are two different aspects of something that may be connected or not, but they are two very different things. But, the fact that they are Jews and if we can say that their service says something about the majority of the people, it means they are still people that we can work for. We are not trying to push and bribe those people who couldn't escape the clutches of the Jewish Agency, the Joint and other very nice groups that tried to do it, but rather that people want it.

Now, what do they want is something else, because one of the other things that we came to see from the survey as well is that in some ways the work of the Soviet regime, were called to say Stalin's regime, he was successful in disrupting, perhaps destroying the Jewish community. The Jewish community as a community, as a group, that is coherent and works together is something that has now ceased to be. It may, and it is very important if it will ever become congealed again from very separate individuals in different places that will come together to reform into something that is a unit. I am not speaking about a unity, but rather about a unit that will become something of a unit that can work together and do things together.

But, it also shows that even though there is so much done by institutions, all kinds of institutions and all kinds of establishments from ultra religious to ultra non-religious.

It seems that the Russian Jews, at least retained some of the major notion they had for a few hundred years. They never believed the Chernovnik, they never believed the official and if you come as an official you are not to be believed in whatever capacity you are.

So that was one of the things that was detained, which means you can send them whatever you want and they will be, as most Russian Jews in Russia at least are nice and polite. They will smile at you and they will clap their hands, but they won't believe a word of what you say as long as you are a Chernovnik. When you cease to be that and you try to do something else, not as establishment, not as a person who is trying to create something or force something on you, then some of them will listen, some of them will hear things.

So that means that the necessity of doing things, not in creating formal meetings or formal sittings or other things that are done together and in a group and they are very well focused, these are not important. What is important to somehow find ways, not just formal ways, ways of getting to the individuals whom we have to add? We don't know them, they are not easy to identify. We sometimes will never know who they are and who is not, but we have to find ways of reaching them or at least to open the gates and to make the roads for them to reach us, and by us I am do not mean this Institution or another Institution, but to reach the Jewish core, the cause and that is another point that comes out of this research, which is, in that case not a very easy one.

The fact that so many of the people in the survey decided that Judaism is a matter, which is completely and entirely subjective, that it has no definition like anything is in one way, you may say it shows that we are a real normal nation. If you ask a Frenchman to define what is Frenchness, he surely won't give you a good answer. If you ask a

Russian what it means to be a Russian he won't give you an answer. He will say, "I am a Russian, it is clear, it is simple." So the point is, if the Jew says in the same way, "I am a Jew," without any means or any ability to define it, is not in itself bad.

The problem is that in other nations there is the identity because you live in this place, you live in this country, therefore you belong to it. Or you speak in this language; this is another way of belonging. Or in a way you work with and for this community or this society.

In our case, we have a sentiment of Jewishness that in itself doesn't have any of the definitions, it is not a normal nationhood but is a kind of a strange phenomenon still hovering of a Judaism that in many cases is something like a zero group. It is a definition that doesn't have any contents. It is a definition of something of "I am a Jew in some way, but I don't know what it is and what it means, and why I am there or why I am not there." This is something that I am saying there should not be, I am saying it not as a criticism, but just as a challenge, because our challenge is to fill up that gap. To fill it up by some kind of knowledge, of something like not just a vague and unclear identity, but something that has some kind of a meaning, which is among other things, in some ways they survey touched upon these points, perhaps not enough, which is, "Okay, I am a Jew, by my own definition, by somebody else's definition but whatever it is. I am a Jew."

So then the question is, "What are you ready to do for it?" I think that that is a very important question. Should we address it to the people but it should be addressed to everybody. "Okay, I am a Jew." How does it represent itself? Is it just a matter of missing a statement, an empty statement that has no contents or does it have any kind of a content in "I am ready to do something, ready to do something for it."

Let me say in America they used to say, “You should put your money where your mouth is.” I am telling many people in here and in surely in America and many other countries, “Now put your soul where you put your money in.” I know this is a much more difficult demand, but that is what the outcome has to be. It is not what happens while I am doing something or I making some kind of a talking statement, but that is one thing.

Let me just say one other thing, which is, if I would say that this survey, they found out something, which is clearly positive, it is that these Jews by whatever vague and perhaps non-existent definition are Jews, they remembered one thing, which is so very strong in every Jewish book from the book of Genesis to the end of every other book, which is that in many ways as an individual is remaining an individual, basically by having a chain of memories. That is what makes us into a person. That is what makes my self as an I, as a kind of a chain of memories.

So they got a notion that if we are to be a member of a nation, to be a nation, to be something, it is the chain of memories. Tell your son, as a very major command, which is, it is not only enough to have some kind of a vague notion, but also to keep it, to give it to my children, to my children’s children in order that they will carry on. Now, this feeling for the memory, for the carrying from generation to generation, this is something that I think should be stressed, not only in the Former Soviet Union, but throughout the Jewish world, which is, if you cannot do anything, if you don’t belong, at least remember what has to be done.

**Gene Rachmansky:** Rabbi Steinsaltz, thank you very very much for those inspiring words. Now unfortunately we have a Chernovnik speaking next, right after

Rabbi Steinsaltz posing of a challenge to the Chernovniks. So we have Steve Schwager who is probably head of one the most influential and active organizations working in the Former Soviet Union, CEO of the American Joint Distribution Committee and Steve is going to reply with some practical implications for what do the results of this survey need for funders or they need for people who are going to apply programs and create programming, so I give the floor to you Steve.

**Steve Schwager:** Thanks Gene. It is hard to compete with Rabbi Steinsaltz and Natan Sharansky, but I will try. First as I read the study, I come away saying that the glass is half full, meaning that a lot has been accomplished in the Former Soviet Union by so many Jews, but there is still much more work to be done.

If you try and get a handle first of the number of Jews to be reached in the Former Soviet Union, I can say that my friends at the Jewish Agency think all across the Former Soviet Union there are a million law of return Jews. We in the Joint think there may be a million and a half law of return Jews. My friends in *Chabad* think there are five million. So you choose the number you like. Whatever number you choose, the fact of the matter is that if you look at all of the people we are reaching between welfare services; Jewish identity services; the synagogue life, mostly *Chabad* and local indigenous organizations, collectively I would venture to say we probably reach six hundred thousand people. So, if I am right, that there is a million and a half law of return Jews, there are nine hundred thousand people that have not touched Judaism in any way, shape or form. We have to find a way to reach those people.

The study points us in a direction of things that need to be done. First of all it talks about individualized connections over formal institutional settings. What it really

should be saying is, it talks about empowering indigenous groups. Gene you talked about a die and low, Genia Levav is one of my oldest friends in St. Petersburg and I have met her in 1991, when I went to one of her first kindergartens and I looked at the place and I said, "Genia, you are my friend and this place is a dump. Let me send you a JDC kindergarten kit," which had furniture, books, all sorts of materials for kids. Genia looked at me and said, "No." I said, "Why not Genia it is better than what you have." She said, "Send me the catalogue and let me pick what I want," which if you know Genia it is exactly what she would say. That is what we did, we sent her a catalogue and we let her pick what she wanted. By the way she picked all of the Jewish material in the kits, she didn't pick some of the other stuff, which was probably fine.

The fact of the matter is, one of the first things we have to accept is that in the Former Soviet Union Jewish life will not be where it is in Israel, not be in where it is like in America, not be what it is like in France. Soviet Jews will create their own Jewish identity within the Former Soviet Union. That is number one.

Number two, we are creating and we will continue to expand our networks of Jewish community centers, centers which offer a surrealistic approach to Judaism where you can come in and be part of the Jewish painters. No other connection to Judaism other than being in a room with other Jewish painters. It can be in a fire rights group, it can be in an author's group, and you come along the continuum with Judaism. No Jew I have met in the Former Soviet Union besides one day I am not connected and the next day I am connected. It is a continuum of people who get on the line in different places, and somewhere along the place they come to different conclusions. Some will decide they are

going to stay, some will decide they are going to make *aliyah* and they will go to Israel. Some make the decision now and some make the decision later.

Finally, if I look at the last chart of the survey, the chart, which talks about the importance of Jewish ceremonies, whether it is circumcision; *barmitzvah*; Jewish marriage and Jewish funeral, it says to me that currently we don't have enough religious pluralism in the Former Soviet Union. That at the moment the religious establishment is mostly *Chabad* with a few others. *Chabad* now has at last count three hundred rabbis in the Former Soviet Union. The Reform Movement at last count had six. Soviet Jews are not orthodox Jews. Some are, the majority is not and we need to find religious alternatives for them to figure out a way to enhance the Reform Movement and the Conservative Movement's presence in the Former Soviet Union.

I think at that point I will stop and say that we will certainly use the survey as we begin to think about our work over the next ten years in the Former Soviet Union.

**Gene Rachmansky:** Thank you very much Steven. Now we have two more brief responses from Jerusalem, Dr. Michael Genevitsky who is the Director of Jewish Agency Russian desk.

**Dr. Michael Genevitsky:** I am also Genovnic with some sensitive background. I am an Educational Director of the FSU division in the Educational Republic of ... I really have self response, as we certainly know is the most cases, the purpose of modern sociological research is the description, the reinforcement, maybe acknowledgment of the well-known phenomenon tendencies and not the discovery of any thing new.

In this context and from this point of view, as a result of research which is discussed today, gives us such a type of acknowledgment and as a re-enforcement and it

is really important and it justifies the logistic support given by the Jewish Agency to this research and it gives us an opportunity to discuss it.

But what seems to me a bit odd in this report is a sense of surprise, the near excitement from the discovery. When I am reading the statement such as many have abandoned all hope that the Jews still living in that issue will continue to be part of the Jewish people and this started to have to show that Russian Jewry ties to the Jewish people are stronger than perceived. I cannot possibly hide my discontent and surprise.

Probably twenty years ago or maybe in 1987 in the beginning of Perestroika the naïve foreign researcher crew for the first time have penetrated the iron curtain could claim such an exposure. But to have it said today, it really sounds to me strange. The same I can tell about anyone of the main conclusions of this research. For example, the definition of Jewishness according to subjective feeling and not according to traditional definitions. Okay, this statement is certainly correct and proved a thousand times by theory and practice, but it underlines a conceptual form of all our educational activities during, at least the last decade.

This year, fifteen thousand children and youngsters took part in the Jewish Agency summer camps. The concept of those camps was built on this definition of Jewish national, the complex dialogue with the subjective feeling and the inner world of the child around the Jewish values and Israel. That in contrast to brainwashing and to vulgar Zionism propaganda. By the way, it is quite obvious that the term Zionism is actually not Zionism it is Tzionism, yes in Russian. Tzionism creates a negative connotation just as communism and pitilism and any other ism in the post Soviet era, post Soviet reality.

Such conclusion as a desire to gain in-depth knowledge of Israel with a view that Zionism is a marginal component of Jewish identity. I think there is no connection between expected negative connotation of this worth, Zionism to the attitude towards the real Israel. So there is no surprise, moreover there is no paradox in such a conclusion. In general, I don't see anything paradoxical in these results.

We sit now in winter and hopefully rainy Jerusalem and there is now summer weather in the Australia, is it a paradox? Is it something contradicting common sense, unexplainable or incomprehensible? The Russian speaking Jewry civilization in many senses is different from other components of the Jewish world and not only in Russia and Ukraine as the same as in Germany, North America and in Israel, and it is certainly doesn't contradict common sense, because you understand it and we can analyze it and we can explain the roots of this phenomenon. This difference demands the highest degree of professionalism and specialization from all of those who are engaged in the Jewish education for Russian speaking Jewry in order to achieve success as well as minimize unnecessary surprises. Thank you.

**Gene Rachmansky:** We would just like to add that I have entered the Jewish Agency summer camps in the Former Soviet Union and I can confirm what Dr. Genevitsky is saying in terms of the way they implement their outreach, it is incredibly effective and does personal philosophy appealing to the consumer and what they are interested in. Surprisingly, I wouldn't mind sending my kids there one day; the level of intellectual discourse there is just unbelievable.

Now, back to Moscow, Dr. Mikhail Chlenovits who is the President of Va'ad, the Federation of Jewish Organizations in Russia and the Chairman of the Euro Asian branch

of the World Jewish Congress. The question to Dr. Chlenovits as our representative of the community that is surveyed is actually linked to and an expert in Russian Jewry, how do you find his findings? Dr. Chlenovits.

**Dr. Chlenovits:** First of all I would like to express my appreciation of the activity of the Center for Jewish Studies sent by Rabbi Steinsaltz, by the Institute of Democracy and the *Levad* Center in Moscow, by really presenting your very important and very interesting study.

On the other hand, I fully share the surprise of Michael Genevitsky that his results seem paradoxical to those who organize it. Actually nothing so paradoxical in that, the majority of the findings were not only known and not only by the Russian Jewry, but also by the majority of those who dealt with the Russian Jewry during the last decades. It is already a long time since different scholars who are studying Jewish identity are speaking about Jewish identities and not only about Jewish identity.

In a number of surveys and the reading of papers, I think by the way some of them written and published by myself, it becomes clear that there are three profoundly different patterns of Jewish identities in the modern world and that is the pattern of the Jewish identity in the western Diaspora number one, in Israel number two, and the Russian pattern of identity number three.

What I think it important to stress here that the Russian type of Jewish identity is not exclusively a result of the activity of the Soviet atheistic State, it is certainly came into reality and forum long before it, and actually in many ways, like also the Jewish identity of the western Diaspora and the states in Western Europe, to the lesser extent in

Latin America are the result of basic world review patterns prevailing in the whole societies where the Jews live.

Just to explain what I mean. More than two hundred years ago during the French War revolution, Conquer Montenier, a proponent of Jewish emancipation expressed his opinion that “the Jews are not forming a nation. But is they think they do, let them come to the convent or to the National Assembly and declare it and we shall immediately expel them from our country.” The Jews were clever enough; they came there and said, “No, no, no, we are certainly not nation.” “What are you, Jews?” was the question from the French society. “Oh yes, we are a religion. We are French of the Mosaic faith.”

When about a hundred years after that, some of the Russian Jews liked this type of approach started to identify themselves as Russians of the Mosaic Faith. The answer of the Russian society was very different “There is no such thing,” they were told as the Russians of the Mosaic Faith. “If you are a Russian, be an orthodox Christian. If you are a *Zid* remain a *Zid*.”

So then came again the question from the society, “What are you, Jews?” “Oh, yeas,” told the Russian Jews, “We are a nation.” That was quite well understandable. So the Russian type of the Jewish identity is nationalistic in its basis, starting somewhere from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. I even dare say more that this type of Jewish identity prevailed, at least the Markwell where the authors of the survey called “Activists of the Jewish Movement,” in the first half of the twentieth century. It was one of the most, we will say, popular and most strongly expressed type of Jewish identity.

We should really understand that the term religion has different meanings and different connotations and different cultural surroundings. In the west religionists mainly

a civic religion when speaking about the million of people who belong to it. In Israel it is certainly a part of orientalist culture of the near eastern culture and understanding of the word religion in Israel to a large extent has been brought by the oriental Jews who made *aliyah*. In Russia religion due to the activity of the Soviet State has become a synonym of belief, which is actually alien to the western European or American culture.

So, the basis of Russia identity is nationally. It is a set of symbols, which people think and here in the survey they are quite well presented. The bricks, the element of components of this set of symbols is more or less close in all the three types of Jewish identities. Some got *Yiddishkeit*, some got genealogy, Israel, Holocaust etc., and we find them here also. But certainly the share of it is very different and we can add also especially the nationalistic patterns some other very important traits, like for instance, shared set of behavioral values of say semi clandestine knowledge; shared rules of sat recognizing each other etc., etc.

Now, what seemed here paradoxical, the attitude towards intermarriage? Intermarriage actually is nothing more than a cultural trait. There is no other culture or no other people as the Jews who so strongly insist of banning intermarriage and proclaiming endogamy as a major role. There are no other such people who violate this rule so energetically as the Jews at the same time.

By telling about cultural rule, well we see our neighbors the Moslems have absolutely no problem over intermarriage. The King of Jordan is a son of a British lady, which doesn't make him say badly for taking this major world position.

\_\_\_\_\_ : The other way around. They don't give their daughters out.

**Dr. Chlenov:** Okay, they do it also, so there are in every culture there are certain cultural rules and here where we have this one. So, it is not a kind of major feature. Yes intermarriage as Rabbi Steinsaltz told us here is not equal to assimilation, assimilation is something different. The nationalistic type of identity to the Russian Jews is quite natural to find, on the one hand negation of assimilation and on the second hand, certainly in a community where about seventy if not more percentage of the marriages are international and acceptance of this rule. Certainly, that nationalistic or national identity is based on a national self-consciousness, on a national self-proclamation.

As for Zionism and an attempt to avoid while deter. As for an attempt to hide the nationality and also the negation of the Chernovnik or formalized the types of propaganda, let us say, that certainly is a result of the Soviet heritage, all three of them. As for the establishment and anti-establishment we see it in all the Jewish communities in all the three types and it is quite natural that we have now here, after the bureaucratic Jewish establishment has formed itself in Russia, Ukraine and the rest of the official countries, certainly we see also the beginning of anti-establishment movement, which expresses itself in different, sometimes quite bizarre ways.

The question is, what should be done and what should be the lesson of the survey to those who are dealing with practical work with the Russian Jews? First, I think, it should be a good lesson for those who deal with the Russian Jewish emigrants in the west or *olim* in Israel. It is, first of all and mostly a lesson for them because, well I don't only believe, I saw it many times, the majority of difficult or sometimes even tragic events and processes in the emigration, they result in the inability of the Jewish host societies and in

Israel to understand, to comprehend the very notion of this secularistic, nationalistic Judaism without religious connotation.

What should be done here probably? Actually, not so much for the local Russian Jewish organizations, because they themselves are the result of this pattern, but for those who are our friends, who really make the noble work of helping us from outside. First of all, is the problem of *indogamen metriniali*, both come into contradiction with the reality and that creates problems.

Monopoly of orthodox Judaism, which is practically visible in the countries of the Former Soviet Union and even will say the presence of the Reform Judaism, which here Mr. Schwager, if I am not mistaken, tried to stimulate or to show it as a kind of an alternative, it doesn't create so much, what I would call, "Genuine Russian Judaism," because it is an important concept from the United States in this situation here in Russia.

As I feel it, there is a very slow process, but I think that it already started of a formation, of what I called "Russian Judaism," in the religious term, not only the secularistic term. It should a denomination, very conservative in form and very liberal in essence, so that the action should be probably, somehow on enlightened Judaism. Mr. Yudowitzky presented us with some attempts, which he and his team and the Jewish Agency and some other organizations like the Joint, like in your organization, are really trying to introduce and trying to do it so that it will more fit the specificity of the Russian Jewry.

My last sentence would be that the Russian Jewry is really a big problem for the Jewry as such. It is an integral part of the Jewish people, of Judaism of Jewry and the number of them in the world is somewhere from three to five million persons, which is

quite a bit and important part of the Jewish people. Yes about a million and two still live in the Former Soviet Union will continue to do so. Thank you.

**Gene Rachmansky:** Thank you very much. Dr. Chlenov for your unique perceptive. Our final speaker and then we will open up the floor to questions. Our final speaker is Avraham Infeld of Jerusalem. He is the President of the Chase Family Foundation and we will ask Avraham to please comment on educational implications if any, of the findings of his study.

**Avraham Infeld:** Thank you very much. I really have very little to say after hearing Mr. Chlenov. I guess, I agree with almost everything that he has said. I have to agree with it, because I am not a Russian and I have great difficulty in understanding the Russian mind and I have to tell you that I am not surprised, even though I am not a Russian and there is no reason why I should understand the Russian mind. They have a distinct way of thinking and it is a distinct way of behaving and a distinct way of seeing things. They did survive the pogroms, they did survive anti-Semitism, and they did survive the Holocaust. The question is, are they going to survive international Jewish intervention? I don't know.

I say that as somebody who headed for many years the ... study an organization that is intervening very seriously in the Former Soviet Union. I do not leave there with the feeling of our doing very very much good. I think we began to do s a lot more good when we started to step aside and say, "Let us find the Russians who will lead the organization and do it and not expect us, coming from outside to supply what we need to do.

I also find that my friends Steve Schwager and Steve you are going to have forgive me, we have never disagreed before, not publicly anyway, and it is not because I am an orthodox Jew. But I don't think that there is room over there for us to begin to define what religious Judaism in Russia should be. I have no idea. Just because there are three hundred orthodox rabbis who are *Chabad* somehow managed to save them there. It doesn't mean there have to be three hundred Reform.

I would love to see more and more Jews become involved with their Jewish identity and for those who are seeking a spiritual or a religious expression of their Judaism and not finding it within orthodoxy, will establish indigenous Russian alternatives to orthodoxy, but not something that is important from the outside.

Now, having heard Mikhail Chlenov and I thank you so much for what you said, I just want to share a little exercise that I do with Jews around the world and they will somehow perhaps pinpoint the difference in the identities that we are talking about.

Whenever I come to young Jews anywhere in the world, when I talk about young, I mean anybody who is younger than me is young. Well I am talking about people between the ages primarily, seeing that I am only twenty-nine, people between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine. Throughout the world there is an exercise on it. On that, Board which is divided into three columns, I write across the top three columns, "apples, oranges and bananas," on the second line I write, "tomatoes, cucumbers and lettuce," and on the third line I write, "jackets, pants and shirts," on the fourth line I write, "Jew," and I ask the participants to fill in the other two columns.

I have done it with over a hundred thousand Jews in North America. In every case, but four out of a hundred thousand, over a hundred thousand the immediate reaction

was to write, “Jew, Christian, Moslem,” or “Jew, Catholic, Protestant,” always. I have done it with approximately thirty-five thousand Jews in Israel. Ninety-five percent, the moment I put down Jew, the first thing they write, is Arab, always and then they write, Italian, French or something else, but always Arab.

When I have done it tens of thousands in Russia, the first thing they always write after the word Jew is Russian. They do not see themselves Russian the way when the American Jews sees himself American. He defines his distinctiveness as being distinct from the Russian by his being Jewish. It is neither his religion nor Chlenov, who should we define it as narrowly as nationalism. It is much more a sense of ethnic people that defines who he is. That is on the one hand.

On the second hand I find when dealing with Russians in general, I just attended the opening of the Book Fare for Fiction/non-Fiction Book Fare in Moscow, Sharansky an unbelievable experience. Millions and millions of books and tens and tens of thousands of Russians. I mean people who you could see were poor was taking every penny out of their pockets and walking out of that fare like, carrying books. There are people who are looking to understand, to express, to feel their culture. If Jews are Jews in the way that Russians are Russian, our approach to Jews has got to be a way, which talks to them neither about there religion nor their nationalism but their culture of their Jewish, whatever that is, they call being Jewish.

That is why we just signed a contract today to spend several million dollars a year in translating books into Russian of the top Jewish fiction and Jewish non-fiction books, because we believe that in way there will be Jews that will respond to it.

But, the second element is that when dealing with that kind of a condition, where people are looking for individual solutions, personal identity questions, the only real education that works from my experience is informal education. An education that deals with, what I would probably call “The reflective education,” but not only for children. It is not only for kids in camps. I don’t know where we Jews got the stupid idea that education is for children.

I remember my late father saying to me, that if it was up to him he would name every funeral holding, graduating Institute from Jewish education. It was the only way you could graduate from Jewish education is by dropping dead. Therefore, what should be done on the educational level is development of educational opportunities for reflective Jewish discussion; reflective Jewish conversation; reflective Jewish challenges at all levels and at all ages.

I get a real thrill whenever I am in Moscow I wake up early in the morning, long before some of *Chabad* rabbi friends get there. I get to the *Chabad shul*, they *daven* very late and I am thrilled to see several tens of people *davening* as *Chabadniks*, it is wonderful. I go to a *Chesed* run by the JDC and I see people coming and being served wonderfully by the *Chesed* and I go to the Jewish Agency camp and I see what you are doing and I go to a *Hillel* club and I see what we are doing.

People, none of us have found the answer and this document is very important, because it presents to us where the Russian Jew, who we are reaching is. It doesn’t say there is anything about the Jew we are not touching. It said to us, “Where is the Jew that we are reaching?”

It tells us two things. What we have to do in order to reach the others to bring them to this stage and it is not going to be through formal education or religious education. It can be through high-level academic education, which is why I am a strong supporter of the creation of centers for Jewish learning at universities throughout Russia, especially if they accept non-Jews. Because when a non-Jew will come to study Judaism, the Jews will after him to study Judaism.

But the second element has got to be developing the centers of reflective education that I believe can be done. Thank you very much.

**Gene Rachmansky:** I would like to say problem solved but that is probably a bit premature. Just one comment, when I said that Mikhail Chlenov, and thank you for your unique perspective, what I meant by unique was that of all the speakers Mikhail surely is the only one who is actually a Russian speaking Jew who is living in the community today in the Former Soviet Union and his perspective is probably as Avraham said, pin point accurate.

In reference to Avraham's point about the Russian culture, just a side anecdote. My wife recently was asked by some organizations downtown, we live in downtown Manhattan on how to engage some of the Russian families downtown, Russian Jewish families. My wife came up with a crazy idea of offering them Russian class, nothing to do with Judaism, and we are proud to say it is starting the next semester. Most of the families are Russian Jews, many intermarried and it is down at JCP down in Tribecker. So Avraham your point about the Russian culture is true, not only in the Former Soviet Union but in the *shtetl* down here in New York as well.

Thank you very to all of our speakers, very insightful. I was given ten minutes for close for some summary remarks, but I think it is much more important that we get remarks from the participants and from the audience members here. So, the way we are going to do this is, we are going to go in a circle, we will start with Moscow, Jerusalem, New York and there is a moderator at each location. If anyone has a question let us please start with Moscow, if you could please just raise your hand and the moderator will come over to you and give you a mike and please address it to the appropriate panelist if possible. Thank you.

**Alexander Lockshtein:** As a person who deals with Jews who have left Judaism for other religions voluntarily or not voluntarily I would like, maybe in future studies or if one of the panelists can comment on this right now. Are there any comparative studies or how important are the religions, the religions of the majority are viewed by the Jews. We have seen from the study that Judaism has the unique definition here and is very much individualized. In that view, is it okay to practice other religions? Are there any comparative studies? Are there any dates to learn, to study or part, any intention to plan in the future?

**Gene Rachmansky:** This question to whom?

**Alexander Lockshtein:** Well David since you are either a Jew, since you are represent those who made this research or Mr. Chlenov whom I can always ask informal questions, but I would like to hear it now, formal.

**Dr. Mikhail Chlenov:** I can answer shortly, just for my part, because it is very short. We don't have at the moment. I don't know about studies like that, I am sure they exist. But one of the things that we did and we are planning to do in the future is to

explore those findings. Again, I am just saying, this is not a research, this is only some highlights of the big research in which there is much more information. We want to explore that to other organizations, not only from the Jewish field, but from other parts of the Russian society, because in many ways and also this comes with a case.

We are trying partnerships, understanding and sharing information and hopefully we will be able to give this information and maybe to get some information that can be useful as well. So this is a plan for the future. But maybe Professor Turner has more concrete information about this.

**Professor Turner:** Well, I think that actually the impact of other religious, first of all orthodox Christianity was quite important on the Russian Jewry since the last four or five decades. In the 1960s, 1970s, partly until now it has become very fashionable for a Jewish intellectual to the opinion to be baptized and we know a number of prominent personalities like the poet Alexander Galich, Alerzandra Menyon and so on and so on, started by the way from Pastor Nagman... demonstrated their closeness to Christianity or even their being a Christina.

As for research, I know yes and I think you it certainly too and the majority of those who are sitting here know it. There was at least one temple that we can remember, Russians call it the *Steranifkina* who had in her questionnaire an answer about belief. I told her that in the Soviet Union in Russia in our mentality, religion is a belief and not a cynical religion, not a social address, nothing of that kind.

Her question was, "Are you a believer with *Yeru...*?" She into real Jews. The answer was at about twenty-four percent or something, I don't remember the count exactly, told her, "Yes we are."

The second question was “In what do you believe?” The result was, well roughly the following of some, say ten percent or a bit more of those who believe about twenty percent let us say believe Judaism, about thirty percent believe in Christianity and the rest of them they believe but they are not sure in what.

It shows, and until now, I think it is a problem and there is a line in this very delicate difference between belief and the religion. But still Christianity much more than Islam and much more than Protestant religion and it plays a very important role in the formation of the mentality of the Jews.

**Gene Rachmansky:** Thank you very much. Can we move on to Jerusalem for a question please. Jerusalem are you there? Well, while we wait for Jerusalem to go back on line, we will take a question here in New York Colleen Mentor Felix Frankel.

**Felix Frankel:** I was interested in only Russian speaking Jew on the Executive Committee of UJA I want to start this very positive remark. The Feitelberg debate in analyzing all of this is unheard of forty or fifty years ago. It is less twenty years ago whatever, it is not the point. The point is we should all be very proud of what has been said in the last twenty, thirty years, with all the negatives and with all the deaths. To me the best answer to all of these questions of Judaism is in Israel.

It is a country, which for sixty years on her constitutions and one of the reasons, because they can't define who the Jew is. Is that correct, is it factual? The other question is and it's rhetorical question. If you ask a Jew to draw a picture of G-d, can a Jew do that? No Jew can do that. We cannot draw a picture of concepts of Jews in Russia, it is probably part of our religion, where we cannot define G-d the way Greeks did and Romans.

The last remark, life is full of paradoxes. For example, I am a President of Falls... theater, but I don't speak *Yiddish*. My son who Stalin Hitler would have eliminated as a Jew, the first thing he did, he put a big Israeli flag on his wall, and that is to me summarizes what Russian Jews do as a Jew.

**Gene Rachmansky:** Thank you Felix, we are back to Jerusalem, we apologize we lost you there for a moment.

\_\_\_\_\_ : Avraham Infeld was saying in that I think it echoes or it suggest a good basis for comparing American Jews and Russian Jews. That is to say, if Americans filling in the plush American Jews say, "Jew, Catholic, Protestant," and is an inclusive statement. What I am asking is if the Russian says, "Jew, Russian," is that an inclusive statement? I think that has to do with the whole discussion of this evening, not just New York excellent methodology.

**Avraham Infeld:** Thank you very much. I am so glad you asked me a question that I have no answer for, because it should be answered by a Russian and I don't know the answer. But another thing my late father said to me, "If anybody asks you a question, say what you want to say. If it doesn't answer the question, it is a sign they asked the wrong question."

I do want to add something to what I said. I don't know whether it is inclusive, knowing it is a very good question. But there were two points that I didn't mention before. The one is the Hebrew language. If this being Jewish is what I sense it is, language should be a very very important part of what we do. If it is supposed to be a very very important part, I would admit that it is important in Russia, but I have to say I didn't see mention of Hebrew here. But Hebrew is a superb methodology through which

to get to cultural issues. It is not an accident that Christians talk about falling in love, which is falling and Jews talk *Ne'hit ha'hed, which* is in *hitpa'el*. It is a different concept.

You enter the world of culture and cultural reflection through language. So language should be an important part of what we do.

The other issue is, I did make a negative comment about world intervention, I am not against it, and I just want us to be there to seriously empower the local people to take control of what they want.

**Gene Rachmansky:** Dudi, back to you in Moscow.

**Dudi Palant:** Thank you. I want to say that since this conference is also being broadcasted through the Internet and we have a chat room in the Internet, so there are some questions there, so I want to read one of the questions that we just received. The question is the following, I will translate it into English: Are you expecting that other Jewish organizations in Russia will be interested in practical use of the results of this survey?

This is a question that we have received and I want to say that in a way, maybe this is one of the main goals of this survey is to try to bring more information, maybe not to make everything new, but to bring more information, more understanding of the situation, because at the bottom line we are coming every day to work in order to make our connection with the Russian Jewry better and more useful and more substantial.

I really hope that, I know from my organization that this is what we are going to do. We are going to learn these findings and to work accordingly. I just hope that after we will be able to share the information with other organizations, for each organization

will make its own choice, own decision about how to use and what to do, but my biggest hope that it is going to somehow influence and improve the roles that you are doing with the Russian Jewry in the FSU and hopefully maybe in other places as well.

\_\_\_\_\_ :                    May I ask a few words on that? I just came a few hours ago from the Far East where I met leaders of the Jewish organizations who have got twenty regions in Siberia and the Far East. Very important that a number of difficulties, which they have in their practical work, somehow are reflected in this showing. First of all, the main thing was how to overcome the ban of non-*halachical* children to enter the educational systems? Certainly here I mention absolutely sure the Jewish organizations will be interested in that.

**Gene Rachmansky:**                    Back here to New York we have a question from the audience.

**Karen Gershon:**                    I wanted to ask the question of women fit into this picture and I wanted to know whether specifically when you did the research and looked at the Russian Jewish identity needs of the community, whether there were any differences and what the needs were for women?

**Gene Rachmansky:**                    The questions were referred to whom?

**Dudi Palant:**                    The question was again, if there were any specific investigation in terms of the needs of the women?

**Karen Gershon:**                    Because there were difference in the research, between the

**Gene Rachmansky:**                    Were there any differences in the research and the findings specifically in relation to women?

**Dudi Palant:** Okay. The truth is I cannot recall it now, because again we were trying to present the highlights of the research and in the biggest research there is so much information that I don't know by heart. I know there are differences, because there is, of course divisions between men and women, but I cannot recall at the moment something that I can present as an example for differences that are significant. But I can check it later, because we have the materials, but I am not sure at the moment. I don't remember at the moment any significant differences

**Gene Rachmansky:** Understood Dudi. Do we have time for a few more questions? To Jerusalem, although we don't see them on line. Jerusalem can you hear us?

\_\_\_\_\_ : Yes, I want to react to that question about the differences.

**Gene Rachmansky:** Who is speaking please because we can't see you?

**Asher Ariyan:** This was checked, gender differences were checked and no significant differences were found. That is the general statement, details, as I say, will be in the full report.

I want to react to the discussion in general. My experience in survey research is that when people say that there are no surprises, and yet an interesting debate emerges, then I have the sense that we have done a good job. Thank you.

**Gene Rachmansky:** Thank you as well. Well, friends and family across the world our time is coming to an end today. Okay, one more question from Europe only because somebody is jumping out of their seat to ask the question. So we have to reward that kind of enthusiasm.

\_\_\_\_\_ : I didn't jump out of my seat. I just wanted to elaborate on the language question. From what I remember from my grandfather and growing up in the Former Soviet Union, Jewish meant to speak *Yiddish* and I am very surprised that through this whole survey and we are seeing the immigration for the past thirty years or I am in immigration for four years, we communicated in every country in *Yiddish* and when I came to Poland in 1957, JBC actually had an *Yiddish* school where I learned to read and write *Yiddish*. Especially the Eastern European Jews that was their language and Hebrew was the prayer language, which I am welcoming for all the Jews to learn Hebrew.

My question is why not rekindle and kind of point out the *Yiddish* was the uniting force, we kind of miss it in the survey.

**Gene Rachmansky:** To anyone of the panelist who would like to respond to that.

**Avraham Infeld:** I think that we have to recognize that in a world in which there are automatically today well over five million Jews who buy Coca Cola, dress, make love and the Hebrew the language, the natural Hebrew language today is network. But the fact remains that *Yiddish* was only an attempt by a Jew to speak German and had it naturally include it a major part of Hebrew. The same with Ladino towards the Spanish speaking Jews.

Today, I think that Hebrew should and could be the language that is both able to unite and provide that distinction for a member of this, whatever you call it, being a Jew.

\_\_\_\_\_ : I want to draw your attention that this poll it was checked and two times more people say that the deposit for them to study Hebrew is then finished

and I am sure that these people don't know Hebrew, don't know *Yiddish* but when asked what they prefer, Hebrew that is the way of the Jewish world and not *Yiddish*.

**Gene Rachmansky:** Thank you very much, so whether it is in Hebrew, in *Yiddish* or in Russian or in English I just want to thank all of our participants from around the world. I want to thank the inventors of the Internet for making something like this possible, because I feel like just a few years ago this would have been completely impossible.

I thank you for the questions, to the presenters for the insightful and powerful statements and also just a few quick thanks to the people who made this happen from behind the scenes. Barry Silverman at the Institute for Jewish Studies; Marjorie Riv Davis at the Alec Society and none other than Jennifer Rosenberg here at UJ Federation, these are the people that actually made this go as smoothly as it has gone.

I thank you all and leave you with one thought, let us continue our individual and collective journeys together as family, as a nation and as people, no matter where we live, no matter what language we speak. Thank you all for, G-d bless, see you next year.