

*Russian speaking Jews all over the world in many cases combine high intellectual and general education level with almost complete ignorance of Jewish Tradition. Few organizations have addressed this issue on a systematic basis. Various government agencies took on parts of the puzzle and their consequences, but no one looked at the whole issue from a cultural and educational perspective. **Machanaim** stepped into this void with a multi-tiered, multi-faceted open approach to teaching what being Jewish can mean to someone acculturated in the Russian Communist environment.*

FOCUS ON: JEWISH HERITAGE ULPAN

Highest priority for us is helping Russian-speaking youth develop a positive Jewish Identity. However, our experience shows Jewish Identity is while family matter; it cannot be developed by youngsters alone, without connection with their parents and even grandparents. Only a family approach can form a feeling of belonging and being part of a nation.

Therefore, **Machanaim** has programming components targeted to different generations of the family . This project includes various forms of activities and caters to various audiences, focused on their specific needs both in terms of program structure and content.

ADULTS

For those who work or study at the daytime there are **evening lectures** given in Russian and Hebrew on different aspects of Judaism, Jewish History, and Jewish Philosophy. These lectures are oriented to different level of knowledge: beginners, advanced and teachers. In addition to lectures that gather an audience of 25-50 participants, there are smaller groups of learning for 5-6 participants each, and havruta – partner learning. Almost daily Rabbi Dr. Arye Strikovsky teachers Gemarah to small co-ed groups. Evening lectures in Russian on TaNaCH given by Dr. Zeev Dashevsky and Prof. David Kazhdan attract over 50 people each, as well as lectures in Hebrew given by Rabbi Shabtai Rappaport and Prof. Yeshayahu Gafni, with partial support from the Education Ministry.



GOLDEN AGE GROUP

At the daytime there is a program of **intensive learning for people of retirement age**. This addresses the unique challenges many elderly Russian olim face: they come to Israel at an advanced age, and often feel lost and unwanted. Some of them never had any idea about Judaism, but, seeing their children and grandchildren involved, want to get acquainted with its main concepts, and later get really interested and want to learn on a more regular basis. Others remember something from their childhood before the Soviet reality stamped it out; now in Israel, they yearn to return to their roots. Finally, there are people who even while still in the USSR led the life of religious Jews but did not have any opportunity to learn texts in-depth - and now they want to catch up with what they missed.

These people have, to some extent, fallen through the cracks: they do not know enough Hebrew to attend lectures in Hebrew; they are not admitted to formal programs because of their age; occasional popular lectures in Russian don't fill the bill for serious learning.

Machanaim offers such people a special program of fairly intensive learning. They come to learn every day, for 4 hours a day, with experienced Russian-speaking teachers. They learn Torah with commentaries, ask any questions they want. Several times a week they also have a Hebrew-speaking Rav for a high-level lecture. They help each other understand the language, those knowing it best sometimes translate. Besides its educational value, this learning is very important psychologically: The classes give a meaning to their lives, they come to love Israel, find friends and a place where they feel they belong.

There are some 100 students regularly participating in this program.

CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Machanaim runs Jewish Identity programs for **children**, designed to help them develop a sense of belonging and involvement in Jewish life through arts and crafts activities. A recent exhibition by one of our children's groups brought extended families together to a celebration of Jewish creativity. We also have run sleepaway summer camps to bridge the gaps between adolescent immigrants from different layers of the society and encourage their curiosity about Jewish Heritage.

Machanaim's Youth club includes: lectures, films, discussions, workshops, musical concerts and tours over the country. Before Jewish Holidays, there are small celebrations. The activities concentrate around Jewish identity and Jewish values in a non-coercive and open form. The topics of the lectures include Jewish history, introduction into Judaism, Science and Religion, Religion in Modern society, Psychology and Jewish values etc. The discussions on similar topics take place, with **Machanaim** teachers and guest teachers and mediators participating. We believe these gatherings promote the sense of Jewish identity among the participants and contribute to their spiritual absorption and integration in Israeli society. In partnership with the Absorption Ministry.

Machanaim's also runs a program for **beginning teachers**, designed to help them develop an educational approach that fits teaching Russian immigrants who might not know anything about Judaism. Such an approach requires a special kind of training in tolerance and the participatory techniques to create a friendly, non-pressured atmosphere. There are simply not enough thoroughly trained Russian speaking teachers available. This project provides an educational framework for beginning immigrant teachers from all over the country. The monthly Yom Iyun Workshop has 70+ participants and includes high level content and extensive discussions about the techniques that are most effective with this audience.

This program is in partnership with the Education Ministry.

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