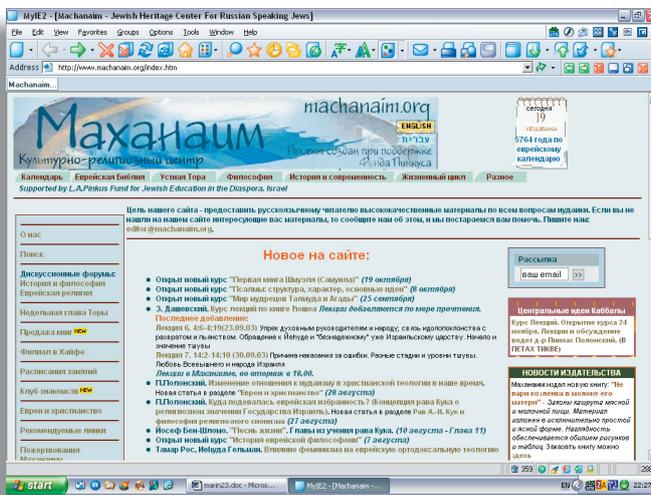


Russian speaking Jews all over the world in many cases combine high intellectual and general education level with almost complete ignorance of Jewish Tradition. Few organizations have addressed this issue on a systematic basis. Various government agencies took on parts of the puzzle and their consequences, 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: INTERNET AND MASS MEDIA



The Russian and communist society drilled into its citizens models that associated religion in general and Judaism in particular with primitive, obsolete and ancient “fodder for the masses” - appropriate for trashing by any modern society which should rely on technology and science. Russian Jews in particular were very susceptible to this culture because they have been proud of their technological sophistication and acumen. This background makes the Internet and other electronic media both important and highly successful routes for Jewish education for today’s Russian speakers, no matter where they are in the world. In fact the Internet has proven to be one of the most effective tools to get Russians acquainted with Jewish Tradition, Jewish history and Jewish mode of life.

Machanaim has electronic databases that enable Russians to use the same sophisticated search technology they use to find the proper components of an algorithm in their professional lives, to find many different perspectives and commentaries on a specific verse of the Torah. An easy to use interface that queries **Machanaim’s** database commentaries on the five books of Moses is only one section of the 8,200 page **Machanaim** Internet site that blends today’s technology with 2,000 years of Jewish heritage, in Russian.

Machanaim’s Internet site has 6 components:

Today - News and commentary, discussion forums , articles of Jewish Interest, in Russian from around the globe. This includes **Machanaim’s** weekly commentaries for Russian newspapers, recently published articles on actual problems in Judaism and in Israeli society, discussions of the today situation, etc. A Russian Jewish forum allows the user to participate in discussions on various problems of Jewish and Israeli life, e.g. the status of woman in Judaism, or the antagonism between the Ultraorthodox and the “hilonim”. Participating in, or at least reading such discussions, gives the user a possibility to feel part of the world Jewish community and enhances Jewish Identity.

There is also a section dealing with humor and culture, including poetry in Russian on Jewish themes.

Jewish Calendar - includes explanations on the structure of Jewish calendar, and texts and articles in Russian on all Jewish holidays..

Classic Sources and Databases - includes the texts of the TaNaCh, translated into Russian with special notes that compare the different translations and show how they vary. The searchable sections include verse-by-verse commentaries of Rashi, Sonchino and Rav Sh.R.Hirsch for the Torah, and various overview commentaries for the books of the Prophets and the Scriptures. The translations of the books of Nechama Leibovich into Russian are also available.

The Oral Torah - includes articles and references to the Jewish Law. There exists also Ask the Rabbi section that supplies the reader with answers on the questions they ask - that range from how to make kosher utensils to what is the Jewish idea of life after death.

Jewish Philosophy - includes classic and modern texts on Jewish philosophy, from Maimonides to Rav Kook and today's thinkers, like Prof. Yoseph Ben Shlomo and Tamara Ross.

Jewish Life Cycle - includes texts on Jewish life cycle customs, with sources and ideas underlying these customs, from marriage and brit mila to funeral and mourning.

Interactive Academic Courses

The internet site also houses **Machanaim's** extensive curriculum of interactive academic courses on Fundamental and advanced topics - where the students can learn via Internet, fulfill the assignments, ask questions and receive Continuing Education credits. Development of this project is partially funded by support of Pincus Foundation.

Currently offered are 16 courses with six more in the works:

- Central Themes of the Jewish Holidays (Beginners)
- Creation of the World – Man and Humanity (Beginners)
- History of Zionism and the State of Israel (Beginners)
- The Jewish Family (Beginners)
- Central Personalities and Periods in the History of Jewish Tradition (Beginners) – (Parts I-II)
- The Book of Judges (Beginners and Advanced) – (Parts I-II)
- The Five Megillot and the Book of Jonah (separate courses: Beginners and Advanced)
- Forefathers of the Nation (Advanced)
- The Interpersonal Commandments (Advanced)
- Halacha, Tradition and Themes of the Jewish Holidays (Advanced, includes pedagogical information)
- Jewish Life Cycle (Beginners)
- History of Jewish Philosophy (Advanced)
- The world of Talmud and Aggada sages (Advanced, includes pedagogical information)
- The Psalms of David (Beginners and Advanced)
- The First Book of Samuel (Beginners and Advanced)

Distance Learning

Machanaim's new focus is to create a new model for Jewish Distance Learning using the internet to broadcast lectures via videoconference. **Machanaim's** new Internet-based multipurpose network will be targeted to different levels of scholarship from the beginner through advanced. The basic level will be addressed to a broad audience, with special courses for developing a cadre of teachers and leaders of the next generation. A **Machanaim** Review Board will regularly evaluate individual progress of every active participant of the program. A participant that demonstrates success will be promoted to a higher level of learning and (where possible) will become a tutor of a new local group, receiving some moderate remuneration. This will help alleviate a critical shortage of suitable teachers.

Jewish Education for the Diaspora via Videoconference

Videoconference learning is a cost-effective method for delivering educational services to communities in Diaspora. **Machanaim** has piloted this approach in conjunction with the Jewish Agency, Ministry for the Diaspora Affairs, and Lauder Foundation with Russian speakers in Germany and can duplicate this model in partnership with other Jewish communities.

Mass Media

In the course of over 10 years **Machanaim** has participated in various programs on Israeli radio, and contributed a weekly article on Torah portion and current issues in a leading Russian newspaper. New this year is an hour segment on Friday afternoons on Russian Israeli television called Shabbat Shalom. This program presents the Torah portion, discussions of various aspects of Jewish life, and sometimes debates with representatives of different outlooks.

For more information about program development and partnerships, contact Miriam Kitrossky at tel. 053-270186, Miriam@machanaim.org.