# A JEW FROM SIBERIA CELEBRATES SHAVUOT

by Greg Shlionsky

Shavuot, the Festival of Weeks, commemorates the completion of the barley harvest, and the sacrifice of the new wheat offering in the Temple in Jerusalem. The image of the festival celebration in Jerusalem and the giving of the Torah at Sinai, is a far cry from the snow-filled plains of Siberia. And yet Shavuot has a most poignant message for Jews from Siberia and for Jews everywhere.

When my family moved to Siberia in 1986, I didn't expect to like it there. I was thirteen years old and was quite happy to live in the big city of Kiev in the Ukraine. My family had been to Siberia before--my parents were involved with building the oil pipelines there in the seventies, when I was very little. All I could remember from those days was lots of snow, and the lack of big buildings. Still, when in April 1986, a nuclear reactor blew up in Chernobyl, sixty miles from Kiev, my parents decided that Siberia was once again the place to be. Of course, I had to no choice but to join them.

The town in which we lived, yabrsk ("Novembertown"), was half my age. It was named after the month of November because it was in November, a few years prior to our arrival, that an exploration party struck oil in that previously unpopulated spot in the taiga. By the time my family arrived, the town was teeming with tens of thousands of oil workers who came from all over the Soviet Union with their

wives and children. There were a handful of schools, a hospital, and dozens of gray five-story apartment buildings.

As expected, the weather was on the colder side. Snow would start falling in the first weeks of September, and wouldn't stop until late May or early June. Temperatures would drop to -40 Celsius by November and stay there through March, often hitting -50. On those "happy" occasions all schools were closed. Noyabrsk was also windy, as Arctic storms swept across the West Siberian Plains. Luckily, no one in Siberia had ever hard about "wind chill factor."

Aside from the weather, and the ubiquitous mosquitoes which appeared once the snows melted, Noyabrsk was not such a bad place. Jobs paid well. No one worried much about crime. Food supplies and

decent clothes were hard to get--but not harder than anywhere else in Russia. Besides, the woods started right in front of our apartment building, and on warmer days they provided for great cross-country skiing.

Best of all, we seemed to be the only Jews in town. At school, the fact that I was Jewish was largely unknown or ignored. Most teachers and students had come from other small towns with limited Jewish populations, and cared little about ethnicity. This was a dramatic change from my experience in Kiev. In Kiev hardly a day would go by without an incident—a snide comment from a teacher, an insult on the street, a fight with a schoolmate. Like millions of others Russian Jews, I grew up knowing nothing about Judaism, but acutely aware that I was ethnically a Jew. Jewishness was a handicap that drew insults from neighbors and prevented one from being

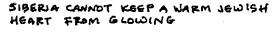
accepted to prestigious universities or promoted to managerial jobs. In Siberia, I was no longer constantly reminded of this handicap. I was just like everyone else. I had no Jewish friends. I was even elected head of the student government at school. And if in those days I were to think about marriage, marrying Jewish would have been the last thing on my mind. Siberia allowed me to forget I was a Jew---and made life easy.

As we all know, assimilation knows no borders. Here in New York, like in Siberia, we are all largely free from the Jewish

"handicap." Being Jewish does not prevent us from being accepted to the most select colleges, getting top jobs, or almost anything else. It is often easy to be overwhelmed by the desire to be like everyone else, to belong-- as I was as a teenager. But we are also free to choose a separate path from the rest. We are free to live a lifestyle that may not seem apple-pie-American, but rather a lifestyle that connects us to the wisdom and spirituality of our Jewish faith. And when we dare to be different, we in effect follow those of our ancestors who left their established homes in Egypt to pursue their Divine destiny at Sinai.

As we await Shavuot, I wish myself and all of us to have the strength to be different. The rewards are tremendous.

Greg Shlionsky moved to the United States in 1990, and currently works in derivative trading at Lehman Brothers.





### CONGRATULATIONS AND MAZAL TOV

#### **ENGAGEMENTS**

Janice Horowitz and Richard Bookstaber Adina Goldfarb and Michael Engel Audrey Daum and Aaron Hirshberg Paula Geldbaum and Dr. Michael Weinberg

#### **MARRIAGES**

Jane Halfond and Sam Braaf Amy Krieger and Andrew Brooks Jane Slotin and Jess Joseph Andrea Spungen and Sam Laniado Sandra Norowitz and Alan Kipust

#### **BIRTHS**

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Drs. Janice and Richard Bennett, on the birth of a son, Baruch Zev Tracy and Sander Gerber, on the birth of a son, Jake Akiva JoAnn and Alan Goldberg, on the birth of a daughter, Amalia Danielle Sharon and Joe Janovic, on the birth of a daughter, Valerie Faye Sharon and Rabbi Adam Mintz, on the birth of a

Sharon and Rabbi Adam Mintz, on the birth of a daughter, Shoshana Talia
Hildy and Louis Parks, on the birth of a son, Adam

Loren

Jill and Rabbi Mark Wildes, on the birth of a son, Joseph Hirsch (Yosef Tzvi)

#### **BAR/BAT MITZVAH**

Oren Epstein, son of Judith Weil & Lloyd Epstein

#### **CONDOLENCES**

Eileen Frank, on the loss of her father, Edward Frank

Marilyn Grossman, on the loss of her father, Samson Hamburg

### **CONGRATULATIONS**

Chaya & Ed Harris on being honored by the Jewish Renaissance Center

#### REFUAH SH'LEIMAH (Speedy Recovery)

Talia Sophie Forman Rabbi Simcha Weinberg

# TZEITCHEM L'SHALOM (To live and/or study in Israel)

Michele Karmazin & Dr. Joel Comet Gabriel Isaacs

#### SAVE THE DATE

Beginners Shabbat Luncheons - \$15 June 7, Sept. 6

All Night Shavout Learn-in Thurs, June 10, 11:30 p.m. - 6:45 a.m.

> Rosh Hashana Wed - Fri, Oct. 1-3

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## SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Friday, June 20 Candle Lighting	Shabbat, July 26 (Pinchas)         8:45 a.m.           Morning Services         7:10 p.m.	Friday, August 29 Candle Lighting 7:15 p.m. Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 7:20 p.m.
Shabbat, June 21 (Beha'alotecha)         8:45 a.m.           Morning Services         8:00 a.m.           Daf Yomi         8:00 a.m.           Bible Class and Talmud Class         7:05 p.m.           Mincha         8:05 p.m.           Shabbat ends         9:12 p.m.           Daily Mincha and Maariv         8:15 p.m.	Bible Class 6:55 p.m. Mincha 7:55 p.m. Shabbat ends 9:00 p.m. Daily Mincha and Maariv 8:05 p.m.  Friday, August 1 Candle Lighting 7:53 p.m. Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 6:45 & 8:00 p.m.	Shabbat, August 30 (Re'eh)         8:45 a.m.           Morning Services         8:25 p.m.           Daf Yomi         6:25 p.m.           Bible Class         6:10 p.m.           Mincha         7:10 p.m.           Shabbat ends         8:15 p.m.           Daily Mincha and Maariv         7:10 p.m.
Friday, June 27 Candle Lighting	Shabbat, August 2 (Matot-Masey) Morning Services 8:45 a.m. Daf Yom 7:05 p.m.	Monday, September 1 Morning Services
Shabbat, June 28 (Shelach)         8:45 a.m.           Morning Services         8:00 a.m.           Daf Yomi         8:00 a.m.           Bible Class and Talmud Class         7:05 p.m.           Mincha         8:05 p.m.           Shabbat Annual Class         8:05 p.m.	Bible Class       6:50 p.m.         Mincha       7:50 p.m.         Shabbat ends       8:53 p.m.         Daily Mincha and Maariv       7:56 p.m.	Tuesday, September 2 Rosh Chodesh Elul Morning Services
Snabbat ends 9.12 p.m. Daily Mincha and Maariv 8:15 p.m.	Monday, August 4 Rosh Chodesh Av Morning Services 7:00 & 7:40 a.m. Friday, August 8	Friday, September 5 Candle Lighting 7:03 p.m. Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 7:05 p.m.
Morning Services	Friday, August 8 Candle Lighting 7:45 p.m. Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 6:45 & 7:50 p.m. LAST EARLY KABBALAT SHABBAT	Shabbat, September 6 (Shoftim)           Morning Services         8:45 a.m.           Daf Yomi         8:00 a.m.           Bible Class and Talmud Class         6:00 p.m.           Mincha         7:00 p.m.           Object         7:00 p.m.
Shabbat, July 5 (Korach) Rosh Chodesh Tammuz Morning Services 8:45 a.m. Daf Yorni 7:20 p.m. Bible Class 7:05 p.m. Mincha 8:05 p.m.	Shabbat, August 9 (Devarim)       8:45 a.m.         Morning Services       8:55 p.m.         Daf Yomi       6:55 p.m.         Bible Class       6:40 p.m.         Mincha       7:40 p.m.	Daily Mincha and Maariv
Shabbat ends 9:12 p.m. Daily Mincha and Maariv 8:15 p.m.	Shabbat ends 8:45 p.m. Daily Mincha and Maariv 7:45 p.m.	Friday, September 12 Candle Lighting 6:52 p.m. Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 6:55 p.m. Shabbat September 13 (Mi Tautran)
Sunday, July 6 Rosh Chodesh Tammuz Morning Services 7:00 & 8:30 a.m.  Friday, July 11 Candle Lighting 8:10 p.m. Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 6:45 & 8:15 p.m.	Monday, August 11 Erev Tish'a B'Av Morning Services . 7:50 a.m. Fast Begins . 7:58 p.m. Mincha followed by Maariv and Eicha . 7:50 p.m.  Tuesday, August 12 Tish'a B'Av Morning Services . 6:30 & 8:00 p.m.	Shabbat, September 13 (Ki Taytzay)         8:45 a.m.           Morning Services         8:00 a.m.           Daf Yoml         8:00 a.m.           Bible Class and Talmud Class         5:50 p.m.           Mincha         6:50 p.m.           Shabbat ends         7:52 p.m.           Daily Mincha and Maariv         6:50 p.m.
Shabbat, July 12 (Chukat)       8:45 a.m.         Morning Services       8:45 a.m.         Daf Yound       7:20 p.m.         Bible Class       7:05 p.m.         Mincha       8:05 p.m.         Shebbat and       9:10 p.m.	Mincha 7:25 p.m. Fast ends 8:29 p.m.  Friday, August 15 Candle Lighting 7:36 p.m. Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 7:40 p.m.	Friday, September 19 Candle Lighting 6:40 p.m. Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 6:45 p.m.
Shabbat ends       9:10 p.m.         Daily Mincha and Maariv       8:15 p.m.         Friday, July 18       8:06 p.m.         Candle Lighting       8:06 p.m.         Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat       6:45 & 8:10 p.m.	Shabbat, August 16 (Va'etchanan)   Morring Services   8:45 a.m.   Daf Yomi   6:45 p.m.	Shabbat, September 20 (Ki Tavo)         8:45 a.m.           Morning Services         8:00 a.m.           Daf Yomi         8:00 a.m.           Bible Class and Talmud Class         5:40 p.m.           Mincha         6:40 p.m.           Clabble Loads         7:40 p.m.
Shabbat, July 19 (Balak)	Bible Class 6:30 p.m. Mincha 7:30 p.m. Shabbat ends 8:36 p.m. Daily Mincha and Maariv 7:35 p.m.	Daily Mincha and Maariv 6:40 p.m.
Morning Services     8:45 a.m.       Daf Yorni     7:20 p.m.       Bible Class     7:05 p.m.       Mincha     8:05 p.m.       Shabbat ends     9:06 p.m.       Daily Mincha and Maariv     8:10 p.m.	Friday, August 22 Candle Lighting 7:25 p.m. Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat 7:30 p.m.	Friday, September 26         6:28 p.m.           Candle Lighting         6:35 p.m.           Mincha and Kabbalat Shabbat         6:35 p.m.           Shabbat, September 27 (Nitzavim-Vayelech)         8:4F - ¬¬.           Morning Services         8:4F - ¬¬.
Tuesday, July 22 Fast of 17th Day of Tammuz           Fast Begins         4:32 a.m.           Morning Services         7:00 & 7:30 a.m.           Mincha         7:50 p.m.           Fast ends         8:52 p.m.	Shabbat, August 23 (Ekev)       8:45 a.m.         Morning Services       8:45 a.m.         Daf Yomi       6:35 p.m.         Bible Class       6:20 p.m.         Mincha       7:20 p.m.         Shabbat ends       8:25 p.m.         Daily Mincha and Maariv       7:25 p.m.	Dat Yomi       8:1         Bible Class and Talmud Class       5:2         Mincha       6:25 p.m.         Shabbat ends       7:28 p.m.         Daily Mincha and Maariv       6:30 p.m.
Friday, July 25 Candle Lighting	Daily Millicha and MaanV	SATURDAY NIGHT SELICHOT SERVICES Wednesday, October 1, 1997 Rosh Hashana

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