FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Shanah Tovah Umetukah! All of us at Action for Post-Soviet Jewry want to take this opportunity to wish you and all your loved ones a happy, healthy, safe, sweet, and peaceful 5781. May your year be filled with blessings, joy, and fulfillment.

For a moment, I would like to take you back to the beginning of March. The APSJ Board had just voted to expand my position to full time starting in May. We were still cautiously optimistic that we would be able to proceed with our annual planned spring trip to Ukraine. And then, as the days progressed, the reality slowly became apparent. We would have to cancel the trip. I was to begin my tenure as the third Executive Director in this organization’s 45-year history during a global pandemic including a statewide shutdown. There are so many unprecedented and unexpected moments to share as we end the Jewish calendar year of 5780 and head into 5781.

The office closed in March, and we moved primary operations to my home. I formally began my tenure as Executive Director from my dining room. We were able to successfully forward the office phone to my cell phone. Less successful was trying to forward the office mail to my home. Later in this newsletter, you will read about how you can help with this. Almost all other office systems were in the process of being transferred to cloud-based applications, a process which was accelerated by the pandemic.

In April, the Board held its first all-virtual meeting. While we miss being in each other’s physical company, it is pleasant to join in from home and not contend with rush-hour traffic. With the help of many donors, we managed to secure COVID-19 supplies and ship over 800 pounds of medicine, food, cleaning products, and personal hygiene items to 18 communities in Ukraine. The receiving, packing, and shipping process took place in my family room with my three college-aged and young adult children volunteering. I could never have imagined this scenario when I accepted the position. Yet I am so grateful to have had this opportunity to do good with my children during some of the statewide lockdown’s most restrictive days. Please make sure to read the heartfelt thank-you we recently received from one of the care-package recipients, published later in this newsletter.

May arrived, and I was finally able to fully commit to the work of APSJ. With input from our partners in Ukraine, the Board voted to suspend shipping used clothing for the foreseeable future. It would not be easy, given the resources available on the Boston side, to receive, store, and sort items while keeping the office and staff safe. It would be close to impossible for the Community Coordinators in Ukraine to receive, sort, and distribute the articles, given the country’s social distancing restrictions. Everyone agreed that APSJ should continue to ship additional COVID-19 supplies, as these are expensive and difficult to obtain in Ukraine. Additionally, if our partners in Ukraine identify a need for a specific item or someone donates new clothing in bulk to APSJ, we will ship those items.

Throughout June, July, and August, we are keeping the office open part-time. Being back allows me the opportunity to clean

ORIGINAL DRAWING BY THE LATE RAFI BOUGANIM.
THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY FUND: HELP ARRIVED IN UKRAINE!

Thanks to the generosity of many of you reading this and a grant from Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, during the crux of the pandemic APSJ managed to send eighteen boxes of much-needed gloves, medicine, food, and personal hygiene and cleaning supplies to communities in Ukraine. The Adopt-a-Bubbe/Zayde program participants were grateful to receive COVID-19 supplies and delighted that their adored Community Care Coordinator delivered the packages. Knowing the supplies were sent with care and concern from the Boston community gave a much-needed spark of hope to these very isolated program participants. Shared here is a letter from one of the recipients, Irina L. from Melitopol. Pictured are moments ranging from the beginning of packing to a sampling of the many individuals and families receiving the supplies.

Irina’s letter exemplifies the core of APSJ’s mission: partnering together, person to person, and community to community, to create personal and social support networks.

“I want to express my deepest gratitude to the AFPSJ. I received help in the midst of the pandemic and quarantine. I was born in 1932 but not qualified to get any help under the "victims of fascism" category.

I was born in the village of Suhoy log Sverdlovskoy region (Ural). My family ended up there because my great grandfather was tsar’s recruiter for the Army. I grew up in that village. Life was very difficult: hunger, cold, long winters, woods around us. Population was very diverse - political prisoners, ex thieves, relocated peasants, etc. For the most part, people were civil to each other and lived in peace. Life became more difficult after the war started. Men were drafted.

After I graduated HS, I was accepted into the Pedagogical Institute and became a French teacher. I started working in South Sachkolinsk. In 1957 I got married and moved to Melitopol with my husband. I was teaching in the local school for 35 years and retired in 1987. When we moved to Melitopol, my husband and I built a small house. After a while, our son was born. We were very happy, but it did not last long. My husband died very young, and I raised our son by myself. My son died a while ago. I am completely alone.

My former pupils used to visit me sometimes, but it does not happen often. I had been living alone for a few decades now. It’s very difficult for me to take care of myself, and provide for myself at this age. My pension is very little. Everyone is always happy when spring comes, but I always try to prepare myself mentally for next winter. At this point in my life, unfortunately, I completely depend on strangers and my coordinator to be able to get coal, and groceries, and medicine. But the scariest, and the most miserable is the loneliness.

Thank god to you, and my coordinator who brought me over supplies for the pandemic.

I am very grateful to all of you!
With gratitude,
Irina L

(Translated without grammatical correction by Marina Jarvis)
PARTNERING WITH CJP’S ISRAEL AND GLOBAL JEWISH CITIZENSHIP (IGJC)

Action for Post-Soviet Jewry works in partnership with Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston to support Jews in the former Soviet Union. This year, APSJ and CJP partnered throughout the year in the following ways:

- Debbie joined CJP’s Mission to Dnipro in November 2019 and shared a fabulous Warm House pre-Kabbalat Shabbat experience with the group.
- Debbie spoke at CJP’s Women’s Philanthropy Seminar. The women made soup bags and collected over-the-counter medicine to send to Dnipro, which arrived right as the pandemic began.
- Three members of the APSJ Board also served on CJP’s newly-formed IGJC committee, and participated in a six-month strategic planning process.
- APSJ presented a workshop on the work of APSJ from the refusenik era to current welfare and Jewish renewal to the Boston-Haifa school partnership.
- APSJ received emergency COVID-19 funds from CJP to send much-needed supplies to Ukraine.
- APSJ received a donation of new infant swaddle blankets and shipped them to three programs supported by CJP in Dnipro as well as to the communities APSJ supports.
- APSJ participated in two pre-Kabbalat Shabbat gatherings with the IGJC committee and our partners in Dnipro.

CJP’s Israel and Global Jewish Citizenship (IGJC) fosters a community of proud and engaged global Jewish citizens dedicated to Israel and the Jewish people. Our commitment stems from both a shared past and shared vision for secure and thriving communities in Israel and all around the world. We find strength in our diversity and in the inspiring individuals with whom we partner to repair and connect our world.
out and organize the office. As I look through files and pictures, this space’s unique history has become apparent to me. From slides, VHS tapes, and old dot-matrix printouts, to photo albums, DVDs, and USB drives, the history of technology is very apparent; even more so is the history of places and people, and their stories. Each face, each letter, each case file represents a person that Action for Soviet Jewry and Action for Post-Soviet Jewry touched. When I think about how many people over how many years APSJ has connected with, I am awestruck, honored, and humbled at the prospect of carrying forward this responsibility of care.

By now, you should also have December 20th, 2020 on your calendars as the date we will be “Celebrating 45 years of Judy in Action! A Virtual Retirement Tribute for Judy Patkin.” Action is one of the only grassroots Soviet Jewry organizations born out of the 1970s-80s fight for freedom that is still in existence. When the Soviet Union collapsed, and Jews were finally free to emigrate in 1991, Judy did not close up shop. Instead, she traveled to the former Soviet Union (FSU) to see how the Jews left behind were faring. Seeing their dire need moved her to work with the Board to shift Action’s mission—from case-by-case human rights advocacy to person-to-person humanitarian aid delivery. “There was still work to be done,” Judy said. “We’ll be there as long as they need us.”

As we move into 5781, we need your help even more. APSJ will require the resources to nimbly pivot to meet unforeseen and unexpected needs during these unprecedented times. Thankfully, as I write this, I am delighted to report that all the participants in our Adopt-a-Bubbe/Zayde program and all our Community Coordinators have remained COVID-free. This is mainly due to the fact that most were already homebound before the pandemic. The stricter isolation protocols, including visitors not being permitted to enter homes, and the effects of this isolation such as depression, paranoia, memory issues, and more, are now our key concerns as we continue to ensure our participants have the food and medicine they need. We are exploring potential new technology initiatives and partnerships to approach this problem, and we hope to share more details soon.

We have faced many challenges, and we will continue to do so. The critical takeaway here is that, with the guidance of the APSJ Board, our partners in Ukraine, and all of your support, we are facing both unprecedented and unexpected challenges and finding ways to continue the work of APSJ. This time of global pandemic has helped make us even more aware of how responsible we are for one another.

This High Holiday season, please continue to support the work of Action for Post-Soviet Jewry to the extent to which you are able. APSJ is very blessed to have a committed community of supporters who consistently invest in its mission and work.

With much gratitude and wishes for a happy, healthy, and safe year,

Debbie Kardon
Executive Director, Action for Post-Soviet Jewry
A VIRTUAL RETIREMENT TRIBUTE

Celebrating 45 years of Judy in Action!

From 1975 to 2020
Judy Patkin at Action for Soviet and Post-Soviet Jewry

People of our time are losing the power of celebration. Instead of celebrating we seek to be amused or entertained. Celebration is an active state, an act of expressing reverence or appreciation.

Abraham Joshua Heschel, The Wisdom of Heschel (1975)

This is your “call to Action” (pun intended) to help us celebrate, appreciate, and pay tribute to our indomitable Judy! In answering the questions below, we hope you will share what you know, love, and respect about the woman, her work, and the organization she helped to build.

- Does your family have roots “back in the Old Country,” as Judy’s father used to say? And if so, do you know where?
- Did you protest, write letters, or help lobby politicians during the refusenik era?
- Did you travel to the USSR to meet with and help support and sustain refuseniks?
- Was your family one of the many who emigrated from the USSR with Action’s help?
- Did you travel to the former Soviet Union (FSU) to bring hope and support to the participants in APSJ’s Adopt-a-Bubbe/Zayde program, and experience a festive Warm House gathering?
- Did you collect clothes, shoes, blankets, and other necessities to send to APSJ’s communities in the FSU?
- Do you have a photo, memory, or story to share about Judy?
- Would you like to add your written words or spoken voice to a lasting tribute to Judy?
- Can you contribute to a special fund being established in Judy’s name to help continue her life’s work?

Please visit www.apsj.org/celebrateJudy45 to explore ALL the ways you can celebrate Judy in Action! and email us at celebratingjudy45@gmail.com with any questions.
STAYING IN CONTACT

As you may be aware, the USPS has had its share of challenges during this pandemic. At APSJ, we have felt the impact of irregularities in our mail delivery both in sending and receiving mail. While we will continue to use the USPS for ASPJ’s communications, we would like to ask your help in four ways:

1. Please be patient and understand that response turnaround time may be longer than usual.
2. Please reach out by email or phone at any time to ensure we received your correspondence.
3. Please reach out by email or telephone if you expected to receive a communication from us and did not.
4. Please help us keep in touch with you electronically by sending us your email address. Our promise: no spam, no sharing your data. Sign up by going to www.actionpsj.org/keepintouch