



The Underground

Yaakov Astor, Rabbi Mordechai Neustadt

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Like scenes out of a spy novel ...

... except that this was real life, not fiction.

They were instructed what to say and what not to say, where to go, how to act and react ... They were spied on and followed constantly, threatened with punishment, harassed at border crossings ...

Yet they kept on coming. At first just a trickle, the shlichim of the Vaad L Hatzolas Nidchei Yisroel ultimately numbered in the hundreds. Despite the dangers, they came year after year to the dreaded Soviet Union to help their lost brothers and sisters rediscover their lost heritage. They came to bring needed supplies, to show they cared, and to help in whatever way possible.

And help they did. They succeeded in fanning the small sparks of the Russian ba al teshuvah movement into a burning flame. Then, when the Iron Curtain finally fell, the Vaad only redoubled its efforts to help the Russian Jews transition to fully religious lives in Eretz Yisroel, America, and elsewhere. In fact, the nucleus of today's religious Russian Jewish communities was created in great part thanks to the efforts of Rabbi Mordechai Neustadt and the shlichim of the Vaad.

For decades, these stories of incredible mesirus nefesh remained solely in the possession of the brave individuals who experienced them. Now, they can finally be told, and they will leave you awestruck.

Two great catastrophes befell the Jewish people in the 20th century -- The Holocaust and the destruction of Jewish life in the Soviet Union, behind the "Iron Curtain." Though the impact of the former is widely publicized and recorded, the destructive effect of the latter is relatively unknown. Yet, in some ways it was no less devastating.

The thoroughly evil Communist regime not only succeeded in eradicating Jewish life throughout the USSR, but by banning all forms of religious practice, they erased the name of Hashem from the hearts and minds of almost all Jews there. They engendered so much fear that the next two or three generations became thoroughly ignorant of their Jewish heritage and were terrified to even be identified as Jews. It was truly a spiritual Holocaust.

This is why the spiritual revival of the Jewish people under the unimaginably brutal Communist regime in the last decade of its existence is so remarkable. And as remarkable as it was, it has hardly been documented. It is a story that is largely untold. Even those who know about it probably know only a portion of what went on.

This is due in great part to the fact that Jewish organizations outside the Soviet Union were forced to keep their activities quiet. If their efforts were advertised they risked drawing the attention of the KGB, the dreaded Soviet secret police, thereby endangering their mission and putting at risk the small but growing circle of young Russian Jews learning to live a Jewish religious life. They had no choice but to go about their organizational work without publicity.

The purpose of this book is to finally tell that story.

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