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Dear David

At long last here is my report on Project Judaica Program at RGGU during its first Winter Semester. I tremendously enjoyed the teaching, the students and the people (save Vlasova and her likes). As for the Program itself my enthusiasm with which I wrote about it in my first Moscow letter grew even stronger especially in the face of my nearly three month experience of it and of my native city with all its foibles and idiosyncrasies.

The more time passes by the more remote become my recent impressions of Moscow. On the other hand I continuously think of the Program and of almost each one of its students. I will first sum up my own teaching experience, then will offer a few suggestions.

I THE YIDDISH CLASSES

ATTENDANCE:

I don't know what standards of attendance are considered to be normal at RGGU. On the whole most of our students came to most of the Yiddish classes. There were only very few "regular irregulars" (the most notorious ones that come to mind are: Yaroslava Martinova and Grigorii Mirkin).

PARTICIPATION:

Throughout the first month considerable efforts were invested into making the students listen to and speak Yiddish in class. Yet, by and large the student body remained quite passive and only partially receptive to my *yidish beyidish* efforts. They were, on the other hand, very good with reading and translating various, mostly not too long, but genuine (ie 'unadaptated') Yiddish texts in class as well as with the countless grammatical drills and exercises. A large proportion of the exercises and homework consisted of a whole range of phraseologic units, different types of sentences and short texts that they had to translate from Russian. By the end of March many started to submit original compositions and dialogues in Yiddish. The students were also very enthusiastic about the different popular Yiddish folksongs and humorous shorter tales that were taught.

With regard to attendance I think that in addition to the strongest possible early warnings it is important to keep record of the attending students and if possible of their homework results. The existence of the record and its relevance for the final evaluation of each student should be made known to them. My own solution was to keep a special "Attendance and Homework Results Diary" (unofficially dubbed *Séyfer (h)akháyem*) where the students themselves were asked to sign at the beginning or at the end of every class.

As to the homework, it makes sense to mark each one of them with a grade (roughly adopting and adapting the Russian system of grading, ie from "3 - -" to "5 + +"). Although in my experience most of the homework grading had to be a roughly impressionistic evaluation, it was nonetheless a convenient way of showing each student "where she or he stood" and evaluating the overall progress of the group. Once it was introduced towards the end of the first month, the students' attitude to homework became by far more responsible.

YIDDISH TEACHING MATERIAL AND EQUIPMENT

I left in Miuskaya (room 339, in the specially allocated cupboard, inside a green folder) the complete set of all the texts, exercises and exams that were used in my class. Under a separate cover I will send you to JTS a copy of all these materials (*for you and Sheva only*).

I also left there in one of the "equipment" cupboards a Soviet pre-perestroika standard issue portable tape, which I acquired in GUM and used in class. It is an incredibly primitive piece of machinery and I was warned not to use western cassettes on. Yet since all the recordings I used were neither unique nor rare I found the tape very useful; its sound quality (mono of course) is quite good, moreover it is an excellent prop for comic relief, a truly endless source of jokes.

EXAMS:

Too many exams can be disruptive and unnecessarily intimidating. The students, however seemed to be quite eager to have intermediate, objective evaluations and the two mid-semester exams (which for psycho-paedagogical reasons I called *proverochnaya* rather than *kontrolnaya*) also added a measure of a semi-formal interim assessment.

The first interim exam was given on the 9 (evening) and 10 (morning) of April, the second on the 8 (morning) and 11 (evening) of May. As you may recall I was somewhat worried that although most of the students were both promising and a good number of them was even delivering, the results of my first two exams were uncharacteristically too high for some of those whose homework and class participation were inadequate. Apparently the first exam appeared to be somewhat easier than it should have been. The results of the second exam were not as high — no too surprising "5"s, — though a few "4"s still seemed to me too high for a number of students. Those of them who managed to achieve this result with the massive assistance of their by far more knowledgeable neighbours were warned that this may be taken into consideration when their final grade is decided. There was of course no need to fulfil this threat, for their final exam results were fully congruent with their actual performance both in class and at home (*viz* their homework).

The final exam proved to be the most difficult one. In addition to the series of grammatical exercises and sentences translation into Yiddish, the students had to translate into Russian an excerpt from Perets's "Hofenung

un shrek" (the latter was read in class shortly before the exam, but they weren't told that it will appear in the exam) and to write an original short text in Yiddish (not less than five sentences).

THE FINAL GRADES:

The final grades were given after considering (1) Yitskhok Niborski's grades, (2) the results of the two interim exams, the second being more important than the first, but both carrying less weight than the final exam, (3) my attendance and homework records and of course (4) the results of the final exam. However, the final grade is not a simple average of the various grades and I hope that it adequately represents the student's level of achievement. I of course regret all the "3"s which are too abundant to my taste (8 out of 28), but it seems that most of them were well deserved (probably with the exception of Anya Shternshis and to a lesser degree Any Malchikova — both are well meaning and quite hard working students).

II

OVERALL STUDENTS EVALUATION

All in all in both groups (including outside students) there are some fifteen very good students almost a half of which are excellent. The best ones in my opinion are :

ASTASHKEVICH, IRA
DUNAIEVSKII, MIKHAIL
GUSEV, VALENTIN
ELIASBERG, GALINA
KHEIFETS, KARINA
KORNILOV, ALEKSEI
KRICHEVSKII, LEV
KRIKUN, SVETA
LASHKEVICH, MIKHAIL
MINKIN, ALEKSANDR
MOGILOVA, YULIA
SHCHEDRIN, VASILY
SHKOLNIKOVA, ELINA
SOLNTSEVA, ANYA
VEKSELMAN, LARISA

I will not be surprised if most of them will also rate as the most promising students capable of independent research. It is, however, very difficult to know with regard to the fresh(wo)men who in most cases are less mature, though such students as IRA ASTASHKEVICH, ALEKSEI KORNILOV, YULIA MOGILOVA and ELINA SHKOLNIKOVA (and possibly SVETA KRIKUN) seem to be a safe bet. From among the more mature students I would like to single out: GALINA ELIASBERG, LEV KRICHEVSKII, VASILY SHCHEDRIN and ANYA SOLNTSEVA. Apropos Sveta Krikun, she will become next year as a full time student in the new Linguistics Department at RGGU. Could she, possibly, be encouraged to continue at the Program as a student with special interest in Yiddish (and later probably also Hebrew) language? Also Anya Solntseva has a strong interest in linguistics, her *kursovaya* paper on the language of Medieval Hebrew Poetry is excellent.

As for the outside students all three — MIKHAIL DUNAIEVSKII, VALENTIN GUSEV AND MIKHAIL LASHKEVICH are first rate.

DUNAIEVSKII is a young (possibly first year) Chemistry student from another University, who taught himself Yiddish, he is well motivated and very enthusiastic about the Program in general and Yiddish in particular. He even attended Prof. Chazan's lectures and passed his exam, although his English is virtually nonexistent (I translated for him the questions of Chazan's exam).

LASHKEVICH is a young (our age?) physicist, who also taught himself Yiddish, however he came to us with a far more systematic and deeper knowledge of the language than Dunaievskii. I don't know whether Lashkevich has any interest, ambition or motivation to become a Yiddish teacher, but it strikes me that he himself could soon become one of the most competent younger Yiddishists and possibly a Yiddish teacher in Moscow. Needless to say such people are in short supply in the CIS.

GUSEV is another excellent student notwithstanding his severe speech impediment (his stammering makes it impossible to benefit from his active participation in class).

Two other students, SIDLIN MIKHAIL and SIVERTSEV ALEKSEI, are often mentioned as promising and talented. Of the two, Sivertsev was by far more diligent and hard-working in my class. Both seem to be very good for research, though I would hesitate to qualify them as potential Yiddish scholars. Another student, ILYA DOLGOPOLSKII, strikes me as a very gifted person; if only his talent was matched with the motivation and diligence of Sivertsev!

As for the rest, the final grades speak for themselves. Once again I regret that both ANYA MALCHIKOVA and especially ANYA SHTERNISH were not able to get more than "3".

III

YIDDISH STUDIES

I am convinced that at least a number of the first rate students I have mentioned earlier may become primarily interested in Yiddish language, folklore and literature (e.g. Elina Shkolnikova's term-paper was on the *shtetl*, and Galina Eliasberg's on *Yisroel Tsinberg* [though she focused exclusively upon his earlier publications in Russian]). I would, therefore, like to suggest that at some later stage when the obligatory Yiddish classes are over some formal though facultative way of keeping up advanced Yiddish classes should be found (ie that the interested students should get credit if they participate in a four or three hour a week class of reading Yiddish texts and discussing them in Yiddish).

Moreover, even if none of the students chose to partially or fully specialise in Yiddish, even then one of the Program's obvious strengths is its emphasis upon the Yiddish component of modern Jewish Studies. I would, therefore, also like to reiterate my suggestion to invite DOVID

KATZ (somewhere in the academic year 1993-1994) for a month-long course, entitled *Introduction to Yiddish Studies*. Such a course will cover a very broad range of issues (Origins of Yiddish, Yiddish and Ashkenazic Hebrew, Western and Eastern dialects, Old Yiddish Literature, History of Yiddish Studies, Sociology of Yiddish). It seems that its importance and relevance to the Program is self-evident. Given Dovid Katz's standing as a scholar and a lecturer (with his very rich experience in teaching and lecturing on these topics to students of all levels) I know for certain that it will be a great success.

Perhaps also some of the Yiddish writers living in Moscow — e.g. KHAYEM BEYDER, MISHA LEV, SHMUEL GORDON, TEVYE GEN and HERSHL POLYANKER (he is very active and often comes to Moscow from Kiev; are there any others??) — could be invited to give a talk or two before the Program's students. Probably they could also be invited to frequent the Library, which has the potential of becoming an informal meeting place for Judaica and Yiddish hungry people.

IV

THE LIBRARY AND MARK ZAKHAROVICH

The Library is excellent and the Program is very lucky to have Mark Zakharovich PEREL as its Librarian. In addition to his experience and his Yiddish and Hebrew he is very much liked by the students and is always ready to help them. Last time I was there on Friday, 5 June he sat together with Dunaievskii and read with him Sholem Aleykhem's *Der blutiker shpas* in the recent *Sovetish heymland* edition. Unfortunately I did not manage to raise again the question of his proper employment by RGGU neither with Starostin nor with Basovskaya or Pivovar. I promised him to remind you about it. Dear David, this a psychologically very important issue for Mark Zakharovich and this bureaucratic matter insignificant as it may seem to us (or insurmountable as it appears to Ms Gorbunova) has to be positively resolved if the Judaica Program wants to keep him as its Librarian and Cataloguer.

The collection of books in the Library is excellent. I would like, however, to put the following short list of desiderata:

Dictionaries:

1. A bound photocopy of ROKHKIND AND SHKLYAR's *Yiddish—Russian Dictionary*, Minsk, 1941.
2. A copy of a large *Russian-English and English-Russian Dictionaries* as well as a copy of a large *Webster*.
3. BEN-YEHUDA's, *Hebrew Dictionary* (all volumes).
4. EVEN-SHOSHAN's *Hebrew Dictionary* (all volumes).
5. One of the major *Bible Concordances*.

Lexicons and Bibliography:

6. A full set of *Leksikon fun der nayer yidisher literatur* (ie the new *leksikon*).

7. Kressel's [*lexicon of modern Hebrew Authors*], (2 vols.) — if possible.
8. SHUNAMI's *Maftekh hamaftekh* (three vols?).
9. A full set of (a) *KIRYAT SEFER* and *RAMBI* [*reshimat maamarim bimadaei hayahadut*] — if possible.

Literary and Philological Publications:

10. A complete set of all YIVO publications (from Vilna, Warsaw and New York).
11. A complete set of all Yiddish Language and Literature series and publications issued and published by the BAR-ILAN, HEBREW and OXFORD Universities.
12. One (in most cases additional) copy of the following books:
 - M. Bordin's *Rusish — yidish shmuesbikhl [=Russko-evreiskii (idish) razgovornik]*, Jerusalem, 1991 (one copy I managed to get for the Library from the Israeli Embassy).
 - A. Harkavi's *Yiddish-English-Hebrew Dictionary*.
 - E. Falkovich's *Yidish, fonetik, grafik, leksik un gramatik*, Moscow, 1940 (at least a bound photocopy thereof).
 - D. Katz's *Grammar of the Yiddish Language* [I left one copy in the Library],
 - Y. Mark's *Gramatik fun der yidisher shprakh*.
 - M. Schaechter, *Yiddish II*.
 - U. Weinreich's *College Yiddish*;
 - U. Weinreich's *Modern Yiddish-English, English-Yiddish Dictionary*.

V

THE JEWISH ARCHIVE

In addition to acquiring pre mid- 1930s Judaica literature in Russian for the Library, which gave very promising results so far, I would also like to raise the question of the possibility to accommodate the various Jewish (and especially Yiddish) archival materials that surface now in Moscow and other cities of the CIS (eg MOINI SHULMAN's archive and possibly papers of many other Soviet Yiddish authors — MISHA LEV and KHAYEM BEYDER would be happy to advise on how and where these materials can be traced (by the way I recently learned that MOYSHE ALTMAN's daughter is trying to find a place in Israel for her father's archive). We briefly discussed this possibility while returning from our visit to Khayem Beyder.

If there is a future for Jewish Studies and research in Russia (and RGGU and this Program offer one the most essential efforts to secure it) then it makes sense to start a Jewish Archive attached to the RGGU's *Narodnyi Arkhiv*, where at least some of the work could be done by the Program's students.

VI

ONE YEAR ABROAD FOR RGGU JUDAICA STUDENTS

The possibility of sending some of the students to the Oxford Centre for Hebrew Studies One Year Abroad Programme was in principle enthusiastically received. I hope it will be fully negotiated and coordinated between JTS and OCPHS well in advance.

VII
FINALE

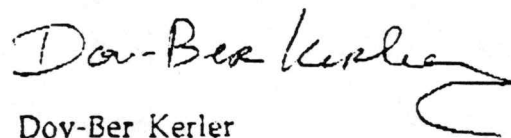
Dear David, it was a great pleasure to work with you and to be associated with such an exciting and in my view most promising Program. I am deeply grateful to you for providing me with such an excellent opportunity to come back to my native city of Moscow to teach there my native language to University students. Despite Moscow's gloom and the state of general and ever increasing disintegration it is Program like this and the good people I met at RGGU that give hope for a viable future for Russia and hence for the future of Jewish Studies and research there. I hope you will continue to keep me in touch with the Program and its growth and development.

In our fully computerised age, self-plagiarism becomes the order of the day. Hence the following lines which I "borrow" from my first Moscow letter to you and to which I fully subscribe:

Dear Dovid-Eliyohu, you deserve every gratitude and praise for inspiring, establishing and running one of the most promising and exciting programs in Jewish Studies. Everyone here (ie in Moscow), professors, administrators and students are enthusiastic about Project Judaica and its highly efficient management from the American side. Its significance is of course evident to anyone who is familiar with the history and current state of Jewish and especially Yiddish studies in Russia in the former Soviet Union. Last but not least I would like to thank you for giving me this rare opportunity to partake in the Project. Could you also convey my thanks to Ms Rebecca Jacobs for her able and indispensable help.

With many thanks for everything and with all best wishes,

Yours sincerely,


Dov-Ber Kerler

FOR THE ATTENTION OF PROFESSOR DAVID FISHMAN
the Jewish Theological Seminary