

"NEXT YEAR IN ..."

Avital Shcharansky was in San Francisco last week, in her continuing struggle to free her husband.

This time, she came with a new book, *Next Year in Jerusalem*, her stirring account of what is happening to Soviet Jews. It is also a love story. No one should miss it.

There emerges a fascinating portrait of how Jewish consciences grew in arid Russia. Since Avital's parents were dedicated Communists and "did not mention Jewishness" to her, she had little awareness of herself as a Jew. But even before she knew that Israel existed, she "always felt out of place in Russia, as if I were among foreigners."

Compounding that "sense of being alien, was the general grayness of the Soviet Union. I felt stifled in a dark world," writes Avital, "and I wanted to break out of it." Israel made the difference. As Avital became aware of its existence, it became the place to "break out" to.

But, at the time of the Yom Kippur War in 1973, she could still say: "Although I already planned to go to Israel, my decision to do this was unclear to me. If someone had asked me why, I couldn't have answered." It was then that she drifted into an involvement with the Soviet Jewry movement, met Anatoly Shcharansky and developed a sharper Zionist consciousness.

She was allowed to leave, Anatoly saying that he would meet her later. But, of course, he was absurdly charged with espionage, and in July, 1978, in Avital's words, "a Soviet court condemned me and my husband to 13 years of waiting, loneliness and suffering."

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Avital pays tribute to the strong moral and personal support of American Jews: the visits, the messages, the friendships. In San Francisco, the Bay Area Council on Soviet Jewry has undertaken that service function with great skill and distinction. It is a membership organization which deserves everyone's support. It is also the chief distributor of Avital's book in the area (415-585-1400).

Avital also pays tribute to America's political support. She was too young for the Black Years and the years of the Iron Curtain. Those were years of hopelessness in the 1950s and 1960s, when the Soviet Union did not care what America thought.

By the time Avital began thinking seriously about such things, the situation had changed. Because of China and internal economic pressures, the Soviet Union became vulnerable to influence from the U.S. government. And the U.S. government has been subject to the influence of the American Jewish community on this subject because of the general strength, and total involvement of American Jewry in the spectrum of public affairs in this country.

So, the Jackson-Vanik law should be kept on the books. (See the ad in this issue of the *Bulletin*, on page .) That is a general pressure point, and therefore has to do not only with emigration but with the Prisoners of Zion. The JCRC is sending a copy of Avital's book to all the Congressmen in Northern California. Buy the book, read it, and after you turn the last page, send a letter to your Congressman about Anatoly Shcharansky.

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