

# 32 Years Later the Phone Rang

*Mark Dov Shapiro, Rabbi Emeritus of Sinai Temple, Springfield  
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On Tuesday morning, April 25, 2017, Sinai Temple's office received a telephone call. Someone named VERA MELAMED from Los Angeles was asking to speak to me. Robin, who answers the phone, wondered if this was a legitimate phone call. Just in case it wasn't, she thanked the caller and said someone would get back to her. Robin then called me to ask if I knew who this person was...and before she had spelled the last name for me...I knew exactly who Vera Melamed was.

I knew her because I had met her in Moscow in January 1985.

At the time, I was on a mission with a friend of mine to visit Soviet Jewish REFUSENIKS. These were Soviet Jews who had applied to leave the Soviet Union and been "refused." As a result, their lives were in disarray. My friend and I spent ten days in the Soviet Union visiting some of these families in Moscow, Leningrad, and Riga.

In particular, I was interested in visiting with 12 year old Vera and her family because my Bnai Mitzvah students at my congregation in White Plains were "twinning" their Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremonies with Vera. I had even brought a gift for Vera from my congregation.

NOW Vera was on the phone to me in 2017!!!

32 years later!!!



*Rabbi Shapiro visiting with the Melamed family in  
Moscow in January 1985*

Turns out that Vera and her family received permission to go to Israel about two years after my visit. I briefly saw them when I myself was in Israel not long after that.

But that was it...We had no further contact until Vera called me on April 25, 2017. Now at the age of 44, Vera is married and lives with her husband and three daughters in Los Angeles. She's become an American! One daughter has already become a Bat Mitzvah; her younger twin daughters will soon become Bnot Mitzvah. Vera has survived and thrived!

And how did she find me?

She did an Internet search on her name which led her to an article I wrote for the New York Times after the 1985 trip.

For my part, I had a new gift for Vera. I found the photos I took in her Moscow apartment back in 1985 and sent them to her!

What a marvelous discovery for each of us!

Please enjoy the photo from so long ago in Moscow.

Please read the New York Times article to learn more about the 1985 journey.

MDS

<http://www.nytimes.com/1985/03/31/nyregion/westchester-opinion-rabbi-finds-isolation-close-companion-soviet-refuseniks.html?pagewanted=all>