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MaozNews is a monthly publication. Our goal is to provide readers with an overview of realities in and with regard to Israel, with particular but not exclusive reference to the Gospel. Readers will view those portions of MaozNews in which they have interest. To that end, we seek to diversify.

Israel Challenged By Reality

Who Is A Jew?

Can a person who does not believe in God, observe the Sabbath and other Jewish traditions or provide his children with a religious education be a Jew? Before you answer, note that most of the Jewish state's leaders fit this definition. Well, then, can a gentile who fits this description become a Jew without assuming these characteristics? From the perspective of the Israeli rabbinical courts, to which the State has

consigned the right to determine who may join the Jewish people according to

Israeli law, the answer is a resounding "No". The Rabbinate refuses to recognize anything less than a thoroughgoing religious conversion, including the commitment to a life-long Jewish religious lifestyle.

What, then, characterizes Jewish identity – values or submission to a

tradition? Which values? Which tradition?

A Tough Question

"Who Is a Jew" has become one of the toughest questions troubling the nation since the founding of the State of Israel. It involves who may become Jewish and how one may do so; who determines who is a Jew; who accords immigration and absorption rights, who grants citizenship and how to relate to the hundreds of thousands of non-Jews who identify with the nation but he decline a religious conversion.

Some 350,000 non-Jewish immigrants' most of them legal, moved to Israel in the last 19 years. A few thousand of these have converted to Judaism. But all of these immigrants are now an inseparable part of the Israeli Jewish society, often treated as second-class citizens. Meanwhile, the State offers inducement to conversion, a branch in the Prime Minister's office is responsible for the promotion of conversions, and the Army encourages and abets the conversion of non-Jewish conscripts.

A New Jewish Identity

Over the years, Jewish Israelis have sought to forge a new form of Jewish national identity, one that would not be contingent on rabbinical recognition or Jewish religious mores'. Some time ago last year, Israeli author and thinker, A.B. Yehoshua addressed the centennial

conference of the American Jewish Committee on the issue.

He said that, until the modern era, Judaism was never a "religion" like Christianity, primarily responsible for its adherents' spiritual life. Life in a Jewish state in which most of the decisions are framed by "Jewish" questions and given purportedly "Jewish" answers is, in his view, by far more "Jewish" than life in the Diaspora, where a small part of a person's life is conducted within the context of his Jewish identity. This, he insisted, is not merely a modern view of reality, but a traditional Jewish posture, originating in the Bible.

This is misleading. Being "Jewish" is more than merely being born of certain parents; a "Jewish" act is more than something done by a person born to such parents. Jewishness is a (biblically motivated) world view, issuing in specific forms of action shaped and driven by that very world view. It is also more than an affirming nod toward certain national traditions, even when these are not allowed to take on religious overtones, and however secondary these might be to an essential Jewish worldview. That is why the early Zionists dreamt of creating "an exemplary society" which would be free of rabbinical shackles while affirming traditionally Jewish customs in a free and spontaneous manner.

However, the bulk of Israeli life has not been conducted in reference to traditional Jewish values, nor informed

by such a world view. Secular Israelis today measure their lives in terms of Western liberal cultural values, while religious Jews confine their Jewishness to observing traditional Jewish practices, promoting their respective rabbinical courts and their special interests, and staying aloof of Israeli society.

What Values, Then?

What values guide Israeli society today? The Orthodox are busy in their grab for political power, meanwhile milking the State of its human and financial resources and seeking to encroach on the liberties of non-Orthodox Israelis. The non-religious are driven by man-centered, pleasure-seeking western values. Witness the fact that many thousands have supported caving in to Hamas' demands in return for the release of an abducted Israeli soldier. Witness the widespread unwillingness to shoulder responsibility, make sacrifices and strive for the common good.

Israel remains at loss: it affirms its desire to be a Jewish State, but has yet to determine what is "Jewish".

If being Jewish involves identifying with a cultural tradition, is it only that? And what constitutes that identification? Does it imply unquestioning submission to a consensus regarding that tradition, or has the tradition been frozen at some stage, never to be subject to change? If being Jewish involves identifying with a biblical world view and with the values

that are the product of that view, how can one be indifferent to, or deny, the existence of God and his right to rule over man, and yet be considered Jewish? The biblical world view not only recognizes the existence of God, but is essentially God-focused: it acknowledges God's right to be loved and served before all others, and therefore obeyed with warm affection.

What, then, is the Jewish view to the various versions of God that claim to be Jewish – Orthodox, Conservative, Reformed and Jewish Christian? Which is the truest expression of Jewishness? This is a truly thorny question.

Looming Catastrophe

Meanwhile, Israel is well on its way to a heart-rending, potentially catastrophic social and political upheaval, driven by the loss of its moral compass and altruistic, man-centered and relativistic values. These lead inexorably to a short-sighted egotism that cannot see beyond the immediate, and therefore is ill equipped to deal with the immediate, let alone prepare for the future.

A democracy can only function as such if its citizens are morally motivated, politically informed, actively involved, and share a broad common vision, however much they disagree on the details. Europe has a long history of institutional political endeavor in which it can fall back and which creates its various shared national visions (however much they are now being eroded, issuing in the European Union). American society lacks that institutional history, but has a constitution that secures it a broad, shared vision that has been amazingly successful in creating American values to which the majority of immigrants to the US quickly subscribe.

Israel has neither such a history nor such a constitution. Its citizens today do not have a broad, shared vision of what they want for the country. It's Declaration of Independence out-Kissingered Kissinger's cynical Realpolitik by premeditatedly employing "constructively ambiguous terminology" which each segment of Israeli society interprets as it sees fit.

Conflicting Dreams

The Orthodox dream of a rabbinocracy guided by ultra-Orthodox religious tradition. The (non-religious)majority dream of a western-style democracy in which, to use Theodore Herzl's terms, the army remains in its barracks and the rabbis in their synagogues. The right dreams of a territorially-expanded Israel in which Jews hold a privileged position, the left of a liberal, humane utopia in which all citizens are equal and there are no restrictive moral values but those of "love".

Israel's moral crisis is inserting itself into the very fabric of Israeli life, with the citizenry disintegrating into blocs with radically conflicting worldviews, based on radically different reads of history. The lack absence of a shared national vision is increasingly obvious, resulting in a polarizing of society and a gradual loss of social solidarity and of social mutual responsibility of the various members of Israeli society the one to the other.

Israel's parliament is paralyzed by a coalition Government that is so wide it stands for nothing and for everything in between. The opposition, composed of a handful of small political parties, is hamstrung by widely differing platforms and viewpoints. Contempt for the law, the courts and the police is increasingly pronounced, with senior religious and political figures speaking out against these essential institutions and those who head them. The West Bank settlers have long chosen to ignore Governmental and

national policy, to follow their own and to impose their views on both the Government and Israeli society.

Moral Values

Sacrifice has become, at best, a byword and is never taught in schools and in most units of the military. Soldiers' duty is not to vanquish the enemy at any cost by to get through the conflict at minimal expense to oneself and to one's unit (in that order).

A "let's eat and be merry" attitude bespeaks what may well be a hidden persuasion that "tomorrow we die". So corruption is widespread, homosexuality is promoted in the written and spoken Press, and the parents of an abducted soldier seek to impose upon the Government valid personal and emotional consideration, invalidly deemed to be more important than the country's interest. The army is no longer viewed as made up of "our young men", but of "our dear children", and parents dare interfere in the running of military units, while the political and military leadership evidence a disturbing lack of courage, talent and determination.

Israel's educational system is falling behind many countries of the world and the only areas in which Israelis are scoring new successes are either the product of previous year's education or focused on technology and money-making. Quite apart from other considerations, which make Israel's military presence on the West Bank necessary, there seems to be no justification for Israel's treatment of the Palestinians living there. Nor does such treatment help in creating a solid basis for goodwill and mutual trust, so necessary for peace-making. After all, true peace is Israel's surest path to security. Yet it apparently remains Israel's least concern, in spite of protestations to the contrary.

It sometimes looks as if what was originally the Israel-Arab conflict and has now become a conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is the only glue holding the

nation together. Should, God forbid, that conflict be resolved, Israelis will be at each other's throats.

Israel is truly faced with a challenge – the challenge of its life.

Baruch's Biography

Having been called up in October 1973, Baruch's unit fought on the Golan, where we pick up the story.

The October War (continued)

When the fighting subsided, we were allowed home for 24 hours, while the rest of the unit bivouacked in the field. Uzzi and I each made it home just in time to hug and kiss our wives, shower, change clothes and make our way back to our unit – only to discover that it had moved. Effi had left us coordinates, so we found the men in a short while. On another occasion we were allowed 12 hours at a nearby Kibbutz, which had invited us all to swim, eat a civilian meal instead of military rations and sleep in a real bed. Uzzi and I, with Effi covering for us, skipped the day at the Kibbutz and made our way home instead. It was worth every short moment! Little Avital was terrified to see me: in expectation of nerve gas attacks, I had been ordered to shave off my beard, so the gas mask would fit snugly. Avital had never seen me without a beard, so I sounded like Daddy, walked like daddy, but sure didn't look like him!

The politicians talked on. Winter was encroaching. Our sleeping bags would be frozen stiff when we woke up in the field in the morning. New sleeping bags were issued – the first we had seen with a plastic exterior which served for insulation. I inserted my old sleeping bag into the new one and slept well through the night. The Syrian Kuneitra was nearby, so we went to see it and were shocked by the systematic devastation our troops had wrecked upon the city. Once-attractive houses were now mere shells, with the doors, windows, plumbing and many of the tiles removed.

We were billeted on another low hilltop when a shell-shocked soldier was brought to us. Unlike the one described earlier, the onset of this man's condition was gradual, the product of three weeks of war. He was the Division Commander's radio operator. He had not been involved in any shooting, but heard the cries of men through the radio and the details of their combat situations.

Effi instructed us not to let the man out of our sight. The Division Commander wanted him sent to the rear but Effi refused - "If we send him back, that will be the end of him. He'll never come out of his present condition. I can't do that to him". One day Effi was engaged elsewhere. The Division Commander seized the opportunity and, with the

connivance of another doctor, filling in for Effi, had the man sent to the rear. Effi was furious when he heard and gave the Commander more than just an idea of what he thought of such unprofessional behavior. The Commander had exceeded his authority by acting contrary to a doctor's instructions. I was impressed and challenged by Effi's sincere concern for the men.

It began to snow. We were instructed to billet in a camp at the entrance to Kuneitra. Uzzi and I reconnoitered until we found an old stove. We brought it to the broken-down building in which the medical team was to set up, went about shutting the windows with nylon sheeting and placed the stove in the living room, where we all slept, eat, cooked and treated the men. I took an infusion kit, emptied it of its original contents and used it as a drip for diesel fuel, thus feeding the stove. We had the warmest, best fitted residence in the whole Division.

In Sinai

Our troops had managed to push the Syrian and Egyptian armies back and establish themselves within range of Damascus on the Northern Front and a mere 101 KMs away from Cairo in the south. In the course of battles in the south, our army encircled Egypt's Third Army. There was talk of a break out attempt by the encircled Egyptian Second Army, so we, with many other units, were hastily moved south to buttress the forces in the Sinai and underwent defensive preparations for gas warfare.

It was a long way down to Sinai. We drove for some 24 hours, until we arrived quite close to the Suez Canal, where we were told to set up camp. Most of the men slept on the way, making up for weeks of sleeplessness. I kept Uzzi company. He was driving, dead tired and needed someone to help him stay awake, but I repeatedly dozed off, only to be awakened time and again with a jolt.

We remained in Sinai for five months, and saw no action. Our presence surrounding the Egyptian forces was merely a bargaining chip, albeit an important one. Morale began to sink. Businesses owned by the men were collapsing, agricultural farms going to waste, family loyalties cracking under the strain of long separation. I asked Effi to back me as I assumed responsibility for the morale of the men, which I viewed as an aspect of their health, for which he and I were responsible. I was given the rank of Sergeant First Class, then Staff Sergeant, and Effi's full backing. For a time I considered officers' course but did not pursue this path. Effi commanded the doctors in the 4 Division and I the medics. When one of us was on leave, the other would fill in for him, but Effi was my superior in every way, including rank

It was a busy time for me, but a good one. We cared for the men and I sought to help train and equip the medics for future service and to render our medical work more efficient. I enjoyed the work but pined for Bracha (as I always do when we are forced to separate) and for Avital. The friendship between Uzzi and me grew stronger as we shared the tent and the work, and as we traveled together to visit our families.

Troops were being ferried by the air force from Rephidim, about 40 minute's drive north of where we were on Tsir Tasa. On one occasion, when it was our turn to go home, I asked Effi for permission to have our driver drop us off at the airport. Permission was not granted, but the driver was allowed to take us from our base to the water source on the way. We hopped in and drove off – straight to the airport.

Upon our return, Effi was working with us in improving our living conditions when he asked me, “Baruch, did you go with the vehicle to Rephidim.” “Yes,” I admitted, I could not lie. “You're grounded. You will miss the next rota for going home – and next time you had better obey my orders!” I accepted the discipline and apologized, He was right, and I had acted as a Christian should never act. Effi then proceeded to “ground” himself for a whole vacation rota, so that I would not be grounded for a month! His form of leadership, quiet, fair, demanding, generous and moral was an inspiration.

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Ministry News

Bracha has been visiting family and friends since June 11th. Baruch hopes to join her on July 12th, at which time he will undertake a number of preaching and teaching engagements. He will also be utilizing the time to edit a number of books from the **Modern Hebrew Bible for Youth**, putting final touches on his **Matthew** and working on **Romans**. Since he is also working on his series of commentaries on the Minor Prophets,

he has agreed to speak on **Malachi** in January. HaGefen has undertaken to commence production of his **Judges** in October and HaChotam may be interested in publishing his **Christian Disciplines**.

Work at the church is making encouraging progress. A young man is now in place, filling in for Baruch with the **Young Adults** while he is away. It is hoped that, in due time, he will prove capable of taking over this aspect of Baruch's activity in the church, freeing him for other endeavors while rendering the work among the young people far more effective. Baruch's age is not exactly helpful when working with these dear people...

Baruch has also been involved in some **counseling**, particularly one of the families, challenged by a set of circumstances for which they were ill-equipped to deal. Fundamentally, it is Baruch's conviction that the principles of the Gospel need to be applied to the varying circumstances of life, and that doing so enables one to either resolve an issue or live with it wisely and in a manner that glorifies God.

Work on **Romans** is progressing well. Apart from a few instances of fine-tuning, the work has entered its final process and, it looks likely, will be completed before the expected 24 months are ended.

Four days before leaving for the States, **Baruch's laptop collapsed**. He spent the next two days scurrying from one service station to the next in an effort to either repair the computer or find a temporary replacement. The purchase of a new computer (this one is almost 3 years' old) is out of the question. Happily, the motherboard was replaced in time and he is back in harness.

Yours prayers, letters of encouragement and various expressions of fellowship in the Gospel are all greatly appreciated. From time to time, when events justify our doing so, we produce and distribute our Breaking News reports on a daily basis. Helping us increase readership is a great means of getting the message out.

We expect, by the next issue of MaozNews, that **Shlomit** will have given birth and will be happy to share the news with you once it is available. At the moment, we do not even know if are expecting a boy or a girl...

In Christ by wonderful grace,

Baruch and Bracha Maoz

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