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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.

An Unlikely Love and an Unlikely Escape

Based on material provided by Associated Press

Falling in Love

It was July 21, 1944. Bielecki was walking in broad daylight down a pathway at Auschwitz, wearing a stolen SS uniform with his Jewish sweetheart, Cyla Cybulska by his side. His knees buckling with fear, he maintained a stern bearing on the long stretch of gravel to the sentry post. The German guard frowned at his forged pass and eyed the two for a period that seemed like an eternity - then uttered the miraculous words: Ja, danke - yes, thank you - and let Jerzy and Cyla out of the death camp and into freedom. They were among the few to escape. The 23-year-old Bielecki used his relatively privileged position as a German-speaking Catholic Pole to orchestrate the daring rescue of his Jewish girlfriend, who was doomed to die with the rest of the Jews in camp.

It was great love, Bielecki, now 89, recalled at his home in this small southern town 55 miles (85 kilometers) from Auschwitz. "We planned to be married and live together forever." Bielecki was 19 when the Germans seized him on the false suspicion he was a resistance fighter, and brought to Auschwitz in April 1940 as part of the first transport of inmates, all Poles. He was given number 243 and sent to work in the warehouses, where occasional access to additional food offered a chance of survival.

Two years before the first mass transports of Jews started arriving, in 1942. Most of the Jews were taken straight to the gas chambers in neighboring Birkenau. Others were designated to forced labor amid horrific conditions. In September 1943, Bielecki was assigned to a grain

warehouse. Another inmate was showing him around when a door opened and a group of girls walked in. "It seemed to me that one of them, a pretty dark-haired one, winked at me", Bielecki said with a broad smile as he recalled the scene.

It was Cyla - who had just been assigned to repair grain sacks. " Cybulska, her parents, two brothers and a younger sister were rounded up in January 1943 in the Lomza ghetto in northern Poland and taken to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Her parents and sister were immediately killed in the gas chambers. She and her brothers were sent to work.

Their friendship grew into love, as the warehouse offered brief chances for further face-to-face meetings. Cybulska recalled that during the meetings they told each other their life stories. "Every meeting was an important event for both of us

A Daring Escape

By September, 22-year-old Cybulska was the only one of her family alive, with inmate number 29558 tattooed on her left forearm. As their love blossomed, Bielecki began working on the daring plan for escape. From a fellow Polish inmate working at a uniform warehouse he secretly obtained a SS uniform and a pass. Using an eraser and a pencil, he changed the officer's name in the pass from Rottenfuehrer Helmut Stehler to Steiner, just in case the guard knew the real Stehler, and filled it in to say an inmate was being led out of the camp for police interrogation at a nearby station.

He secured food, a razor for himself and a sweater and boots for Cybulska. He briefed her on his plan. The next afternoon, Bielecki, dressed in the stolen uniform, came to the barrack to which Cybulska had been moved. Sweating with fear, he demanded the German supervisor release the woman. Bielecki led her out of the barrack and onto a long path leading to a side gate guarded by the sleepy SS-man who let them go through.

The fear of being gunned down followed his first steps to freedom: "I felt pain in my backbone, where I was expecting to be shot," Bielecki said. Eventually, when he looked back, the guard was in his booth. Bielecki and Cybulska walked on to a road, then into fields where they hid in the bushes until dark, when they started to trek. "Marching across fields and woods was very exhausting, especially for me, not used to such intensive walks," Cybulska said in her report to Auschwitz as quoted in a Polish-language book Bielecki has written, *He Who Saves One Life ...* "Far from any settlements, we had to cross rivers," she wrote. "When water was high ... Jurek carried me to the other side." At one point she was too tired to walk and asked him to leave her.

"Jurek did not want to hear that. He insisted: 'we fled together and will walk on together,'" she reported, referring to Jerzy by his Polish diminutive. For nine nights they moved under the cover of darkness toward Bielecki's uncle's home in a village near Krakow. His mother was overjoyed to see him alive, though wasted-away after four years at Auschwitz. However, she was dead against him marrying a Jewish girl: "How will you live? How will you raise your children?"

The Aftermath

To protect Cybulska from possible Nazi patrols, she was hidden on a nearby farm. Bielecki decided to go into hiding in Krakow - a choice they believed would improve their chances of

avoiding capture. The couple spent their last night together under a pear tree in an orchard, saying their goodbyes and making plans to meet after the war.

When the Soviet army rolled through Krakow in January 1945, Bielecki left Krakow and walked 25-miles (40-kilometers) along snow-covered roads to meet Cybulska at the farmhouse. But he was four days too late.

Cybulska, unaware that the area had been liberated three weeks before Krakow, gave up waiting for him, concluding from his non-arrival at the farm that he was dead or had abandoned their plans. She took a train to Warsaw, intending to establish contact with an uncle in the United States. On the train she met a Jewish man, David Zacharowitz. The two began a relationship and eventually married. They headed to Sweden, then to Cybulska's uncle in New York, who helped them start a jewelry business. Zacharowitz died in 1975. In Poland, Bielecki eventually started a family of his own and worked as the director of a school for car mechanics.

He had no news of Cybulska and had no way of finding her. In her report Cybulska said that she was haunted in the years after she left Poland by a wish to see her hometown and to find Jurek, if he was alive. Chance made her wish come true. While talking to her Polish cleaning woman in 1982, Cybulska related her Auschwitz escape story. The woman was stunned. "I know the story, I saw a man on Polish TV saying he had led his Jewish girlfriend out of Auschwitz," the cleaning lady told Cybulska. She tracked down his phone number and, one early morning in May 1983, the telephone rang in Bielecki's apartment in Nowy Targ. "I heard someone laughing - or crying - on the phone and then a female voice said 'Juracku, this is me, your little Cyla,'" Bielecki recalls.

A few weeks later they met at the Krakow airport. He brought 39 red roses, one for each year they spent apart. She visited him in Poland many times, and they jointly visited the Auschwitz memorial, the farmer family that hid her and many other places, staying together in hotels. "Our love started to return," Bielecki said. "Cyla kept telling me: 'leave your wife, come with me to America.' She cried a lot when I told her: 'Look, I have such fine children, I have a son. How can I leave them?'" She returned to New York and wrote him: "Jurek I will not return."

They never met again and she did not reply to his letters. Cybulska died a few years later in New York in 2002.

State and Religion in Israel

The Bill Proposed

In Jerusalem last week, the Committee on Constitution, Law and Justice of Israel's Parliament (the Knesset) approved a draft of Conversion Reform Bill that sparked concern and outrage among secular, Reform and Conservative Jewish communities in Israel and abroad. Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu said he opposes the bill proposed because it will "tear the Jewish people apart", and promised he would ensure that his party's (Likud) Ministers voted against the bill.

The bill was drafted by Committee chairman MK David Rotem (Yisrael Beiteinu, a right

wing, highly nationalist party led by Minister of Foreign Affairs, Avigdor Liberman), proposes to assign authority on all matters of religious conversion in Israel to the Chief Rabbinate.

Unlike the United States, Israel does not separate religion and state although its Declaration of Independence guarantees freedom of religion. Judaism enjoys special status and extensive State support. The Israel Religious Action Center was founded in order to defend and promote non-Orthodox rights in

Israel, and has for years been trying to attain government funding for Reform and Conservative congregations in Israel, among other things it has espoused.

Jewish Identity and Politics

There is an ongoing struggle in the Jewish world over who has authority to determine what constitutes “true” or “authentic” Judaism. The proposed bill is but another stage in this internal struggle.

Israel operates on the basis of the notion that Jewish identity is a matter of coalition politics, which leads the country into a perpetual limbo between Orthodox elements, who demand the right to determine civilian laws (edging the country toward a theocracy) and guaranteeing freedom of religion and equal rights, as any credible democracy must do. Israel has structured its legal and governmental system in such a way that the Knesset may determine what kind of Jews the State will recognize.

American Jews demand that Israel uphold freedom of religion, including the freedom for Jews to determine their own different religious identities, a step that would require recognition of non-Orthodox religious practices, including non-Orthodox

conversions to Judaism. They fear that an explicit call for separation of religion and state in Israel would undermine the state’s “Jewish character” and the privileges it reserves for Jews by way of the Law of Return. The same concern forces Israel to maintain a murky definition of its “Jewish” character.

The Dilemma

Thus, caught on the horns of conflicting paradigms (“Jewish” and “democratic”) Israel cannot separate religion and state and remain a “Jewish” state. What is more, it is forced to determine, to all intents and purposes, what form of Judaism will be recognized by the State, thereby delegitimizing other forms while according the State a role in religious controversies.

The conversion bill is one in a long line of examples that expose a fundamentally flawed system in which the State of Israel has yet to decide how to be both Jewish and democratic, or one of the two. Sixty-two years after Israel was founded, this remains the most important, most fundamental question the nation faces. What is disturbing to many is that Israel’s Government and Knesset should be involved in any way in the framing and enacting of religious legislation. Aspiring to be and to remain a democracy, government involvement and civic legislation in such a matter is nothing short of an outrage.

The Minister of Minority Affairs Avishay Braverman (Labor) slammed the bill, stating, “It is inconceivable that (if the bill passes into legislation) more than 85% of U.S. Jewry would become second rate Jews.”

Opposition party parliamentarians from Kadima insisted, “Netanyahu has surrendered to the ultra-Orthodox, while and the Likud has fled ... The purposeful absence of Likud Knesset Members during

the vote led to the victory of the putrid deal that Yisrael Beitenu struck with the Orthodox factions at the expense of Zionism and the Jews of the Diaspora."

On the other hand, Interior Minister Eli Yishai (Shas, the prominent Orthodox religious party in Government) said that the absence of a conversion law would, itself, pose "an enormous spiritual danger to the Jewish people." Sephardi chief Rabbi Shlomo Amar also stressed the need for the bill: "If they heeded my advice, [the Orthodox parties in Government] would stand together with one voice and one heart and say 'it's the conversion law or we're resigning.'"

The bill's sponsor, David Rotem, an Orthodox lawmaker from the largely secular Yisrael Beitenu party, has rejected criticism, describing the goal of the bill as an effort to render conversion easier for immigrants from the former Soviet Union (who make up the majority of his party's voters). The bill empowers selected municipal chief Rabbis to conduct conversions. Currently, all such power is vested in the chief Rabbinate.

Present Reality

Roughly 1 million people immigrated to Israel after the collapse of the Soviet Union, many with doubtful ties to Judaism. Rotem has said his bill would allow would-be converts the freedom to shop around and look for an amenable local Rabbi. However, since not all conversions are recognized by the Rabbinate, such "shopping around" would be futile.

Under current practice, Israel accords Jews special privileges in the process of immigration, including financial assistance and immediate citizenship upon entry. Conversions performed in Israel are recognized by Israeli law only if conducted by Orthodox Rabbis. However, conversions

by non-Orthodox Rabbis outside Israel are recognized and render the converts eligible for all special privileges. The proposed legislation would accord Israel's chief Rabbinate the power to determine the legitimacy of any conversion.

The group most likely to suffer would be immigrants who converted to Judaism abroad, but it will also affect the large number of non-Jews who are prepared to convert so long as the act is a formality and does not bind them to an Orthodox lifestyle. They prefer, therefore, to undergo conversion under Reform or Conservative Rabbis rather than submit to life-long Orthodox stipulations.

The bill therefore touches a raw nerve in the Reform and Conservative movements, in Israel, where Orthodox Rabbis have a monopoly over religious practices such as marriage and burial. Staunch Jewish supporters of Israel are concerned with the prospect of further entrenchment of Orthodox control, and its proposed authority to be the sole arbiter of Jewish identity in Israel. If the bill passes into law, this would serve a blow to non-Orthodox Rabbis the world over.

"A Crises of the First Order"

Rabbi David Saperstein, head of the Washington-based Religious Action Center of the Union of Reform Judaism, said the bill, if passed, would mark a crisis of the first order. "It would be an enormous blow to the unity of the Jewish people and the principle of religious freedom in Israel," said Saperstein, who is visiting Israel to lobby lawmakers to drop the bill. "The American Jewish community will remain strongly engaged in Israel, but the message will be sent that the Government of Israel does not accept our Rabbis and our movement as legitimate; this would make all our work [on behalf of Israel] much more difficult." Of the

world's roughly 13 million Jews, half live in Israel and most of the other in North America.

Reform Rabbi Galia Sadan has said, "What has disturbed the Reform Movement from its inception is the question of the Jewish people's spiritual survival - how this people can continue to exist despite the dizzying changes of the modern world. That's the question that disturbs today as well: Are we bringing people closer ... in a pleasant, accepting process that understands the tension between a person's desire to adopt Jewish tradition and his desire to maintain a modern lifestyle, or are we interested in a humiliating process that causes people to fail? ... Orthodox conversion is very difficult to complete. It's an educational process that expects people to become religiously observant, and what can you do if not everyone wants to become religiously observant? People pretend so they'll get the seal of approval.

Democracy and Religion

"Our country (Israel, *BM*) was revealed in all its glory in 2002 when it declared that its' society is to be pluralistic, and that a person can be recognized as a convert in any (Jewish) denomination he chooses. The High Court of Justice ruled that the government must recognize all conversions ... Now this bill comes and takes us backward. We're giving up pluralism, recognizing only the Rabbinate and ruling that only conversions done through the Rabbinate will be recognized.

"That's the situation that exists with regard to marriage. Since 1964, the Rabbinate has been the only institution that can approve marriage between Jews in Israel. Today we're eating the rotten fruits of that law. A growing number of people refuse to wed through the Rabbinate.

"Giving authority to the Chief Rabbinate means that if you don't observe the Sabbath, they won't convert you. If you seek to convert because you want to live according to Jewish tradition but don't want to observe Shabbat -- to live a Jewish but non-Orthodox life -- you won't be able to convert. We are all reaping the rotten fruit of the marriage law that gave the Rabbinate a monopoly. Israel is not a democracy if there are people in the country who can't get married. Do we want to behave the same way with regard to conversion?

"If [the bill] says the Rabbinate has "authority," then the ultra-Orthodox will interpret that as *exclusive* authority, and we will have to turn to the courts. The practical significance is that we will have to fight again over the [existing] status quo [established over the course of years between the State and the Rabbinate, *BM*]. Why should the State of Israel go backward?

At present, no law determines who is allowed or not allowed to perform conversions, and only thanks to that can the State preserve its' pluralistic, liberal character and enable every citizen to choose the lifestyle he wants. The moment a law accords the Rabbinate such exclusive authority, the State of Israel will lose its pluralistic character.

"[Excluding the Arabs, *BM*], some 320,000 people live in Israel, who are not Jewish according to halakha (Jewish religious law), mostly from the former Soviet Union. Most of these are Israeli citizens. Nevertheless, are unable to marry in Israel, and after their death, cannot have a Jewish funeral. Yet many converts, who invested many years and large sums of money to convert, including some who made personal sacrifices for choosing to be Jewish, have discovered that their conversion is not recognized by the ultra-Orthodox, who dominate the Chief Rabbinate, or even had

their conversion annulled by Rabbinical courts.

Attempted Solutions

“After the Chief Rabbinate started refusing to perform conversions due to Orthodox objections, former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon set up special conversion courts under the auspices of the Prime Minister's Office. Dozens of Rabbinical judges were recruited for the project, most from the religious Zionism movement. The system was headed by Rabbi Haim Druckman, and Chief Sephardi Rabbi Shlomo Amar had supreme authority over it.

“Many of the converts were soldiers, who completed the process during their military service via the army's Nativ project. And last week, Beit Morasha, a Jerusalem center for Jewish studies, inaugurated the Israel Institute for Conversion Policy, which will focus on converting teens.

“The ultra-Orthodox Rabbis may no longer be part of this conversion process, but they have found ways to impact converts' lives. Some marriage registrars refuse to register converts because, they claim, the converts are not sufficiently observant [of Jewish religious tradition]. Rabbinical court judges have revoked the conversions of converts who sought to divorce their Jewish spouses. The worst incident occurred in 2008, when the Rabbinical Court of Appeals retroactively annulled all conversions performed by Rabbi Druckman's courts.

“Since the governmental conversion courts are weak, the bill offers a user-friendly process for those who prefer an Orthodox conversion. It proposes that municipal Rabbis, all of who belong to the Chief Rabbinate, be allowed to set up conversion courts and carry out conversions for residents of Israel, regardless of their place of abode.

“The bill increases the Chief Rabbinate's authority over conversions and requires the Rabbinate to approve the appointment of conversion judges. But Rotem's assumption is that the Chief Rabbinate is not entirely Haredi (Orthodox); it also contains religious Zionist and modern Orthodox Rabbis - and it is they who will perform the conversions. The bill also makes it harder to revoke conversions, saying Rabbinical courts may do so only if the chief Rabbis approve.”

The Orthodox expect the Chief Rabbinate to pressure municipal Rabbis so that they adhere to rigorous conversion standards. “For the first time, Israeli law is giving the Chief Rabbinate authority over conversion. The Rabbinate does not have that power today. [Non-Orthodox Jewish leaders, *BM*] are concerned by the bill's wording, according to which conversion will be recognized only if the convert has "accepted the Torah and the commandments in accordance with halakha (Jewish religious law).”

This unprecedented stipulation excludes the Conservative and Reform communities, as well as non-religious individuals who opt to join their fate with that of the Jewish people. “Finally, there is concern lest the bill would effectively overturn a 2002 High Court of Justice ruling that required the Interior Ministry to recognize converts of all denominations performed in Israel or overseas. “

Acting on instructions from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Cabinet Secretary Zvi Hauser reached an agreement with Israel Reform and Masorti (traditional) Jewish movements, persuading them to drop a petition to the High Court in exchange for a six-month freeze on all legislative action with regard to the bill. Netanyahu had instructed Hauser to "find any means to

maintain the unity of the Jewish nation," said the Prime Minister's spokesman, Nir Hefetz.

During the six months period, a committee led by the chairman of the Jewish Agency, Natan Sharansky, will work with the Reform and traditional movements to draft an alternative to current proposals. Netanyahu lauded the compromise: "Change in the law on conversions in Israel must be carried out

through broad agreement to prevent a split within the Jewish nation," he said. "Unity is in the foremost interest of the State of Israel and the Jewish nation, and I intend to defend that principle with determination." Mark Pelavin, director of the Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism said the cabinet's decision was "a positive development, but we must see if this time will be used to find the compromise or it's just a delay and kicking a ball down the road."

Murder in Exchange for Kindness

From Breaking News www.TheMaozWeb.com July 25 2010

One of the members of the cell that, roughly eight weeks ago, murdered a police officer was designated as a "humanitarian case" and accorded special privileges one month before the attack. **His six-year-old daughter required surgery** to remove a tumor in her eye and was hospitalized in Jerusalem, at the expense of an Israeli non-profit organization and as one of many expressions of goodwill on the part of Israelis toward Palestinians. The father was permitted to remain by her bed at the hospital until she recovered. According to the father's own admission, he planned the assassination at his daughter's bedside, while Israeli medical teams treated his daughter.

The cell began operating in 2009, when its members received training. In the first months of 2010, they decided to attack an Israeli target. They located a convenient ambush site along the road, and **decided to attack a police car** that passed the site every morning. In the morning of 14 June, three of the cell members deployed, while another drove nearby and acted as a look-out in case IDF forces arrived. The police car passed by the site at 07:15. The operatives opened fire and fled the scene. They burned the escape vehicle and, with the help of an additional operative, hid the munitions.

Advanced Staff Sergeant Major Yehoshua "Shuki" Sofer, 39, was one of the three officers injured. The driver was hit in the hand by a bullet but managed to continue driving, until he reached the Hebron Brigade headquarters. The injured officers were evacuated. **Sofer died two hours later.** He was to be married this coming September.

Eight days later, in the village of Deir Samet, all members of the cell were arrested. During the investigation, they reenacted the attack and handed over their assault rifles. They also confessed to planning additional attacks, notably the abduction of a soldier or civilian. Its members had begun scouting the area, and had purchased skull caps and a wig for use in the attack, masquerading as religious Israelis.

Iranian Regime Heading toward Its' Demise

Approximately one year after the fraudulent elections in Iran and the mass demonstrations that followed, a month after the world started to target Iran's oil and gas industries and the US to impose more extensive economic sanctions, we are seeing **the Khomeinist revolution falling apart**. There is no doubt that international sanctions are accelerating the revolution's demise, but internal processes remain a major factor.

The 1979 revolution was premised on four powerful social elements: **The students, the merchants, the residents of large cities, and the religious clerics**. Each of the above-mentioned social components has increasingly distanced themselves the Iranian regime.

Fully 60 percent of Iranians are under the age of 30. Many of these have had enough of the suppressive Islamic rule. Signs indicate that the **religious authorities are losing control**, influence and authority.

Especially for the young, public personal behavior is often a highly political act. Today, more and more women allow their scarves to slip back to show their hair. They show off their makeup, tight coats and high heels. A few years ago, a couple holding hands in public would have been arrested and flogged. Now the mullahs hope that **turning a blind eye** to this minor defiance will relieve pressure for major change.

In consequence, the young have turned to various methods of public expression. Further anecdotal examples are the sometimes-**raucous street celebrations** that take place on the holiday of *chahar-shanbeh souri* and the flouting of the Islamic behavior rules that takes place in popular social spots, particularly trendier upper-class hangouts and the outdoor teahouses and restaurants in the foothills of the northern outskirts of Tehran. The

authorities have had little success in quelling such expressions.

In the past, people would talk to the international press only if they hid their faces. No more. In 1999, students rioted all over the country and, although they were brutally suppressed, they have **lost their fear** of what the regime may do. They have faced the devil and discovered that he has but a frail, corrupt, human face.

The Islamic morality police tend nowadays to maintain a distance from trendy places like fancy cappuccino bars. When the police do conduct a raid, young people bribe them, and they depart. There is a standard fee of \$100 per party. A bonus for the police but a long-term cost for the government due to the growing **contempt for the Islamic State** and the troubled consciences

of those whose' loyalty is needed to shore up the regime.

The situation is exacerbated by **demographic realities**. Mortality rates have decreased. The period immediately following the Islamic Revolution saw an enormous baby-boom, spurred by the ideologically motivated closure of the Pahlavi-era family planning programs. When the extent of the demographic bulge eventually forced the government to reopen the programs, they had surprising success – resulting in the current concentration of Iran's population among those between 15 and 30 years of age.

The uprising following the disputed presidential election of June 12, 2009, is a manifestation of underlying frustrations. Social and political restrictions, coupled with high rates of unemployment and costs of living, have made it increasingly difficult

for young Iranians, driving them to leave the country in large numbers to find jobs in places such as Canada and Australia. **Iran is losing its human capital** at a rate of billions of dollars a year. The unemployment rate for young people ages 15 to 24 is 23%, twice that of the total labor force. Finding a job is even more challenging for young women. One in three young Iranian women in the labor force (defined as either working or looking for a job) is unemployed, even though women comprise only 17% of the labor force.

Young Iranians have largely been unable to access the benefits of the past decade's considerable economic growth, now slowing down. In particular, they have been adversely affected by persistent unemployment. They have made great strides in education – most urban males and females have at least a high school diploma, and even rural females, long held back by the constraints of their more traditional lifestyles, now typically attain at least some high school education.

However, their **education only increases their frustration** because their prospects of employment are poor, of suitable employment still poorer, and their education has enlightened them to the contrary prospects of freedom. Data from 2005 show that, while 90% of men left school by age 23, it is not until age 29 that a corresponding percentage of men found employment. The situation for young women is even bleaker. The same data shows that, by their late 20s, **only 20% of the educated women find employment**. In what one participant suggested was tied to a psychological “bewilderment” effect among women, caused by rules imposed by the regime, many women choose to describe themselves as homemakers, effectively denying any interest employment.

These women these aside, the unemployment rate among young Iranian women remains at some 50%. With so many under 30 **excluded from viable employment**, and in light of the high price of real estate in today's Iran, Iranians tend to wed at later ages. In 1989, approximately 20% of men between 25 and 29 had never married. By the early part of this decade, the proportion had risen to 40%. The Government has often pointed to ostentatious displays support of the government by Iranian youth. Massive parades rife with Islamic revolutionary fervor and anti-Western themes, such as the annual 22 Bahman (February 11) commemoration of the victory of the revolution, include great numbers of schoolchildren, teenagers and young adults. But these are **Government-sponsored and organized activities**. The regime's ability to appropriate public space for such public manifestations is the primarily cause for such grand, unspontaneous displays.

Religious identity has remained important among much of Iran's youth, but their spirituality is being channeled in ways contrary to the Government's preference. Many young people have **turned to mystical Sufism or even to Christianity**. Sizeable youth participation is evident in more traditional expressions but these, too, may well be a means of escape from the increasingly harsh realities created by the Iranian regime. Another option chosen by some of the youth is to adopt pro-regime militaristic views which assist them to climb the social and economic ladder, but the cost to their consciences is extreme.

Former President Mohammad Khatami believed that “kindness” would solve the problem, and directed his attention to enlarging civic space and fostering greater liberty, which triggered a more dynamic and entrepreneurial nation and has led to **still**

further frustration. The current President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has directed his policies toward the young of the poorer classes via such state-tied organizations as the Basij, which run massive outreach programs. This policy does little to address fundamental economic realities and is, therefore, unlikely to affect them.

Intellectuals have limited influence relative to their role in the past. The most prominent reformist and liberal intellectuals, such as the dissident journalist Akbar Ganji, have ignored crucial issues of job creation, more safely focusing on corruption. The attacks on former President Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani helped erode his public appeal although he was one of the few leading Iranian politicians who sought to reform the nation's economy. An

overreliance on socialist rhetoric and reverence of idealized historical figures like Mohammad Mossadegh may serve to **render prominent intellectuals irrelevant** to the problems facing Iran and increasing the distance between them and the country's dissatisfied population.

Iranian women are also demanding more freedom and equality. For the first time, women's rights became a major topic in political campaigns during the 2009 presidential election. Recognizing the key role that women voters—*younger women in particular*—play in the election, presidential candidates were obliged to go beyond slogans that emphasize **high cultural and religious value placed on women as wives and mothers**, addressing demands voiced by women's rights activists.

In Iran, **gender discrimination is codified in laws and buttressed by the judicial system**, particularly with regard to child custody and divorce. The judiciary system bars women from serving as judges, and the political system bars them from running for the

presidential post or being nominated for positions in the country's highest political bodies. Yet women have been an accelerating force for development in Iran.

The average age of marriage for women in Iran has risen to 23, partly because more women are engaged in obtaining an education, and for a longer period of time. There are **more women than men in Iranian universities**. A higher percentage of rural women now choose to remain single. These changes in marriage patterns are confronting deeply-rooted cultural values. There have been reports of relatively high rates of suicides among young, unmarried women living in more conservative provinces, such as Ilam.

Women's movements are increasingly influential. The One Million Signatures Campaign is the most well-known, grassroots effort. Its door-to-door campaign aims to raise awareness about the negative impact of some laws on the lives of women and their children through face-to-face discussions and by seeking **one million signatures** in support of a petition addressed to the Iranian parliament asking that discriminatory laws be reformed.

Similarly, the percentage of never-married women in this age group, which was traditionally later than the peak marriage age for females, rose from less than 10% in the mid-1980s to more than 25% after the turn of the 21st century. One participant connected this trend to **reduced feelings of independence among youth and the "psychological pain"** of being unable to form a family. More than 70% of men in their 20s live with their parents, up from less than 50% in the mid-1980s, while the corresponding figure for women has risen from 20% to nearly 50%.

University students have become **the revolution's the harshest rivals**.

Iran's economic state continues to deteriorate under the heavy hand of international sanctions. The merchants are greatly concerned by Tehran's growing isolation in the world and large city residents, who hit the streets to protest against the regime a year ago, are well aware of the deteriorating situation. Iranian officials have resorted to the most bizarre attempts to unite the country, such as the recent claim that cigarettes smuggled into Iran had been tainted with pig blood and nuclear material as part of a Western conspiracy. Philip Morris International, which sells Marlboro outside the US, is described as "led by Zionists" and is said to deliberately export tainted cigarettes. He provided no evidence or information about the confiscated cigarettes.

It is doubtful whether **most religious clerics support the current religious regime** established by Khomeini. In any case, they do not hold much esteem for Grand Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, as he is not truly a senior religious figure; many clerics have increasing reservations towards the police state established by the religious establishment.

Ever since the recent death of the truly important religious authority in Iran, Ali Montazeri, there has been no clear opposition leadership among the clerics, yet they are **withdrawing into their houses of worship** and showing less involvement in the state's affairs; this is a declarative withdrawal. Mullah Mohammed al Abtahi was, until September 2010, one of Iran's vice presidents. Disgusted by the corrupt and reactionary regime, he quit, having traded politics for computer blogging. On his popular Web site, al Abtahi now posts irreverent photos of establishment figures - like one of Iran's nuclear minister picking his nose - taken with his cell phone. "Our young people are as well informed as young

people in China or Britain or America. Anyone who tries to limit them is bound to fail," he says.

What's left of the revolution? The social basis on which it was premised no longer exists; its moral and religious basis has long since eroded. Solidarity among the above mentioned elements of society has disappeared. The regime now relies on force and fear, imposed by privileged militias and their stranglehold on Iranian society, much like the many **oppressive regimes whose skeletons are found throughout the pages of human history**. The demise of the regime is drawing near. The Islamic revolution will yet be discovered to be a mere 30-year hiccup in thousands of years of Iranian history.

As domestic hostility to the regime grows, the regime ensures its own demise by becoming **all the more brutal**. Iran's Sunni citizens, who comprise one third of the population, already smell the regime's weakness, as indicated by a recent suicide attack in Iran involving Shiite-Sunni tensions.

Should the West exploit Iran's weaknesses in order to strike? The Iranian regime will collapse should it initiate a military move. **The only element that can reunite all Iranian elements behind the regime is a military strike** against the country because, however much they oppose the present Government, Iranians are fiercely patriotic.

Mistaking the present mix of personal and cultural frustration and economic discontent in Iran, the West is liable to think these to present a foreign policy opportunity. However, many young Iranians exhibit ambivalent reactions vis-à-vis the West, the product of **a dichotomy between widespread admiration for Western culture and frequent disdain for the policies of**

American and European governments and some of the extravagancies of Western culture. It would appear that that the best possible action for Western nations seeking the admiration of young Iranians is political inaction.

Hardliners are always liable to launch another crackdown, but the 1970s Islamic revolution seems certain to be undone by its own children. The West should remember Napoleon's well dictum: "Never interfere with an enemy while he's in the process of suicide."

Ministry News

Baruch and Bracha are **visiting family and friends in the US**. In the course of their trip Baruch has edited **The Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Ruth** and **Esther** for the **Modern Hebrew Bible for Youth** and continues his work on **Romans** while commencing studies on **Malachi** and editing a number of other books in Hebrew.

It has been encouraging to receive responses to **Baruch's two books in English**. Individuals have written and have told Baruch in person that they have used and been helped by the books, in some cases *Jonah* was used for group Bible studies, while *Judaism is Not Jewish* was used in the course of a seminary course. We hope to be able to produce more such if time will allow, but Hebrew publications remain the priority.

A particular challenge **was an expository seminar on the book of Romans**, in which Baruch was asked to give a running exposition of the book in four sessions (!). The seminar was well received, and preparations for the seminar, and then preaching proved helpful for the commentary now being written. When teaching, Baruch learns far more than any of those who hear him. His hosts were the congregants of a fine church in Springboro Ohio, characterized by affection for God's word, lively, heartfelt worship, extensive missionary involvement and an active ministry to the community

In **the church**, Baruch has been encouraged by **Simon's** taking on teaching the young adults while Baruch and Bracha are away. Simon has just completed his military service, and is now considering his future. Meanwhile he has volunteered his time to the Christian summer youth camps. Among other option, he is considering seeking some training for service in the church. **Elena** is about to be enlisted and **Miri** has also completed her term of service as an officer in the army and is now engaged in assisting at the youth camps. Your prayers for these dear young adults would be much appreciated.

Avital and family are doing well. There is little to report. Noam (11) and Maya (8) attend an excellent charter school, where Eran and Avital hope to place Nadav when the time comes. Noam is fast becoming a teenager and Maya an eager teenager-to-be.

One day after Baruch and Bracha left **Keith and Shlomit** (July 27th), **Shlomit** gave birth to Jonathan Owen Thompson, some two weeks earlier than the expected date. The Maozes were able to make a change in their schedule and to backtrack to see the child and share in their children's joy.

Tamar and family are likewise doing well. They spent a number of days with Eran, Avital and family, and left with further bonding between the two family's children. Marcus is looking into the possibility of a change of employment, hopefully, without a change in location.

Rose completed her training as a dental assistant and was posted in a base in the far south, in the middle of the desert. She impressed her commander with her enthusiasm and ability, and so was sent to another course that equipped her to manage the dental clinic. She has since been relocated, so that she can come home each day after serving in a nearby military dental clinic. She was deeply distressed when her mother, now remarried, lost the child she had been carrying for four months.

Katya has returned to work, with her mother and mother-in-law taking turns in caring for little Maya. She and **Felix** have been actively house-searching, but are finding that the cost of most residences is quite prohibitive.

One of the reasons for **our present visit to the US** is the product of the drop in value of foreign currency (Dollars and Euros) as compared to the Israeli Shekel. The economic dip has also caused a reduction in the level of our support. These two factors have created a significant gap in the Shekel value of our income, while prices continue to rise. Strange as it might sound, the Israeli Shekel is considered today one of the strongest currencies. We are seeking to raise the level of our income to its former level in Shekels.

Needless to say, another reason is the fact that our children all live in the US. We pine for them and find **the repeated choice we need to make** between serving in Israel and seeing our family an extremely painful one. We also find the repeated and extended separation, when Bracha goes to assist the girls following childbirth or precedes Baruch on a family visit, to be excruciating. Nevertheless, committed to serving where we can be best used, and to loving and serving our family as best we can, this is the price we are willing to pay. Please pray for us in this respect. Being "willing" does not make it easy, or in any other way reduce the pain.

In Christ by wonderful grace,

Baruch and Bracha Maoz

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