

MaozNews No. 50
Published every 4 weeks or so
March 2012

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The Israeli Scene

It happened in Europe and is happening in the US, now it's happening in Israel. The ideological basis of Israeli society is eroding, faster than in Europe or the US because the basis in Israel was so shallow in the first place. The term "ideological basis" implies an idea, a concept or set of concepts that frame the foundations on which a society operates. Europe and The United States had forms and levels of Christian concepts at the basis of their social life.

Europe has long shifted the grounds of its social enterprise, replacing them to a significant extent with the humanistic, liberal views of the French revolution. This process was enhanced by the pressures on social and family life created by the two World Wars, the purportedly scientific basis laid by Darwinism and the Socialist impetus created by Engels, Karl Marx and Heidegger.

The USA likewise has a mixed heritage, but the primary framework of its view of the family and society. These are now being eroded at an alarming rate, a process accelerated since Barak Obama has installed in the White House.

Israel's basis was barely skin-deep. Driven by a sense of vague destiny, disdainful of religiosity and cynically unaware of the possibility of a sincere religiosity that was morally courageous, intellectually enterprising and socially responsible, the idea that motivated the State of Israel's birth was no much more than the return of the nation to its homeland and the creation of a State that would Jews to be Jews (whatever that meant), within the context of an indigenous society that would allow Jewish life without threat and without contention.

A state was established, amazingly successful. Deserts blossoms, barren hills were afforested, swamps dried and cultivated, six wars won against uneven odds, democratic institutions were established and the scientific community which was created has won more Nobel prizes per capita than any other nation. Israel leads in

irrigation methods and other areas of scientific agriculture, the harnessing of solar energy, the development of software, the medical industry, laser innovation, aspects of space exploration and many other fields of modern enterprise. Israelis are to be found at the head of universities and in social and political endeavor in the US and elsewhere. While the world economy sputtered, the Israel shekel became of the most stable currencies of the world.

Yet Israel society is in caught up in the throes of crises: having achieved its declared goals, it does not know which way to go. The people are back in the land. A Jewish society (whatever that means) in which Jews can be Jews (whatever *that* means) within the context of an indigenous society has been established. The threats faced by Israeli society are no longer from a gentile majority. But the central issue has not and cannot be effectively addressed: what does it mean to be Jewish? Why be Jewish? How are we to be Jewish?

Of course, the religious minority, growing primarily by having two to three times more children than the rest of society, insists that it has the answer. That minority is becoming increasingly confident, raising its voice, imposing its views and demanding to be heard. Ongoing eternal threats, recently enhanced through Iran's nuclear ambitions, and continued internal contention have created a tendency to veer to the nationalistic wing of the political spectrum, with its xenophobia and what some have described as almost fascist tendencies. Nationalism both enlists the interest of religiosity and is enlisted by them.

On the other hand, there is an increasingly intimidated, threatened and weakening minority that resists the process but has little to offer in its' stead and no inkling as to where to turn to find a relevant and coherent world view.

The number of draft-evaders has grown to well over 50%. Violent winds are blowing between the religious and the non-religious in society, and political clout is by harnessed by the religious to defend their cause. Large areas in Israel cities are designated *de jure* or *de facto exclusively* for religious residents. Public space is being transformed into areas in which religious activity is paramount. Secular and moderately-religious citizens are being spat upon and abused by religious extremists, and then defended by the less-extreme. Hospitals are not built and road are diverted in accordance with religious scruples over graves that are 4,000 years old.

At the same time, corruption has invaded high places: a former Minister of the Treasury is in jail for embezzlement, a former President for rape, a former religious Minister of Health for bribery and misuse of public funds, a former Minister of Justice was found guilty of indecent behavior and a former Prime Minister is now on trial for embezzlement, bribery and corruption. The gap between the extremely rich and the extremely poor in society is growing. Twenty five percent of Israeli children go to bed hungry. Public hospitals have fallen into disuse and the number of doctors and nurses per capita is the lowest on the OECD. Israel's educational system is lagging increasingly behind.

Israel needs the Gospel; the only worldview than can provide moral impetus, direction and hope; the only truth that can transform a confused, amazingly talented but despairing society by the power of the Spirit of God and the truth of God's word

into what it longs to be but does not know it. “Being Jewish” has everything in the world (this and the next) with Jesus, because he is the Messiah of Israel.

Iran

Israel’s concern over Iran does not have to do with a possible nuclear attack on Israel. As I have explained in the past, such an attack is unlikely because Iran is fully aware of Israel’s pre-emptive, defensive and retaliatory capabilities, and because Iran is a much softer target than Israel, with its tiny land mass and its mixed Arab and Jewish population.

Israel’s concern is much like that of the US and of Europe: a nuclearized Iran is a confident Iran, energetically intrusive in all of the countries that control most of the world’s oil reserves: the oil rich Arab Gulf States, Iraq and Saudi-Arabia. Iran’s history is one of enterprise and ambition. In more than one instance in the course of history, it established a far-flung empire. Shi’ite Islam is an aggressively ambitious form of that religion, with missionary ambitions – and most of Islam’s missionary endeavor throughout history has been implemented by force of the sword.

Iran has immediate aspirations in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iraq (which it is closer to achieving than ever before), in Syria, Jordan and Iraq. But its eye’s reach is far wider. Europe was once almost wholly conquered by Islamic forces, which took Spain in the west and the whole of the Balkans in the east, and even forcefully knocked at Vienna’s threatened doors. The number of Muslims in Europe is steadily growing, and the day will soon arrive when they will become a political force in their host-countries. Iran is fully aware of this process, and is seeking to manipulate it to its own interests, for the fulfillment of its aspirations.

A nuclearize Iran is meant to bring about a wholly new world, very different from anything most of us would hope to see.

For that reason, however much one might hesitate to bear the consequences of an attack on Iran, if necessary, the consequences of backing down are by far graver. If harsh economic measures – harsher than those imposed so far – do not bear fruit, the west will have to choose between its capitulation and final demise, or all-out war.

Israel’s Future - YouTube

The following link will bring you to a lecture/sermon given by Pastor Wayne Hilsden, the senior Canadian Pentecostal Church representative in Israel. The venue was a pro-Palestinian conference. Many of us entreated Wayne not to participate, so as not to provide a fig leaf to a clearly prejudiced event. Although barely heard and not at all heeded, Wayne requited himself with clarity, dignity, conviction and honest truth. Don’t quibble over details; take note of the spirit of things. Wayne is a godly, wise and courageous man of God whom I am honored to consider a friend.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Potf5l8KzI>

A Special Notice and Request

Our foster daughter, Rose, has completed her mandatory military service. She and another Christian lady friend of the same age (20) are seeking *au pair* positions for 6-

12 months in the US. There are legal standards established by the US Government for such a position. The two would like to be within reach of each other. They both speak English reasonably well, are clean, hard-working young ladies with excellent communication abilities and a way with children.

The spiritual life of both has suffered during their military service.

They are ready to travel any time as of now.

Bracha and I are concerned that the two ladies are in a solid Reformed and evangelical church, with families for which the church could vouch. If any of our readers know of such possibilities, please contact Baruch at bmaoz@themaoweb.com

God is Good

A Testimony

by Michael Karpovetsky

It happened suddenly, so suddenly that I didn't comprehend what was happening until I heard the words from my older brother Leonid's mouth: "We don't have Mother anymore. She has died." Only then was my heart pierced with the stabbing realization that never again would I see her who was an angel of kindness toward me. Never again would I meet her stern but love-filled maternal gaze. Never again would I hear her deep, tender voice;. Never again would I feel the gentle touch of her hand.

My father's following my mother's death sufferings were especially heart-breaking: his sleepless nights; packs of smoked-out cigarettes and words of profound grief, with tears welling up in his eyes: "I would give anything to have her back again!" Father passed away as suddenly as mother did. He left me a vivid example of marital love and devotion, of fatherly care and involvement.

With the loss of both parents, I felt a vacuum within, irresistibly driving me to search for something to fill it. My parents had dreamed that I would study at the university. Finally that moment arrived: I became a student. Student years are generally considered to be the full of fun, the best time of one's life. Accordingly, I, like King Solomon, tried to drown out the voice of loneliness with mirth, passing time in merry student groups, immersed in dancing, theater, and countless other activities. It was all vanity of vanities and striving after wind. The questions never left my mind: "Where are my parents? Do they see or hear me? What will happen to me when it's my turn? Why does man live, if all die? What is the meaning of life?"

Looking Death in the Eye

"It's not so bad – leave in the fall and return in the spring", I thought as I stepped into the military office. Since I hadn't studied military science at the university, I was required to serve only a year and a half in the military, instead of two years. I didn't realize what I would go through during the term of military service, and how it would influence the rest of my life. On the train taking us recruits far away from home, whizzing past various villages, we asked the question: "Where are we going?" An older, experienced soldier smiled wryly and announced, "Company 20-A, to Turkmenistan's battle district in Afghanistan".

I was no longer a teenager, as were my young comrades with adrenaline pumping in their blood, drawing them toward adventure. My life flashed before my eyes, with the question: “What if I never come back?” Inexorably I yearned to live, to love and be loved, to raise a family. But the train was taking me away toward uncertainty. For the first time in my life, filled with despair, I turned to One in Whom I did not believe, at Whom I had laughed and Whom I had blasphemed: “O God, if You exist, save me!”

For half a year I studied at the Ashkhabad army school. These six months of mockery and humiliation, sleepless nights and physical exhaustion, showed me how low a person can go, as well as how one can survive in extreme situations. We were prepared for Afghanistan like cattle for slaughter. In class, the commanders impressed upon us that the radio station where we worked was filled with explosives, and should not fall into enemy hands. The words kept ringing in my ears: “You are dead men. You are doomed.” I still remember what one officer said, ostensibly showing us concern: “Enjoy this New Year's Day celebration, because for many of you it will be your last”.

The day before our deployment to Afghanistan, I had the day off. It was my first time in six months to leave the military base. Before I left, one of my friends, who had been in the service for a long time, suggested, “If you don't want to go to Afghanistan tomorrow, throw away your military ID and report it as lost. During the time it takes to replace it, someone will be sent instead of you.” I faced temptation: if this “someone else” should die in Afghanistan, how could I live with that? I didn't yet know the One who loved me so much that gave His life to save me from eternal destruction. My parents' words came to mind: “Don't do to others anything you wouldn't want them to do to you.” I decided: “I won't follow my friend's advice.” Again, my life flashed before my eyes, and some invisible force made me repeat the words: “God, if You exist, please save me.”

In Afghanistan, I was stationed on the Salang mountain pass, 4500 meters high. This was an important “mountain pass” time in my life as well. Our platoon engaged in continual drunkenness, smoked charz (an Afghan drug), and the taunting of new recruits. It was difficult to break away from this pattern, not to imitate everyone else. More terrible were the shootings around the garrison, when Afghani snipers fired from their camp into ours, killing Soviet soldiers. Conditions were harsh. Snow avalanches claimed soldiers' lives. At night, hate-filled Afghani soldiers crept into our barracks and slit the throats of Soviet soldiers. In the morning we sorrowfully sent off our friends in the “black tulip” – the helicopter that carried the corpses.

He Found Me

Spring is the most beautiful season of the year. Walking down the streets of my hometown, breathing the spring perfume of blooming trees, and relishing the birds' singing, I joyfully anticipated reunion with my brother and friends, with whom I had developed a close bond and corresponded during the difficult period of military service.

Suddenly, memories overcame me, carrying me back to the moment when I had turned to the Lord and cried, “God, if You exist, please save me.” I wanted to believe that God had heard me and that it was He who had preserved me alive and well, not

crippled, but with strong arms and legs, having escaped malaria and typhus, strolling again down the streets of my hometown. How I wanted to thank Him! But the question came: "Thank whom? Maybe there is no God after all, and the whole story is just a figment of my wild imagination." My parents had trained me to be principled and honest, and my years of study had turned me into a rational analyst. To my questions about the meaning of life and life after death, I added two more: Is there a God? If there is, which religion holds the truth?

This inner search coincided with my immigration, in the company of my brother, to Israel. By the time we arrived, I had studied Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, Judaism and Kabbalah. The more I delved into these different religions and beliefs, the more I became entangled in the maze of doctrines. These religions appeared to me like a good meal of spaghetti – you never know where is the beginning and where is the end!

Here, in Israel, away from my familiar surroundings and the friends with whom I used to spend time, I felt my loneliness more sharply. I found everything to be different: a different country; different people, with whom I needed to deal carefully if I wanted to save the few coins I'd received from the Ministry of Absorption; and a different language, which was used by our fathers 2,000 years ago and was foreign to me. I longed for a friend with whom I could share my heart. Once again, an unknown force made me repeat these words: "God, if You exist, Who are You? Reveal yourself to me; I want to know the truth about you."

Soon I was invited to visit a young couple with whom I studied in Hebrew class. I was delighted to visit someone. These people were Christians and we began to debate religion. At that point I was reasonably well read. Like most Jews, I was biased against Christianity. Yet I was attracted to this young couple by the joyous smiles that lit up their whole faces. I couldn't resist asking, "What makes you so happy?"

They replied, gesturing out the window, "Can't you see how beautiful it is? On the other side of the Lake of Gennesaret is the city of Capernaum." I asked, "What's so special about Capernaum?" They answered, "You don't know? It's the city where Jesus performed many miracles!" I was leaving they handed me a Bible. I was very happy to have this book because I had heard and read a lot about it. But when I tried to read it, I got bogged down in the genealogies, just as I had in the theological maze of different religions.

Once, conversing with this couple, I examined the prophecies they pointed out to me. At that time I was a cold, rational realist and had never faced the supernatural. I literally jumped in surprise: "How could prophets, who lived so long before the birth of Jesus, describe so explicitly the place of his birth, the time of his coming, his life, death, resurrection, and even his ascension into Heaven?" I suspected ulterior motives: "It looks like these Christians are trying to lure me into their sect." But when I opened the Old Testament published by rabbis and started to compare the Old Testament prophecies with the Christian Bible, I encountered another surprise – they coincided with one another.

Still my stereotypical Jewish nature was at work: "How can I, a Jew, believe in Jesus? What would my Jewish relatives say?" Besides, I realized that in submitting to God, I would need to leave behind the sins in which I had found pleasure and comfort.

I knew I was standing on the threshold of a monumental decision: the acceptance of the truth I had so long resisted. My struggle continued for four months, and God showed himself strong. He found me while I wasn't seeking him. It was he who compelled me to search for the meaning of life, led me through difficult temptations, and brought to the Promised Land. It was he who caused my heart to suffer loneliness and walk the path of this quest, because he knew me long ago and knew the decision I would make.

Through the Prisms of Testings

With faith in God, reconciliation and joy flooded my heart; loneliness left me and meaning filled my life. I gained many friends, whom I call now "brothers". That doesn't mean I forgot my old friends, whom I love and for whom I pray; but these special, new relationships bind us with inseparable, invisible bonds, held in the hand of the One whom we call our Heavenly Father. Of utmost importance to me became the invisible presence of my best friend, Jesus, whom I had resisted for so long but to whom I had finally opened the doors of my heart.

But a new test burst into my life: my beloved wife, Alina, was diagnosed with cancer in its final stage. It was a real shock. As this reality sunk into me, I again called upon the One whom I now knew, in whom I believed, asking for his support, consolation, and healing for my wife. We spent a year and a half in desperate struggle, earnest prayers and tears, but all was in vain. I became an eyewitness to the decay of the temple which is called the flesh. Still, we didn't lose courage, nor did we despair, because throughout this time we were supported by the word of God and by a multitude of friends and brothers, who united in prayer and shared our struggle. We were going through our Gethsemane and entreated our Heavenly Father that this cup of separation, called death, might pass from us – adding, as did Jesus, "not my will, but yours be done."

During this period of illness Alina experienced many mood swings. On the one hand, she resigned herself to the probability that death might separate us. As her thoughts progressed, she foretasted the joy of the meeting with her Heavenly Father, firmly trusting in his promises. Out of these thoughts, in the midst of the physical sufferings, God's peace filled her heart. But there were times when she saw how much I and our two small children needed her, and fought for life with renewed vigor. Once I opened my heart to Alina and told her I was considering castration because I had such difficulties in physical needs. I remember how she looked at me with grief and said very carefully: "If I will die and you're castrated, how will you remarry?"

The cancer inexorably ran its course. But Alina bravely continued to struggle. At this time, we were especially close to God and keenly felt our congregation's support. No matter how bad Alina felt, she always came to church, always smiled at the brothers and sisters, and was always thankful to God, resting her trust in Him.

Unexpectedly, we received the call from a sister in the USA. She told us about a clinic there in the city of Tulsa, in Oklahoma, where cancer patients in the final stages receive help. We brought this need before the Lord and started preparing for the trip. Many brothers and sisters, Christian organizations, and congregations made donations

toward Alina's treatment. As our trials increased, we felt our spiritual family's loving support all the more deeply. Among our blessings, a special one for us was a sister named Svetlana, who lived in Tulsa, Oklahoma. When I asked her to help us with translation into English while Alina is in the clinic, she happily exclaimed, "It is a great privilege and honor for me to help Jews, who are my family in Christ!"

It took several months to obtain permission for Alina to enter the USA. By the time she arrived, it was too late. The cancer had metastasized to her lungs, requiring hospitalization. We spent her last ten days together in the hospital – ten days filled with the tragedy of the separation of two loving hearts, united by nine years of marriage, two wonderful children, and most importantly, love and faithfulness to the Lord and to each other.

Sveta was a great blessing and encouragement to us. She served not only as our translator, but a sharer of our suffering, taking it to heart. She took time off from work and school to care for us, to pray and cry with us, observing what was happening. Unbeknown to us, she also rejoiced in the harmony of our marriage relationship, perceiving the warmth of love Lord had kindled in our hearts toward one another.

Sveta witnessed the moment when Alina turned to me with her last words: "I long to live and serve God together with you!" That last night Sveta refused to go home. She stayed to assist and support us in those extremely sorrowful hours of our life.

We spent the night at the bedside of my dying wife, fervently praying to God for the miracle of healing if that was his will. In early morning, we caught a glimmer of hope that if Alina could survive the night, she might be able to overcome the illness; but at the same time, the doctor said that Alina had no more than an hour to live. I leaned over my wife's bed, sobbing, uttering parting words, and asking forgiveness for my improper actions in different situations of our life. Our pastor Tom called from Israel and gave me Scripture verses to read to Alina before she left this world. The last verse Alina heard was Revelation 21:4: "And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

For my Alina the former things had already passed away. The nurse, who was at the moment in our room, watching the monitors for signs of approaching death, said through her tears, "At the last words of that verse her blood oxygen level suddenly dropped. With those words you released her."

Epilogue

It was difficult for me to come to terms with my loss, but God gives grace to the afflicted, and He promised that love never ends. My friendship with Sveta grew into a strong, mutual attraction our age difference and other circumstances couldn't extinguish. God united us in marriage, giving us to each other and giving our children a loving mother. He gave Sveta the opportunity to love those who so needed it. All of us obtained abundant joy, because God faithfully keeps His promises, always leaving a bright testimony of that love which never ends.

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Five happy years passed, with Michael and Svetlana serving the Lord, the Gospel, their children and each other. To their delight, a child was born, Emmanuel. Following birth, Svetlana began complaining of painful headaches. Two months after giving birth, she awoke one morning, got out of bed, collapsed and died. She was buried four days later and, at the memorial service, through his tears, Michael testified, "God is good. I do not understand what has happened to us, nor why this pain, but this I know: God is good." Baruch Maoz.

This text has been slightly edited for language and is produced with Michael's permission. Please pray for Michael as he seeks the mind of the Lord for the future both for himself and for his children.

Ministry and Family News

As readers will have heard, we were subjected to a few days of **rocket attacks** from Gaza, according us a number of nights of fitful sleep due to the sirens warning the population to enter their saferooms. Israel's Iron Dome Anti-Missile System proved itself beyond expectations. Capable of calculating trajectories and of recognizing open spaces, whenever a missile was projected to fall in open spaces, it was allowed to do so. Over 90% of those projected to fall on populated areas were intercepted mid-air and exploded by the system. Amazing! Once again, Israel's technological abilities gave it the upper hand.

In the course of the week or so, there were no Israeli fatalities, some minor injuries and two seriously injured, with very little damage to property. Israel directed pin-point attacks on Gazan terrorists, killing them, destroying their depots and rocket launchers. Although the terrorists hid, as is their want, in civilian areas, of the 22 slain, two were innocent civilians. Israel has expressed its regret for these casualties and is presently treating a Gazan child for burns. A rocket launcher was operating near his playground.

Avital and the family are well. They are excited as **Bracha** and I as they prepare for their visit to Israel in June-July. **Shlomit** is about to give birth to her second child, and Bracha is presently with her to assist. **Tamar** and the family are also well, with Tamar having recuperated from a very heavy cold.

Rose is presently working very hard to save up money for school and for a trip. She could do better spiritually, and your prayers to that end would be much appreciated.

TAX-deductible **support for our ministry** should be written to the order of **Berean Baptist church, P.O. Box 1233, Grand Blanc, Michigan 48480-3233**. Direct bank transfers may be made to **Franklin Bank, 24725 West Twelve Mile Road, Southfield, MI 48034 USA, Routing Number 241271957 Berean Baptist Special Account No. 567495976**. Please inform **Max Sharp** of the details of the transaction (date, transaction number and sum) at maxsharp@earthlink.net

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