

MaozNews No. 70
Published every 4 weeks or so
November 2013

In This Issue:

Shame in Tel Aviv, pg. 1

Learning to Learn and Grow Together,(Baruch's biography continued) pg. 2

Help Wanted, pg. 5

Ministry and Family News, pg. 5

Shame in Tel Aviv



Tel Aviv is famous as an overtly "gay" capital, with huge Pride parades and residents who don't look twice at same-sex couples holding hands in the street. Member of Knesset (MK) Nitsan Horowitz, an overt member of the homosexual community, competed for the job in recent mayoral elections.

Horowitz and the far left-of-center Meretz party boast four other gay candidates in Tel Aviv. Under the slogan "One vote that sends five gays to the council," Meretz presented a rainbow-colored ad with the smiling faces of Efrat Tolkowsky, Mickey Gitzin, Itay Pinkas and Dror Mizrahi, all members of the LGBT community. Other ads presented Michal Eden, a former Meretz Council Member and a declared lesbian. "A gay city deserves a gay mayor," she claimed. Meretz and Horowitz stressed equality and tolerance while promising to increase budgets for the gay community and social services for gay youth in distress.

Centrist party Yesh Atid, prominently represented in Government by Finance Minister Yair Lapid, had two. Nimrod Dotan, the education director of a group offering programs for children and youth in the country's outskirts and Zehorit Sorek, a religious

lesbian who lives with her partner and two children and works for the Education Minister, were on that party's list.

The party's Facebook page stated proudly that "Sorek established the Gay Minyan, which serves as a synagogue and in 2012 won the gay community's annual prize." In the course of her campaign, Sorek opined: "the [Tel Aviv] municipality should recognize gay couples living together; they should enjoy the same rights as straight couples And it's inconceivable that [gay center] *Barnoar* should receive smaller budgets than other youth sports and culture centers."

Yesh Atid MK Boaz Toporovsky wrote on the party's Facebook page: "I too hope that Israel will approve civil marriage. My amazing sister married the woman of her choice, and I'm happy and proud. Shelly and Liron, I promise not to rest until the state recognizes your marriage as it does mine."

Another gay candidate was Yaniv Weizman, representing a party of young Tel Aviv residents and members of incumbent Tel Aviv mayor Ron Huldai's coalition. Weizman served as the main voice in the municipality for LGBT affairs. Huldai's Deputy Mayor, Assaf Zamir, reportedly once told Weizman, "'Do you know what this city needs? Gays.' We then proceeded to make Tel Aviv the number one gay tourist city in the world. I'm pleased with that. It leaves more women for me."

In the course of Huldai's two terms as Mayor of Israel's second-largest city, he became the community's darling; he was photographed at every LGBT community event, voiced support for the community, and opened the annual Pride parades. "Huldai has come a long way since his quote 15 years ago, when he said 'two gays kissing disgust me like cockroaches,'" says city-council candidate Mizrahi, chairman of Meretz's gay forum. "Still, I think we need more than parade openings. We need a group that will work and understand the gay community's needs. Our candidates are very experienced on that front." Huldai won the elections by a comfortable margin. Homosexuality is rife in Israel, touted by the media and popular performers, presented in public schools as a valid option.

Learning to Learn and Grow Together

Baruch's biography continued.

In the previous instalment we began learning of people and of the process imposed by the arrival of new immigrants from former Soviet Union

One day a tall, slim, attractive, bald young lady walked into church. She was not a believer but had somehow been attracted. We welcomed her as warmly as we welcomed any newcomer and soon learned that her name was Ira. She shared an apartment with another girl and three men. She was seeking the Lord. We encouraged her to continue to attend and gently asked her to kindly cover her head with a hat or a scarf, as God's Word taught that a woman praying with her head uncovered dishonors the Lord. Ira was happy to comply.

Some weeks later, Ira professed faith, claimed forgiveness and completely altered her life-style. She moved out of the house in which she was living, grew her hair, and enlisted in learning sign language to serve the deaf. The deaf: that is a story of its own. One day, at the very beginning of a service, Lena walked in. Lena was deaf. Of course, we were delighted to have her among us, but how to enable her to benefit from the service? None of us knew sign language, let alone Russian sign language (every country -- sometimes areas within each country -- has its own sign language, developed before visuals could be



easily transmitted from one location to another)! By way of a temporary solution, a rota of congregants sat beside Lena, hurriedly writing down what was announced, sung or preached, and passing the notes onto Lena, so that she would be not more than a minute or two behind the proceedings.

This was obviously unsatisfactory. We had been exposed to a community of which we previously been unaware. How can we reach out to them? Regina, our church administrator, and I asked Lena to teach us sign language. She agreed and displayed great patience as we struggled to learn. From my point of view it was a particularly interesting experience because I was learning Russian sign language, without knowing Russian!

As I progressed, slowly gaining a measure of proficiency in the language, I began signing as I preached. I was never known to be a sedate kind of preacher, but the congregation found my gesticulations a bit more than it could take. I was forced to refrain. But, then, what shall we do? How do we reach out sincerely to these dear people whom God has brought across our path? Where, how to find the answers? Of course, we knew where to turn, and turn we did. We prayed and sought the mercy of the Lord.

The answer came in quite an unexpected way. In the course of Alex's evangelistic endeavours, he met Sophia -- a dedicated, eager Christian, a highly qualified signer who had worked, among other contexts, for the Russian television. For how fuller an answer could we have hoped? Could we have hoped for more?

Sophia immediately enlisted herself in service of the growing deaf, which grew as a result of her efforts. Her two daughters, each with their own personal tragedy and like her in love with God in Christ, joined the congregation. Sasha was the first to marry. God brought Gleb to our congregation, and the two together. It was one of those weddings I was especially honoured to perform. A short while later, the two left for the US with Sasha's young boy, and then were followed by Lena, who has since married in the Lord. Both are faithful Christian mothers, serving in their churches and their communities. They have also been in generous support of their mother, Sophia, in her work among the deaf in Israel.

Sophia began training a body of signers, including Ira, Sveta, Natasha K., Yana and Natasha Z. Natasha K. was the most avid of the students, and soon assumed increased responsibility alongside Sophia, with each of the two women active in different spheres of responsibility. In a short while, we had a small but regular deaf contingent who sang alongside and for us in sign language, and shared in every aspect of our church life, including skits, jokes, visitation and Gospel witness.

Ira grew in the Lord. She later returned to the Ukraine to work among the deaf alongside a fledgling congregation there, married and continues to serve the Lord at the time of this writing. Sophia later left the church, and Natasha K. has carried on the work with dedication and obvious gift. More of Natasha will be told later.

At the same time, we were challenged across the board with the Russian immigrants. Life in a free society was completely unfamiliar to them, and the material plenty



which Israel enjoyed was nothing less than paralyzing: imagine walking into a supermarket, where many brands of coffee, toilet paper and butter are displayed after being used to one brand of each, available intermittently and provided first to the well-placed. Imagine having a bank account from which you can draw money at will after being used to an account from which you could draw only a limited amount following receipt of official permission.

Imagine living in a society in which officials were at your service and where labor and merit are rewarded rather than professed, hypocritical political correctness; or reading a newspaper that dares criticize the Government after being used to daily papers that were permitted only to laud those in power. Imagine being told it was wrong to duplicate CDs and software programs after living in a society in which the only way to exercise freedom was to steal copyrights and print materials surreptitiously and contrary to law.

Totalitarian Communism warped fundamental concepts of daily life: husbands left wives and children simply because they wanted to move to another city, or had met a prettier woman. Employers were all-powerful masters, judges ruled by political decree rather than by the spirit and letter of the law. Government had life and death authority over its citizens and eavesdropping on private affairs was the order of the day. Now we were faced with the need to teach the newcomers how to conduct themselves, make decisions they were never allowed to make before, exercise choices they had never faced and establish moral norms that are the bread and butter of life in the West.

Sometimes the issues were excruciatingly crucial, such as immigrating to Israel with falsified papers that established a bogus Jewish identity in order to obtain new immigrant rights. The argument was that believers are "spiritual Israel," and therefore entitled to all the privileges the State of Israel accorded Jewish immigrants. I had to insist that doing so was a sinful action that required repentance and admission to the immigration authorities - regardless of likely consequences.

Sometimes the issue had to do with family and friends of congregants, who entered Israel on a tourist visa, took up work and disappeared off the map. These were encouraged to return to their home countries and until they did, were refused Communion.

Sometimes we had to insist that the employed give their employers a full day's labor, and that they refrain from taking home pencils, pens, postage stamps and other office or workshop paraphernalia.

On the other hand, we needed to teach the newcomers to trust banks, to choose medical insurance plans and to manage their bank accounts. For example, they had no idea how to use a credit card and, in the first few months, swiped the card at every occasion that presented itself, assuming that "someone, somewhere" was footing the bill. No less was it necessary for us to persuade our brethren that it was a Christian duty to pay the 16.5% VAT on all products and services when not doing so implied a considerable savings. So, we devised a 5-session course which we encouraged each new congregant to undergo.

The Israeli Government imposed immense pressure on the immigrants, many of whose Jewish identity was questionable, to convert. As a result, the wife of one of the more prominent members of our congregation seriously contemplated conversion. I had the painful duty to show her husband what scripture had to say about the implications of such a step, and to point out what steps we as a church would be obliged to take, should his wife convert. Happily, they reconsidered bravely and chose the path of faithfulness.

Dealing with such issues was no simple matter. It was only right to relate to these beloved brethren with respect, love and wisdom, all of which I lacked, as well as with the kind of moral courage that does not come easily. After all, they were brought up in a social system that deeply affected their values and the way they thought about matters. They were sincerely godly people.

There were other challenging issues, no less crucial. In a short while we were inundated with Russian speakers, whose culture, language, etiquette and social standards differed greatly from ours. They conversed in Russian, sang Russian hymns and were horrified if anyone sat cross-legged in church. Bibles were never to be placed on the floor, sermons were short homilies and churches were firmly authoritarian. None of the traditional Jewish feasts were recognized, while Easter and Christmas were major events.

We did not want to make culture an issue. On the one hand, we did not want to become irrelevant outsiders to the nation to which we belonged. On the other, we acknowledged our duty to be as welcoming and as self-denying as necessary so as to include all whom the Lord brought to us.



So the services were conducted in Hebrew, with simultaneous translation into Russian and other languages, as necessity required. The hymns were transliterated as well as translated. While the feasts formed no part of our worship of God, they were a large part of our social life, so Christmas and Easter were added to the list. The women, many of whom were very strict about covering their head in church, not wearing trousers and

avoiding jewellery or cosmetics, often wore an overly-deep neck-line. We sought ways to teach them Christian liberty on the one hand, and our own cultural norms of modesty on the other.

There was another area of difference, no less important than the moral, and starkly more important than the cultural: we held to very different theologies. Our brethren believed that man is capable of saving faith and repentance apart from divine intervention. They believed that one's salvation can be lost. They held to firm views of eschatology we did not share. They expected prophecy, laid great emphasis on dreams and intuitions (which they took to be moves of the Spirit of God) and expected an experience of sanctification and spiritual empowerment following conversion.

Church officers were appointed by those who preceded them. There were no church budgets, no fiscal or monetary transparency and no supervision of the Elders' function. Church discipline was to be exercised by the Elders and had to do with all kinds of issues for which there was no basis in scripture and reinstatement following repentance contingent on the individual's ability to persuade the Elders of the sincerity of his repentance.

The challenges before us were enormous. How to honor the Lord by being true to his truth (all truth is his) as well as to his people? How to distinguish between our (culturally-orientated) understanding of truth and truth as it is in itself? How to win the hearts of the people without playing down the importance of our differences? How to indicate, in practical terms, the importance of our differences without losing the hearts of the people? How to be open to learn as well as to teach?

We took our stand on the Statement of Faith, Constitution and practice of our church, warmly welcomed all who wished to be part of our fellowship and affirming our commitment to the word of God well above our commitment to our convictions, structure or practice: we are willing to be challenged, and where proven from scripture to be wrong, we undertake to change. We expected as much from those who joined.

It was a lengthy period of ongoing discussion, emotionally and intellectually demanding for us all. But the end result was that we all changed, and I believe we changed for the better. What is more, we learned an important lesson: we could hide from the kind of challenges that a constantly-reforming church should undergo by affirming our Confession as well as our understanding thereof, or we could be sacrificially committed to the truths of the word of God. In the end, our Confession underwent no change, but we changed. Our commitment to the Confession did not change, but we discovered that there is more than one way to do the right thing. In the process, we grew closer to one another and had a greater appreciation of God's wonderful grace in Christ.

Marriage Laws in Israel

Israel is taking steps toward joining the small number of states in which transgression against a religious law is punishable by a jail sentence. Israel is the only democracy in the world in which family law is subject to religion. Its Family Law is a hodge-podge of laws and Court rulings. As a result, ever-increasing numbers of Jewish citizens wed outside the rabbinical framework. Israel's Legislature, the Knesset, is now engaged in framing a law aimed at improving the situation.

The present law states that anyone "who does not register a marriage or divorce at the Rabbinate will be charged according to the amendments to clause 99 of the Ottoman criminal code." The bill stipulates that, in addition to the couple, a rabbi officiating at a wedding that has not had Rabbinate approval will also be liable to two years' imprisonment. The law in its previous form was never enforced, but the amendment indicates the intention of Government authorities to apply the law in the future.



Over 300,000 non-Arab Israeli citizens, mostly from the former USSR, are not considered Jews according to Orthodox Jewish law. They are, therefore, unable to wed Israeli Jewish citizens within the rabbinical framework. Yet, according to the bill, if they wed in Israel, but not through the Rabbinate, they are offenders.

Others in Israel are likewise ineligible for marriage according to Orthodox Jewish law. They include those designated by the Rabbinate as 'bastards' because they were born out of wedlock, and those of the family of Aaron who wish to wed divorcees. These will become criminals if they marry in Israel, because the Rabbinate will not marry them.

Help Wanted

We are preparing a new, updated brochure, and are seeking an experienced graphic artist who would be willing to offer services at a reasonable price to design and prepare the brochure for print.

If any are willing to help, please write to languageservice4u@gmail.com, stating your experience and terms of service.

Ministry and Family News

In the course of **early August to mid-November**, Baruch and Bracha drove 27,334 miles, visited 32 locations and had 57 meetings. In the same period they were able to visit all three of their daughters and their families, as well as many friends. These visits have three primary purposes. First **to inform interested churches and parties** of the work in Israel and of the context in which our work is conducted while seeking to encourage churches to focus on Christ, not on Jewish things. We owe Christ our fealty and we owe friends faithful reports. Second, **to see our children and their families**. Third, **to visit and encourage Pastors in isolated areas**, where few others ever venture to visit.

Related to the first of these purposes is another – an almost perennial reality: the rising costs of living in Israel and the erosion of the foreign exchange rates relative to the Israeli Shekel over recent years has greatly eroded the value of our income while our expenses have grown both due to costs in Israel and to the fact that Baruch has hired administrative assistance.

We are immensely indebted to those who stand with us and who have continued their support even under dire economic realities. Some have been able to do so with relatively large amounts (notable among these is Patmos International), some with much smaller. This means that we are forced to travel extensively, seeking new support, merely to maintain present realities. If we could be assured of some \$20,000 per annum more than we are presently receiving, and of that sum being updated in relation to the value of the Israeli Shekel exchange rate, we would be able to travel much less, devote more time to productive work, and relieve ourselves of what is becoming more of a physical challenge as we age.

In the course of the trip, I was able to work at times on **the Gospel of John**, and am presently working on chapter 18. My devotional commentary on **Jonah** is to be republished on November 25th, and interest has been shown in my devotional commentary on **Micah**. I've inquired with one publisher as to the possibility of his undertaking the complete series on the Minor Prophets. I have no plans to translate my commentary on Romans into English -- there are too many excellent commentaries on that book already available, and I have little to contribute that would justify such a publication.



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 **Mr. Craig Cooper** of the details of the transaction (date, transaction number and sum) at coopmobile31@gmail.com

All contributions are tax deductible. Receipts are sent at the end of the calendar year or at the donor's request. Please do not send contributions directly to us – we consider accountability extremely important.

Funds sent for the ministry will be used exclusively for that purpose.

We reserve the right to use for the ministry funds sent for personal use.