

Michael Karpovetzki



Love
NEVER FAILS



Baruch

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Love is unending

Not all in this life is everlasting.
Centuries will pass
And tongues will be silenced
And time will pass like streams around an island.

Under the heavens some things are tough,
And there is a time for all things.
But if God has planted a seed of love in your heart,
Your soul will be forever young.

Without love, life is a downward slope,
But God's love is full of heaven's hope.
If you believe in God who has no beginning,
He will give you life with no ending.

Michael Karpovetski



If you asked me (and Jews always ask) which people group is the happiest, I would answer by asking, "And what do you think?" (By the way, Jews always answer a question with a question!)

Someone might say that Gypsies are the most joyful, as expressed by their wonderful songs and dancing! I would answer, "Perhaps!" Another may argue that Georgian* people are the happiest. And I would say, "Of course. Everyone knows the Georgian temperament. It's like the temperament of many other Caucasian people." Or someone might say it's the Russians when they drink, or the Ukrainians, when they eat a piece of lard with onions and black bread. And I could hardly disagree with this.

But I think that the Jews are the happiest, perhaps because of the many troubles in their history and in their attempt to hide their deep sorrow behind a mask of joy. Perhaps they have really learned to have joy while walking through the darkest of valleys. Everyone can answer for himself.

As for me, I have joy because I, too, am also a Jew, and because I know that the hearts of many of our people (as well as of many others, no matter what nation, culture or cuisine) are full of HOPE.

And this HOPE is YESHUA.

* A country on the Eurasian continent.



Keyla, How Cheap Can You Be?!

When I look back on my carefree childhood, I see my grandmother Keyla. People like her are like guardian angels. Of course I didn't believe in angels or in God. And, as all unbelievers, I needed something as a substitute for God because of my unbelief.

My grandmother grew up in the small town of Chudnov in the Zhitomirskiy region of northern Ukraine, where the majority of the population was Jewish. It is a quiet, picturesque town along the river Teterev. In the spring, the air was filled with the scent of lilacs. I remember watching horses with carts trotting by, leaving their droppings on the roads. I spent my early childhood years there in a yard where chickens busily scratched and turkeys strutted.

Jews often gathered in our house for lively discussions. At just two years old, I was too young to understand what they were talking about. The only words I remember from that time were spoken by my grandmother as her hands caressed my head and her gentle voice full of love, whispered, "Mizuzan, you are a shining light. You are my darling pheasant!"

Love Never Fails



Chudnov Town

My parents sent me to live with my grandmother for a short time so she could take care of me while they lived and worked in the large, industrial city of Kharkov. They later took me back there with them, but my grandmother's attachment to me was so great that she left her home and moved to the city to be with me. Only when I had become an adult did I realize how great her sacrifice was. Because of me, she had left everything she had in her town of Chudnov to dedicate herself to raising me. At that time I couldn't have imagined a greater sacrifice.

My happy childhood was abruptly interrupted by the intrusion of one of life's harshest realities, and I had to grow up quickly. It happened so suddenly that when my older brother Leni said, "Our mother is not with us any more — she is dead..", I couldn't even acknowledge the awful situation. Only some time later did this horrible news hit me with its reality

and cause a sharp pain in my soul. It meant that I would never again see the one who was the center of my life. It meant I would never see my mother's glance – watchful, but still full of love. I would never hear her tender, deep voice and would never again feel the touch of her hand.

It was especially hard to see our father's suffering after my mother's death; his sleepless nights, piles of cigarettes, tears in his eyes and words full of desperation and sadness, like, "I would give everything for her to be alive again." Then my father died as suddenly as my mother had. But he left me a good example of love in a marriage, devotion, and paternal care and love.

When my parents passed away, I felt a deep hole in my soul that I longed to fill. My parents had dreamed that I would study in an institute, so I did. Your days as a student are considered to be the happiest, so, like King Solomon in pursuit of wisdom,* I spent them in an enjoyable way, spending time hanging out with other students, taking part in numerous activities, and visiting the theatre and dance clubs. But all of this was just an attempt to hide from the loneliness in my soul. All of it was just vanity. I had questions about my parents like: "Where are they now?" "Can they see or hear me?" "What will happen to me when I die?" "Why do people live at all if they are going to die anyway?" and "What is the meaning of life?"

* Ecclesiastes 2:10 I denied myself nothing my eyes desired;
I refused my heart no pleasure.

I saw how my grandmother suffered; how she prayed in Yiddish* for all of her sisters who did not evacuate in time to escape Hitler's Holocaust and were executed during the



Michael's family

Second World War. My grandmother was left alone. Her husband Meir also did not return after the war, and my mother Miriam was her only daughter. My father's death was also very painful for her. She used to say,

-
- * A High German language with a mixture of words from Hebrew and Slavic languages; spoken mainly by Jews in Eastern and Central Europe.

“Phima was like my son.”

My father used to tell us about his parents who lived in the city of Berdichev.*

-
- * This city is quite famous among Jews because of a tomb of one righteous Jew, the Chassidic leader, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak.

Grandmother Leya and grandfather Grigoriy had three children and my father was the oldest. His sister and my Aunt



Aunt Shura with her sons, Yuriy and Simon

Shura stayed in Berdichev and we often used to gather with our relatives there at her place. Aunt Shura worked in the hair-dresser's shop near the city baths. Even if you were not a Jew, the baths were a place where all of the information about the local residents was gathered and discussed. And believe me, my aunt's memory exceeded any modern-day computer!

Aunt Shura had two sons, Yuriy and Simon. She had a big apartment where all of our relatives would gather. Among them I met my father's youngest brother with his children, Irina and Larion.

My cousin Irina became my beloved "sister" after we became friends there in Berdichev, and she often visited us in Kharkov with my uncle. We both loved taking walks and discussing different topics. Once we were stuck in an elevator for two hours and I got to experience my cute sister going



My sister Irina

into hysterics! Anyway, it doesn't matter now. It's just great that we have some unique things to remember!

I used to visit them often in Zaporozhe (a city in the southeastern part of Ukraine) and my dear uncle tried to persuade me to move there. But in spite of the fact that I had a warm and loving family there, Zaporozhe could not compare with Berdichev. I remember the joy and love our Aunt Shura expressed when she welcomed us, how delicious her food was and how while we were eating, she would repeat, "Oh, my dear children, now you have eaten and have become so beautiful!"

Besides Aunt Shura, we had another aunt from my mother's side, Aunt Bilya. When we were in Berdichev, we stayed at Aunt Shura's place but always visited Aunt Bilya.

Once my grandfather Grigoriy asked, "Where is our Muzeichik?" He used to call me by this nickname. Aunt Shura answered, "At Bilya's." My grandfather then worriedly yelled, "Oh, my God, how was he killed?!" and only after explaining that he had just misheard the phrase and that I was not killed but just visiting my Aunt Bilya, he calmed down.

Our father loved telling us stories about his relatives. And his favorite subject was about the occupation of Chudnov by the Germans. The family left the town at the last moment to es-



My Aunt Bilya

cape being murdered by the Germans. Their delay was because my grandparents tried to discourage them from escaping, saying that they would have to leave everything behind and had nowhere to go.

Our father recalled, "I told my parents, 'Unless we leave the city, the Germans will kill us all.'" Fortunately, I escaped and have two sons now. My brother Lenya escaped and now has a daughter and a son. Shura also left on time, and had two sons. That is why our family is now so numerous. But if we had stayed there for fear of losing our belongings, then we would certainly have died there.

Another Jew from Berdichev, lived in Kharkov by the name of Uncle Isaak. His nationality was easily guessed because of his appearance, since he was short and had a remarkably big nose! He wore a straw hat and green suit with lots of medals on it that he was very proud of. When he was sitting on a bench with our grandmother Keyla, his legs did not touch the ground. He always looked up at my

grandmother's face when they would have endless dialogues in Yiddish. And they talked so loudly that the men playing dominoes on the next bench would stop playing and turn their heads in an attempt to understand the discussion, in a language they did not know.

Once I overheard a very interesting conversation between them. My grandmother was sitting in the kitchen with Uncle Isaak and, as usual, they were discussing something. Then I heard Isaak speaking poorly in Russian, "Keyla, do not worry. I saw this man and heard him praying. So be confident, write down the names of your relatives." I understood that the subject was about deceased relatives for which a special prayer was offered. Later I also visited the synagogue in Kiev where I asked to pray for my parents. There I found out that my father's name Phima was taken from the root Haim, and my mother's name, Mary, was derived from Miriam.

When the list of relatives which took two sheets of paper was completed, Isaak stood up, paused while reading the names attentively, and solemnly said, "It will cost 25 rubles." My grandmother expressively responded, "No way!" and started to strike out the relatives' names, one by one. Isaak's face changed in a moment as if he had been cheated out of a huge sum of money and said, "Keyla, how cheap can you be?! Give me your 15 rubles and I will add 10 more of my money."



The only Thing Better than Mountains Can only Be more Mountains

Which do you prefer: the mountains or the sea? The majority would choose the sea. Just look how beautiful it is, how wonderful the waves are, crashing onto the shore with foam, leaving seaweed and shells behind it. Or watch how it sparkles during the daytime when the sun is high, and how it changes its color when the sun is low and is glistening on the water's surface. In such moments it seems as if it could sizzle like an iron touched by a wet finger. (I think everyone has tried that when their parents were not watching!) Also, it is a great joy to swim in the sea, to sunbathe on a sandy seashore, to watch ships and yachts, and to be constantly amazed by the surfers who mount up onto the huge waves and gracefully slide down on its white edges.

But some can argue that the mountains are better. Your breath stops when you look at their white peaks. As Vladimir

Vysotsky sang, "The only thing better than mountains are the mountains which you haven't visited yet."

My problem was that by the time I turned twenty, I hadn't seen the sea or the mountains. (Not counting in TV programs). What a surprise it was for me when during my last course at the institute, I was sent by the students' committee to the health resort, "Anchor", in the famous city of Odessa.

Of course the first thing I did was rush to the seashore, leaving all my belongings in my room. When I came back, I found out that my things were stolen! I complained to the reception desk and they said that they would not take any responsibility for a minor theft.

Anyway, it was a good rest for several reasons. The first reason was the trainings, where my hands became warm and heavy from meditation. Second were the 30 minute sea trips, which if you believed the advertisement, were said to prolong life for 20 years. So, after several trips, I felt as if I was just newly born.

But on a serious note, the reason I was sent to the sea was quite sad. My older brother Leni got married. His wife Tatiyana was an 18-year-old girl with a bright smile. When she smiled, you could see a mouth full of golden teeth! Boy, were they shiny! It really impressed Leni so much that he couldn't sleep. He dreamed about a large inheritance in addition to the girl, as well as a luxurious life. You might think that his dream was great. Yes, but his life was not so sweet.

When Leni came home from work, he and his wife played cards. The one who lost had to fry potatoes. If Tatiyana was

dissatisfied with something, she began to gripe so much that it made your blood run cold. My grandmother could not bear it for very long and soon after the wedding, she died.

Sometime later, Leni was in a car accident where so many of his bones were broken that he stayed in a hospital for two months. His friends, both men and women, visited him in the hospital. Even there, Tatiyana's jealousy caused her to take advantage of this situation. By this time, Leni's patience had worn thin and he divorced her without any inheritance. Because of my concern for Leni's situation, I lost interest in my studies. That is why I was sent to the resort. Although the time of rest was great, afterward my problems were still the same.

This episode reminds me of a well-known Jewish fable. Once a visitor came to a rabbi with a problem.

“Rabbi, it is hard for me to live. My wife and I, our children and our parents — all of us live in one flat.”

“You should buy a dog,” was his reply.

“What for?” the visitor exclaimed. “Just buy a dog,” persisted the rabbi.

Sometime later the Jew returned.

“Rabbi, now it is even worse. The dog is running in the flat and the children are screaming..”

The rabbi thought for a moment and said, “You need to buy a goat.”

The visitor was agitated but took the advice. But by his next visit, he was even more furious.

“Rabbi, now it is worse! There was no place for us but now in addition to us, we have a goat! It is leaving its droppings in the flat. It is awful!”

“Buy a cow!!!” was the response.

“Rabbi, that is too much!” I said.

“I tell you, buy a cow!!” he insisted.

The next time the visitor was screaming, “We do not have any place at all now!”

This time the rabbi smiled and said to sell all the animals.

One day the same visitor came, but he was happy, “Thank you!” he exclaimed. “Now there is so much space for all of us and all is well!”

This old Jewish story proves that you understand things when you can compare them. And in order to understand what is GOOD, we sometimes need to experience what is BAD. And now when I look back on my life, I might say that the mountains are better than the sea.

Every person has a lot of problems, challenges and failures and they look like huge mountains in the way. But there is one mountain which is greater than all the others. It is Golgotha. Only there can we be relieved from our “dogs,” “goats,” “cows” and any other problems which are in our way. Only there can we begin to see eternity. Because when you look there, then you may joyfully say with the Apostle Paul (or Rabbi Saul as some call him — anyway the meaning is the same):

Better than Mountains...

"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

≈ Romans 8:18

But before I could climb this mountain, the Lord led me through the valley of death.



Even Though i Walk Through The Darkest Valley

When I entered the Army recruitment office in the fall, I was full of hope to be able to return home in the spring in one and a half years (those who didn't have an education had to serve two years). I never suspected what challenges lay ahead and how crucial they would be for my entire life in the future.

Sitting in a train full of young men like me, I saw numerous villages through a window and heard the same question all the way, "Where are we going?" One of the military staff who accompanied us admitted with a cunning smile, "20A Command, to the Turkestan battle region in Afghanistan..."

By that time I, (as well as the majority of the others on the train), were not immature boys looking for a new adventure. On the contrary, suddenly my entire life flashed before my eyes. What if I never came back?

I felt a desperate desire to live, to love and to be loved, to start a family. But the train was going to an unknown future.



In Afganistan

And in that moment, for the first time in my life, I addressed the One I did not believe in before; the One I laughed at and cursed, crying, **“Oh my God, if you exist, save me!”**

I spent half a year in a military school in Ashkhabad. It was six months of humiliation and mockery, sleepless nights and physical exhaustion. These six months showed me how low a human could fall and what a human could bear in extreme situations.

We were like mute cows prepared to be slaughtered in Afghanistan. During our studies, our commanders convinced us that the radio station where we worked stored lots of dynamite and that the enemy must not capture it. We constantly heard the words that we were doomed to die. I remember one officer who said delicately, “We shall celebrate this New Year, because for most of you it will be your last holiday.”

A day before our departure to Afghanistan, I was on leave. It was the first time I left the four walls of the place where I did military service since I began. Before I left, my friend in the army told me, "If you do not want to go to Afghanistan tomorrow, throw away your military ID. Then you can say that you lost it. It will take time to replace the ID and someone else will be sent instead of you." This was a real temptation for me. What should I do? Shouldn't I save my own life? What if the person who was sent instead of me died there? How could I live with this burden?

At that time I did not know the One who loved me so much that he had already given his life in order to save me from eternal death. My parents had often said,

"Do not treat any person in a way you don't want to be treated yourself." So I made the decision to go. Again, all of my life flashed before my eyes and something made me repeat again, **"Oh my God, if you exist, save me!"**



Death Pass

The mountain pass Salagal is 4500 meters above sea level. It became the main pass in my life. There was lots of alcohol in our platoon and thick smoke from the Afghani drugs. The older soldiers constantly humiliated the young ones. It was hard to stand your ground, to be different from the others.

But most terrifying was the shooting around our garrison. There were enemy snipers shooting at our soldiers from their camp. Moreover, avalanches took the lives of our soldiers. At



The mountain pass Salagal



Black Tulip

night terrorists crept into our garrison and killed our soldiers while they slept. In the morning we sent a so-called, “load 200”* with our dead friends inside, on the airplane which we called the “Black Tulip.”

In spite of all this, the beauty of the mountains attracted me with their purity and greatness. When I was

alone, I observed their white tops, sparkling with many colors. In these moments, I raised my head and prayed, “I lift up my eyes with hope to these white mountains of Yours. I know that help will come from the mountains where God lives.”

I didn’t know where God lived or if He existed at all, but I had this desire to pray. That is why again and again I screamed from within my heart, “Can you hear me? I am an insignificant man who is at the bottom of all creation now. Raise me up to these peaks to where my soul aspires to rise.”

* A zinc coffin with a dead body inside sent to the cemetery



Search for the Truth

Autumn and winter passed, and at last spring came to the Salagal pass, and the time came to return home. Once again I walked the streets of my native city, breathed in the fresh, spring air, enjoyed the birds' songs and eagerly awaited meeting with relatives and friends who had become even dearer during my difficult days in the army, as they supported and encouraged me with their letters.

Suddenly, the times flashed in my memory when I had repeated the phrase, **"Oh my God, if you exist, save me!"** I had a desire to believe that God was hearing my prayers, and now at last, I was in my home city, alive and healthy without any physical injuries or health issues.

I had to thank Him. But the question, "Thank who?" arose in my head. Maybe He doesn't exist and all of this was just a fantasy. My parents taught me to be a man of principle and to be honest. Moreover, my years in the institute taught me to think analytically. So, to the questions I had before, such as, "Is there life after death?" and "What is the meaning of life?", two more questions were added: "Does God really exist?" and "If He exists, then which religion is the right one?"

While I was contemplating these questions, my brother and I immigrated to Israel. By that time, I had read lots of books about Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Hinduism and Kabbalah. But the more I read and tried to understand the core or foundation of different religions and beliefs, the more perplexed I became by their doctrines. They seemed like spaghetti — you never knew where they began or ended!

In Israel, I felt lonelier because of the new atmosphere, the absence of friends and communication. Everything was different: a different country, different people (I had to be careful with them to save my meager salary from the Ministry of Integration for adaptation into the new country), and a different language, which our ancestors spoke 2000 years ago (and which my mind refused to learn now)! I desperately felt the need to have a friend who would listen to me. And again some unknown power inside of me made me say, **“God, if you exist, tell me who you are. Where are you? Show yourself, I am waiting to meeting You!”**

A young couple who also attended Hebrew language studies with me once invited me to visit them. I was so glad to communicate with someone, which is why I gladly accepted their invitation. They said they were Christians. We had a long religious dispute. Remember, I had read a lot of religious books by that time and was quite knowledgeable in this subject. Like most Jews, I had a negative attitude towards Christianity. Only one thing attracted me to this couple — it was the joy on their faces and their smiles. I asked impatiently, “Why are you so happy?” They nodded towards the view in the window and asked,



Jordan mouth, where the river debouches into the Dead Sea

“Don’t you see the beauty all around? Look, there is the city of Capernaum on the other side of the Sea of Galilee.”

“So what about Capernaum? It’s just an insignificant place,” I said.

“Don’t you know?! It’s the city where Jesus (or Yeshua in Hebrew) did many miracles!”

When I was leaving, they gave me a Bible. I was glad to take it because I had heard a lot about this book but had never read it. I was advised to start in the New Testament. I started to read, but every time I opened it, my eyes became heavy. All of the genealogies were boring and I got lost in the theology,

The next time I met this couple, they pointed me to the prophecies in the Old Testament. I was amazed by what they shared with me. How was it possible that the prophets who

lived before Christ could predict and describe His birth place, His life, the time He came, His death, resurrection and even His ascension?

Up to that time, I was a cold realist and had never experienced the supernatural in my life.

I decided that it must be some kind of a Christian prank to capture me into their sect. So, I decided to check everything out by myself. I started to compare the prophecies of the Old Testament and the Torah (published by the rabbis) with the Bible they gave me. I was amazed for the second time because all of the prophecies were precise!

But now my Jewish stereotype had switched on, and I wondered, "How can a Jew become a Christian? How would my Jewish relatives react?" Moreover, I realized that if I opened my heart to God, then I would have to forsake all the sins that young men love so much.

I realized that I had to make a very important decision concerning the truth I had discovered, which was still quite mysterious to me. I wrestled with myself and with God for four months. As a result, God won.



Only the Truth Can Set You Free

One day, the same couple invited me to a church service. It was the first time I had visited the church, which did not look like a church in my opinion at all. It was a gathering of people who prayed, read the Bible and sang songs. I remember the words of one of the songs: “Why is there no place for Jesus in my heart? Why don’t I see His love.” I liked the atmosphere of love and joy there and started to go on my own to talk to the believers, most of whom were from the republics of the former USSR.

Our pastor Claude was a Jew from Morocco. In one of our conversations he said that there was no need to graduate from an institute to believe in God. He said that none of the institutes could answer what happened at the beginning of time and that the only clear answer could be found in the Bible. Then he combined two passages from the Tanakh* and from the New Testament:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty; dark-

ness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light."

≈ Genesis 1:1-3

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that has been made."

≈ John 1:1-3

These two passages tell us about the Word which belonged to God had and was God. With the help of this Word, God created everything. And about this Word, it is written that it *"became flesh"* (John 1:14). Then he read Psalm 21 where the crucifixion was vividly described.



Victor Klimenko

I also started to attend another gathering of believers. Once as I was walking on the shores of Tiberias, I met people from Finland who gave me a CD with songs from Victor Klimenko, and they invited me to a meeting. I fell in love with his songs, which were full of sincerity and love for the Jewish people, even though he sang in Russian with a non-Jewish accent. Later, I got acquainted with this amazing

singer. He was from a Kazak village and became famous when he immigrated to Finland.

When I became a believer I heard his testimony. God changed him so much that instead of killing Jews along with the communists, as any other Kazak, he loved them. And I felt the love that he had for them in an apartment where I was invited by the Finnish people I had met. Here believers prayed for the Jews, gave us gifts and treated us with great food. The dates and the black bread they baked were especially delicious.

Once I asked one of the women (her name was Shoshanna) why she left Finland and moved to Israel. As for me I had left Ukraine in order to find a better life in Israel. But Finland was more comfortable than hot Israel and there must've been a good reason for her to leave it. She looked at me with surprise and said, "We just love the Jews so much." Now it was my time to be surprised, because in Ukraine the Jews were constantly blamed for Christ's crucifixion and called Christ-killers. And Shoshanna explained that only ignorant people who didn't read the Bible would say things like that because it is written:

"...For whoever touches you touches the apple of His eye."
≈ Zechariah 2:8

This was the last straw which made me cry out, "Shoshanna, how is it possible to love them!? They have nothing good in them! We have just arrived in Israel and already were cheated twice. Deceit and contempt are all around us. At work illiterate

men speak in Hebrew, in which I can only understand 'shlosh meot shekels' (300 shekels), 'mataim shekels' (200 shekels), 'arba meot shekels' (400 shekels). I constantly hear, 'The Russians have arrived!' I wish I could be a Finn or a Swede; then I wouldn't have to stay in this Israel!"

She smiled and said that if God loved this nation then we should also. Then I understood that I was seeing a true believer standing before me.

* The Old Testament



I Believe!

I doubted. A voice inside of me whispered, "You are a Jew! How can you become a Christian? If you accept Christ then you will be deprived of all pleasure in this life." But somewhere deep in my soul I knew that this belief was true; that the prophecies had been fulfilled and that there were people who did not deceive but were sincere. The moment came when I could not resist God any longer. In this moment I said, **"God I want to dedicate my life to You."**

When I look back, I understand that it was not my decision, because I could not make a decision at that time. It was He who found me when I was not searching for Him. It was He who made me search for the meaning of life which was lost for me. It was He who permitted troubles to come into my life which led me to the 'promised land'. God made me suffer in my loneliness in order to search for consolation and what is more, I found it. And he did it because he knew me and knew the decision I would make.

God also brought peace and joy in my life. All loneliness is gone and I have found lots of friends whom I can call brothers. Of course that doesn't mean that I have forgotten my old friends. I still love them and pray for them. But I have a special

relationship with other believers, being bound together by God, and who we all call Our Heavenly Father.

Most importantly, I have a best friend now, Jesus Christ. I refused to accept Him for a long time, but now He is always with me. He knocked on my heart patiently and finally I opened the door of my heart. God gives eternal life and all material things become meaningless. That is why when I accepted God into my heart, a constant desire to know Him and a constant search for Him entered my life.

...So that I Might Learn Your Decrees

I became a student again. I didn't study mechanics, math or something like that as I used to, but I became a student of a faith faculty. In bible college we studied theology, because the meaning of life is revealed through knowing God. We constantly grow in this knowledge because even eternity is not long enough to know our eternal God. His endless love is always amazing. In this short life, I want to absorb as many truths of God as possible and to receive an impartation of the glory of heaven in my heart.



Love Covers Many Sins

When I was a student and lived without God, I dreamed of finding the love of my life. I dreamed about a girl with whom I wouldn't feel lonely. I dreamed that she would become my best friend and that we would have a big family. At that time I had feelings for a girl named Lily. Like me, Lily had suffered hardship in her life. Her mother died and her father got remarried. His new wife already had a child, so her father's love was focused on them. As a result, Lily was forgotten. She lived nearby and we went to the institute together. We often met during study breaks. In time, I fell in love with her. She was beautiful, intelligent and very communicative, but most importantly, she was Jewish. My mother and father constantly told us, "Do not marry a Shiksa (a non-Jewish girl)." But I did not have enough courage to tell Lily about my feelings.

During the holidays at the institute, I travelled to Saint Petersburg with a company of students. I had never seen such a wonderful city! But even all of the beauty of the city couldn't deter me from my thoughts about Lily. I made a decision to propose to her when I came back. When I returned, I called her

and we went shopping together. I wanted to tell her about my feelings this time, but when I met her, I saw that she was upset about something. So I realized that it wasn't the right time for my confession.

I asked her why she was so upset and she said, "I am getting married." This news came as a surprise. I calmed my feelings down and inquired whether or not she loved the guy. She said, "Yes." I recalled a Russian film named, "Two Captains", based on a book by Kaverin. The character, Romashov purposefully created situations in order to impress Kate. And when the other character, Alex Grigoriev asked why he did it, Romashov answered, "Because I love her." Alex's answer of, "But love shall be honorable" astonished me. Now I was in the same situation. I did not doubt what I needed to do for a moment and decided to be honorable. I said that that was good news and that I would be glad to meet her fiancé and get an invitation to their wedding. Her eyes became all bright and happy and I understood that true love doesn't seek its own (1 Corinthians 13:5).

When I later moved to Israel and became a student again, I was sure I would have no problems finding a bride there because everyone was Jewish! But when I became a believer, my choices were greatly diminished. I knew that I could only marry a believer. As you can understand, there are not many Christian, Jewish girls. I even considered marrying one of the non-Jewish girls, who worked as volunteers in the hotel next to the college where I studied and lived. But when I observed them not only by appearance, but by character, I noticed that their faith was questionable.

During this time, I became acquainted with a Sabra (a native born Israeli Jew) named Robert. He was a serious Jewish man who used to work in Shin Bet (an Israeli Security Agency). According to Robert, Muslims sought blood, Jews sought money and Christians sought love. Then he added, "I had already seen blood, I had money, and now I needed love." He was on the right path. From the moment we met, I saw his interest and desire for the Word of God. He went to church services, attended home groups, asked lots of questions and knew the Bible as well as people who had been believers for a long time.

One day Robert was taken to the hospital because of an old wound. Three sisters in Christ from Finland and I took shifts to take care of him during the night. Once a month, I had a sleepless night shift. During one such night, Robert confessed that he liked one of the sisters whose name was Salma. And then he asked me what I thought of her friend, Maya. I did not take the question very seriously and replied that she was a good girl and that I liked her.

Later I found out that during Maya's shift, Robert had tried to find out if I had proposed to her. Of course Robert was a very polite and clever man, but like many Sabras, he could be very nosey. After my conversation with Robert, I could not forget about Maya. Although she was older than me by several years, she had a cute face, big eyes and a tremendous desire to serve God. When we met, she blushed, her breath became short and she became frozen as if she was about to be tortured. I did not want to offend her so I didn't rush. I told

her that I liked her, but that I loved God more, so my decision to ask her to be my helpmate or to just remain friends would depend on whether she was ready to take part in my ministry. I was sincere about this because for me, love was more than just feelings, a chemical reaction or desire, but was also a personal decision to serve God.

At this time, a girl named Alina immigrated to Israel and started coming to our church services. I constantly felt her gaze on me and I liked her too. But what would I do about Maya? I decided to wait, which turned out to be the right decision.

I was blessed and had a great opportunity to go to New York with the mission group “Jews for Jesus”, to evangelize there. I thought that this separation would help me to decide and make the right choice. There was no free time in America because New York is a busy city where different nations and races are all mixed together, providing plenty of work for evangelists. Brighton Beach in Brooklyn, New York is known as the “Little Odessa!” In Berdichev, Ukrainians can speak Yiddish, in Odessa everyone has a wonderful sense of humor, and on Brighton Beach, Americans feel like tourists! If someone from Brooklyn has a friend who constantly goes shopping on Brighton Beach, and he is asked, “How is America?” you may hear the answer, “How do I know?! I am not visiting there!”

So, it was a wonderful place for evangelizing Russian Jews, especially if you had a red T-shirt with the motto, “Jews for Jesus”. Once a Jewish man shouted at me with contempt,

screaming, "You are not a Jew!" But his wife next to him whispered, "That's nonsense! Izzy, just look at him. What a handsome Jewish face!"

One day near a shop where Jews constantly gathered, one of them asked, "Are you going to persuade us?"

I replied, "Yes, I want to convince you to come back home to Israel." "But you are for Christ!" he cried.

"Yes," I responded, "but notice that Jesus wasn't a Brooklyn resident and didn't go to Brighton Beach. He was born in Bethlehem and fulfilled the prophecy of Micah, the Jewish prophet:

"But you, Bethlehem Ephratah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

"There were lots of children born in Bethlehem..." my skeptical questioner pointed out.

"But none of them became a ruler over Israel," I countered. He then ventured, "Perhaps he hasn't been born yet?!"

The discussion became a bit more heated, "It is known that from the very beginning, from ancient times, only God exists. If he came out from Bethlehem as a human, then he was in the image of a man. This contradicts one of the main principles in Judaism established by Rambam, which declares that a man cannot be God. Of course we agree with this, but we shall take into consideration the fact that God is almighty and could be-

come a man! So, this prophecy is talking about Jesus. The New Testament states the same.” From this moment, our conversation took an interesting turn.

He asked, “Why do you advertise your Bible?”

“It is not only ours,” I explained. “It is yours as well. I am a Jew too and I know that the Bible wasn’t written by Russians, Swedes or Afro-Americans.”

“But we already have the Torah,” he protested, “and you have betrayed your forefathers’ faith.”

“No, I haven’t,” I insisted. “In the same way, our father Abraham ‘betrayed’ the faith of his forefathers. Moreover, the Torah is a part of the Bible.”

“No way! The Bible is a part of the Torah,” he maintained. “Have you read the Torah?” I asked.

“Yes, of course,” he said.

“Then what is the name of the third book of Moses?” He blushed. “Are you going to test me now?”

“No, I am not. But I am going to tell you that if you think that ignorance is bliss, then you are a very happy man!” I quipped.

“And what about you?” he rejoined hotly, “You dress like clowns and everyone laughs at you!”

“Do you know that Noah was also laughed at when he started to build a boat in a desert,” I said, “but Noah had the last laugh.”

During this mission trip, I had a lot of interesting conversations like this. Every day we distributed our gospel tracts, had conversations on the streets and tried to get contacts from people in order to meet later and talk about our faith.

One evening we counted our contacts. One girl from our team had 3, another 5, and I had a pile of notes with the contacts. We counted and there were 21 contacts. The girl who had 3 started to cry. Our high spirits sank. Everyone knew why she was crying.

Then I had a thought: What if I were in her place? I realized that I had the same problem. Of course I wouldn't cry in her place because I was a man, but inside I would feel frustrated. But God reminded me of one place in the Bible:

"It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill." ≈ Philippians 1:15

We continued our ministry and in two months I returned home. Here I found out about an interesting event. While I was on the outreach, Maya, and Alina's sister Viktoriya, were at the same Christian wedding. Viktoriya told Maya that Michael would definitely marry her sister. Usually calm, Maya became nervous. She met with Alina and told her that I had promised to marry her and asked her to step aside.

After that, I noticed that Alina started to avoid making eye contact with me, but Maya's friends kept reminding me about marriage. I explained that I did not break my promises, but my conditions were the same. My wife would join my church and my ministry.

By that time I had learned to search for God's will above my own and to get my priorities right. My ministry in the church "Israel's Hope" was my first priority. When I moved



*A picture of the Jordan. According to the Bible,
it dried up and the Jews passed through it.
Here, hundreds years later, Jesus was baptized*

from Tiberias to the Tel Aviv suburb of Bat Yam, I started to search for believers. There were two churches. I visited “Mercy and Truth” in Rishon LeTzion, and “Beit Immanuel” in Jaffa, Tel Aviv.

In the church, “Mercy and Truth”, I became acquainted with a brother named Tom, from America. Sometime later, Tom was blessed by our pastor, Baruch for ministry in Holon, a city not far from Bat Yam*.

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- * If you have never been to Israel then it may be difficult to imagine that the cities are often separated by a street or a highway. Bat Yam, Holon and Tel Aviv are close together, and all of them are part of the Gush Dan or Dan district. The tribe of Dan was given this land. But when the Moabites occupied it, Dan's clan moved to the north and established the city of Dan. Since that time, the territory of Israel has been measured from Dan to Beer Sheba. The river flowing down from Mount Hermon is called "Falling Dan", or the Jordan River. That's just a brief geography lesson about Israel.



Difficulties of Translation

The city of Bat Yam is located right between Holon and Jaffa, Tel Aviv. That's how I managed to visit both services. One day Pastor Tom asked me to interpret from Hebrew to Russian. This was a problem for me and I'll tell you why. Usually when someone starts to learn a new language, they can understand it before they are able to speak it. For me, it was the other way around. By that time, I had been living in Israel for over a year and could speak Hebrew quite well. Tom was under the impression that I could understand him quite well, which is why all my attempts to get out of interpreting were ignored. So, I began to interpret for his preaching.

I should tell you that I could only understand one or two words out of the whole sentence. At first I asked Tom to repeat himself, but I soon noticed that this wasn't comfortable for the audience. Then I prayed and started to preach my own sermon. Tom was preaching in Hebrew, I was preaching in Russian and Tom didn't even have a clue that we were preaching about different things. Sometimes my preaching was close to what Tom was talking about, and sometimes there were differences.

Once Tom was preaching on Psalm 23. He said that our God was a good shepherd who takes care of us like a shepherd cares for his sheep. And if even one sheep is lost, He sends his staff to find it. I didn't know the word for "staff" in Hebrew and interpreted it as "dog." It was quite logical that the shepherd would send his dog to return a lost sheep. By that time, Tom had learned some Russian and he knew this word. So he was surprised when he heard me say it and asked me, "What dog? I haven't said anything about a dog."

The more we served together, the more I understood Tom and he understood me. Besides preaching at the church services, we started to visit unbelievers and tell them the gospel message. Our home group was growing.

The services in Jaffa became varied. Everything was adapted for the services. We had musical worship, materials for learning, comfortable classes and Bible study groups. Yet there came a moment when I had to make a choice. David, the pastor of "Beit Immanuel" church, asked me to decide which church I was going to join, because it was impossible to be a member of both. Moreover, he said that any doubt or delay would bring temptations. I had to make a decision by the end of the service.

I started to pray, "Lord, I don't want to be in a church that I like, but I want to be in a church where You need me." Even I was surprised by my own words in my prayer. I felt as though God Himself put these words in my mouth. I liked "Beit Immanuel", but I had to make a choice which was God's will. In this church, I grew spiritually, and in "Israel's Hope" I

did more ministry and shared with others. So, which was better — to give or to receive?

There is one story that is often told here. There are two lakes in Israel — the Dead Sea and the Sea of Galilee, which are connected by one river. When the snow on Mount Hermon melts in the spring time, the river Jordan flows to the Sea of Galilee.

It is interesting that the river flows into the lake and then flows out of it and on to the Dead Sea. These two lakes are like two different people. One (the Sea of Galilee) takes and gives back. That is why it is full of life and the water there is sweet. Moreover, it supplies all of Israel with water. The Dead Sea on the other hand, takes what is given and never gives back. That is why the water is so salty there and no life can thrive in it.

I realized how I would decide because I sincerely believed that God gave me my ministry and I had a responsibility to fulfill it.

After we evangelized on the seashore of the hotel “Sun”, 2 Russian women started to attend our home group. There was also 1 family from Kiev (a husband, a wife and their daughter). He used to be a theater director in Kiev and his wife was a former ballerina. She had to retire because she had multiple sclerosis. Her name was Tamara.

They thought to start working in show business in Israel but failed. Alik, Tamara’s husband, turned down

doing the performances his companions proposed because they were inappropriate. God started to work with this family, especially in Tamara's heart. She accepted the Word of God with great joy. Every time she attended the service or when someone visited her, she listened carefully and with enthusiasm. It was visible how God was changing her.

Once Tom was preaching about a servant who had a huge debt, and how his master forgave him. But this servant refused to forgive his friend for a smaller debt. In the middle of the service Tamara cried out, "Oh Lord, this is about me!" Later she explained that for a long time she couldn't forgive Alik's brother.

One day I went to visit Tamara and bought a sausage. It was her birthday. Later she confessed that they'd had nothing to eat that day, so she was really thankful for my gift. Now she isn't in need anymore. She has a state flat and lives with her family. Her daughter got married and had two kids, and Alik passed away. After this, Alik's brother found Christ, along with his family.

Our church was growing. Another couple, Sasha and Marina, immigrated from Kiev to Israel. They were already believers and began helping us in our ministry. We had our services at their place. Tom began to teach Sasha and me how to preach. Sasha was a construction engineer and spent a lot of time at work, so I did most of the work in our ministry.

Love Never Fails

Maya often tried to persuade me to take up a different ministry. But my decision to serve God in the ministry which He had given me hadn't changed. Maya preferred going to another church, and we started meeting less frequently.



Love Your Neighbour as Yourself

My life was about to drastically change. I had been studying at the Bible College when I met Walter in the parking lot where alcoholics usually asked the drivers for money “to improve their health.” I began to evangelize Walter. One day he showed up at my place in only his underwear. After a short conversation, I discovered that while he was swimming, someone had stolen his clothes. With sorrow in his eyes he said, “If you don’t help me, I don’t know how I will survive.” It was not hard to find clothes for him, but it was much harder to find a place for him to live. I managed to persuade the administration of “Beit Immanuel” to let him lodge there for one night. That night I couldn’t sleep. One thought tormented me. I said to myself, “I study in college and have everything. I don’t have to think about where to live and what to eat. But this poor man doesn’t have anything.” I tried to justify to myself that all my studies were my preparation to serve God and that this man was the only one who was responsible for his life situation. But if that were true, then what did it mean to love and serve God if you do

not love and serve your neighbor?! I heard the clear question in my head as if God had asked me, "How can you tell this poor man about God's love and be so unprepared to show this love?!"

I tried to argue with God. I had tried several times before to help alcoholics and had sent them to rehab centers. Once I even tried to support one of the men from the parking lot. When he was tired, he would lay down on the ground and the drivers would kick him. He ate what was left over from the others and drank Coke from the bottles in the trash. We were lucky to find a place for him in rehab. Brothers from the rehab told us that he ate lots of garlic to get rid of tapeworms. But unfortunately he didn't stay long in rehab.

Another alcoholic visited church who had a home to live in. But he was severely addicted and begged me to help him. We met with him for a month, until he was invited to attend the rehab. But when the day came for him to go, he didn't show up. In the evening, he called and told me that he had prayed and that God was helping him and so he didn't need to go to the rehab anymore. Of course it was just an excuse. I was upset for having wasted my time and effort. I told Pastor Tom about my frustration and his answer rebuked me. He said, "Misha, don't be tired of doing good things for God." At that moment, I realized that the result was not as important to God as the love that I could demonstrate to these poor people, who were forgotten by everyone.

That night, I recalled the parable about the good Samaritan:

“On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. ‘Teacher,’ he asked, ‘What must I do to inherit eternal life?’ And He said to him, ‘What is written in the Law? How do you read?’ And he answered, ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.’

But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbour?’

Jesus replied and said, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, and they stripped him and beat him, and went away leaving him half dead. And by chance a priest was going down on that road, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, who was on the journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, and came to him, and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn and took care of him. On the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, ‘Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return I will repay you.’

Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers’ hands?’ And he said, ‘The one who showed mercy to-

ward him.' Then Jesus said to him, 'Go and do the same!'"

≈ Luke 10: 25–37

The Levite and the priest were driven by one motive. How could they justify themselves? They could say, "We cannot help everyone who is in trouble. We have our ministries and families." But for Christ, these arguments were not substantial, because true love is demonstrated by sacrifice.

So, I asked myself, "What can I sacrifice for this man? And what is the use of my studying in college then? Perhaps I'm studying to tell about Christ's love to sinners. But how shall they believe what I say if I don't show them this love in practice?"

Another voice inside of me contradicted, "What if these people stay ungrateful?" Then the 10 leprous men came to my mind. Christ healed all of them, but only 1, who was a Samaritan, came back to thank Him. It was hard for me but I decided to help this alcoholic even if I had to leave college.

I called the rehab and found out that there was no place. I decided to go to Jerusalem with Walter. My friend Tony, who was a pastor in a local church there, found a cheap hotel for us. I was lacking money. But I prayed and God blessed me through my college friend, Juventus. He gave me some money with the words, "Misha, let God save this soul through you." Anyways, I still didn't have enough money.

Before my departure, I dropped by to say goodbye to a pastor of a Lutheran church, Hekki Nurrmenen. We used to meet and discuss different spiritual topics. The church was across the road in front of our college. When I came in, I thought that

I may ask Hekki to loan me some money, because I still didn't have enough. I remember he became upset when I asked him about it. But anyway, he took his wallet and gave me the sum I asked for. I didn't know the reason for his negative reaction at that time, but when I paid off my debt, he was happy. He told me that he had lent money lots of times to different people, but I was the first one who paid him back.

While I was in Jerusalem with Walter, I called Maya. She said she was satisfied with the church she had chosen and that I could forget her. To my question as to whether she would reconsider, she answered, "No." So, I encouraged her, telling her that there were lots of decent brothers in her church.

I accepted Maya's answer as from God, and felt joy and relief at the same time. Then I called Alina. I told her about the changes in my life and judging from her excitement about what I had done for Walter, I understood that she knew about this situation. I suggested us meeting up, as I wanted to see her.

That evening, Alina and I met. She was glad to see me. She repeated constantly that she admired what I was doing for Walter and gave me some bank notes. "This is all I can afford," she said with embarrassment. I was eager to tell her that I loved her and would be glad to have her as my fiancé. When I said it, in the silence of the night, I heard a loud, "Yes, of course!"



Seven and Forty

On the Mediterranean seashore of our small country with a great history, in the city of Bat Yam, which means “daughter of the sea,” in the year in which Rosh Hashana and my birthday fell on the same date, Alina and I added a third celebration to that date: we were married. We thought it was a good start for a new family. We didn’t expect that it would bring us luck or anything like that. It was more of a coincidence for which we were thankful to God. Our wedding took place in a small restaurant where short people from a small country named Vietnam worked.* So what was special about that restaurant you might ask, and how is it connected with my story in a chapter entitled, “Seven and forty”? Be patient and you will find out.

* They weren’t Jews but arrived in Israel because of a difficult situation in their country. At that time our president, Menachem Begin, permitted them to take refuge in our country.

Our life wasn’t easy. I was 33 years old and didn’t have any experience with family life and neither did Alina. Before we got married, she told me that she hadn’t had enough love in her family. Although her parents had divorced more than 20 years ago, they had all continued to live in one flat with-

out any communication. Alina had grown up in such a tense atmosphere.

Due to a lack of love in the family, Alina was easily influenced by one man with whom she spent time in bars and clubs. At that time, Alina's sister Victoria had become a Christian and had started going to church, so Alina also went there once to see this church. She liked it and started going too.

As it often happens, at that same time, a temptation arose in her life and one man gave her an ultimatum: either him or God. Alina was afraid to lose her "happiness" and whispered, "You. I love you and want to spend time with you." Oh, what a blessing it is that our choice is not the final verdict! This man then found another girl and left Alina without even saying goodbye. Alina couldn't believe it. She decided that there was nothing good in life and that there was no such love like she dreamed of. She was deeply affected, climbed on the window and wanted step out of the window from the sixth floor. At this moment her cat mewed and it was as if Alina woke up. A thought flashed in her mind, "The cat needs me!" She stepped down on the floor, hugged the cat and started to cry. She appealed to God and begged Him to forgive her for what she had done without Him. God's peace entered her life and she began to faithfully serve Him. She started going to church, and then for a year, she studied in a Bible school in Estonia.

Theology wasn't easy for her, but in the school she learned two important things: to trust God in every situation and to always give her tithe; and to give even more than her tithe.

When God united us in our family life, we went through some difficulties and misunderstandings. Our first quarrel took place so quickly and unexpectedly that I wasn't ready for it at all. I was the first to wake up in the morning, went to the kitchen, opened the fridge, took a tomato and ate it. Then Alina woke up, went to the kitchen, opened the fridge and exclaimed, "Where is the tomato?" I joked that I had already hidden it in a very specific place. She didn't even smile but asked, "Why didn't you ask me?" I answered that there were plenty of tomatoes in the shop and if we need some more, I could go and buy as many as she needed.

She said with reproach, "But this one was the last! You ate it all and didn't leave anything for me. You don't love me. Let's divorce." I was shocked by such a situation ... but I didn't show it. I just replied that if she wanted a divorce then she could start preparing the papers and I would sign them. She started to gasp and walk from one corner of the room to another. Then we had a "serious" conversation. Alina asked, "Are you serious?"

"And you?" I responded.

"I am so sorry. Forgive me," she said mournfully. "Ok," I agreed, "but I have two conditions." "What conditions?" she asked.

"The first one is that you never say another word about divorce. The second is that we never sleep separately," I solemnly stated.

She smiled, "I agree."

After this quarrel, we prayed together and asked for forgiveness from each other every day.



There were good times in our church. We both served there. We dedicated ourselves, our time and our flat to God. A small group gathered in our flat in Bat Yam. There was one couple from Kherson (they had escaped from terrorists), their relatives (his sister and her drug addicted son), several sisters (one of them was from my native town Kharkov), several widows (one of them, Nadezhda Ivanovna, was always praying for the rains in Israel during the summer period) and Aunty Bella. She used to wait for me on the bench to accompany her to the church. When she saw that I was approaching, she would say to her friends, "This is my fiancé coming."

At this time I was invited to the mission, "Jews for Jesus." I had a desire to work in this mission, but at first I consulted with my pastor, Tom. He was against this idea because in the mission I had to take long trips and Alina was pregnant now and needed me. So I agreed that it wasn't the right time to leave my family and the church for a long period of time.

The birth of our daughter became my real consolation. Miriam was a fussy child.

She spat out the food she was given and didn't sleep unless she was holding my finger. When she woke up, she calmed down only in my arms.

Alina's mother became a real blessing for us at that time. Once she had a fight with her former husband, left him alone in the flat and began living with us. Suddenly she found out that she had cancer. She fought against the disease with the help of raw products, a strict diet and an active life style. It

helped for four years. Then the disease became worse and she was taken to the nursing home with special care. But her spirit wasn't broken. She constantly prayed and was happy that she had a relationship with God. She loved me and told me that she had prayed about a husband like me for her daughter, a man like in Psalm chapter 1, *"...who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night."*

Once Alina's mother drew my attention to one of the men in the nursing home. His name was Volodiya. He was paralyzed and couldn't talk, but on his face was a desperate desire for support and communication. Our mother asked one sister who was visiting her to write down the Lord's Prayer. When the note with this prayer was given to Volodiya, he was happy and even tried to thank us. We could hear only sounds from his mouth, but even in those faint sounds we could hear, "Thank you very much. This is the consolation I was looking for." Since that time, we constantly shared the gospel with him. When he listened, his eyes became bright and sincere joy was seen in them. Soon his wife Raisa started coming to our church and was later baptized there.

Our mother didn't spend much time in the nursing home. She passed away quite soon after moving there. It's interesting that her former husband Yuriy (Alina's father) suffered more than anyone else, and he constantly blamed himself.



But time didn't stop. Our life continued, the church was growing as well as our family. Soon, a son, Haim, was born into our family. Alina's mother saw him before her death. "A big one!" she said. It was true. He was quite big and had a good appetite. Miriam, who was three by that time, was jealous. She used to ask me, "Father, is it true that mother loves Haim and you love me?" Every time I took Haim, she rushed to me and asked me to take her too. Once she asked, "Father, why did you marry mother and not me?" I was touched and answered that when I got married, she wasn't born yet. She shrugged her shoulders and very seriously answered, "Father, you should've waited!"

Haim was a handsome, healthy boy, bigger than other kids of his age. But we saw that he had a problem. He didn't communicate with the kids in kindergarten and couldn't talk well. The only thing he was fond of were cartoons. We tried to show him Christian cartoons and films. I remember once we went to the supermarket where Haim fell down on his knees, raised his hands and said, "Lord! I am not afraid of these Philistines!" Can you imagine the reaction of the people around! Haim had a brilliant memory and could recite texts from the films he watched, but his speech was poor. Later we took him to the speech specialist who helped us.

Our life was getting better and better, and our church was growing more and more. I started to take part in the ministry responsible for evangelizing and preparing people for baptizing. I was invited to the mission, "Campus Crusade for Christ." My friend from the college, Juventus, had already been work-

ing there. Once I helped him to show the film, “Jesus” in his flat. But now this mission had begun a huge project. The aim was to show the film in many, different Israeli cities. Juventus invited me to develop this project. Pastor Tom wasn’t opposed to it, and soon, I started serving there. Our director, Phillip, moved from America to Israel, with his whole family. When he asked Juventus who he would choose to help him, he answered, “Michael of course.”

This ministry was a great blessing for us. I loved what I did there. We organized various evangelistic projects in different cities and I taught in the churches how to evangelize Jews and bring them to Christ. Moreover, we were constantly in communication, organized conferences and meetings, and took part in Bible training in Ukraine twice. At one of these trainings, Alina was asked what character trait of mine was the most important to her. She answered, “My Misha is very kind and he forgives me for everything and we start all over again.” This was a time when we had full harmony in our family and blessings in our ministry. We wished that this time could continue forever, but new troubles began to spring up in our life.

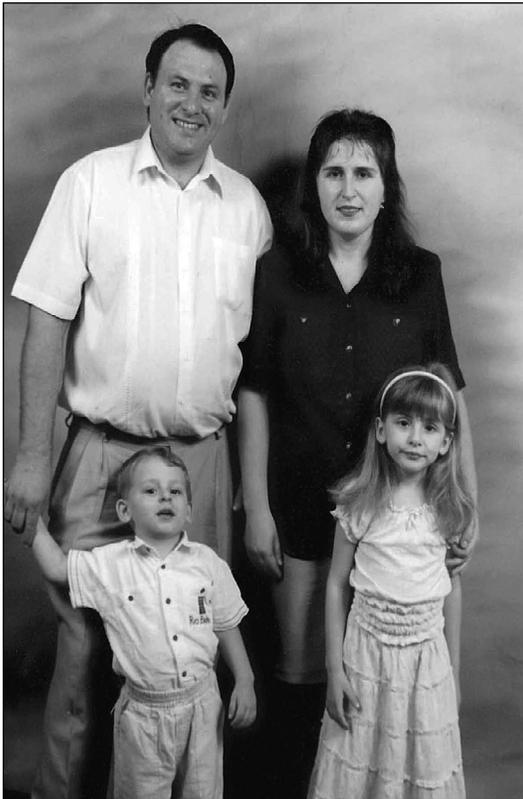
Our mission director’s daughter was killed in an act of terrorism. Abigail was a young girl, full of life, and dedicated to God. She was coming home from school and died in a bus explosion. Her death was instant. Her death was difficult for us too. Her father Phillip, (our director) tried his best not to mix his ministry and personal tragedy. We became close to each other during that period of time and our team became more united.

Seven and Forty

I was blessed by God to do what I loved. I did trainings in the churches and then we practiced what we had learned through evangelistic projects. In our family, we also had a blessing. We learned to understand each other and work together.

Moreover, we had two wonderful kids — Miriam and Haim.

Attention please! Remember, I promised to tell why the chapter is called, “Seven and Forty?” A very interesting date



Our last picture with Alina

was approaching — I was turning forty and seven years before, we had gotten married. Remember, we had had the wedding on the same day as my birthday and the holiday, Rosh Hashanah. Seven and forty — quite Jewish, huh? At that time, at Jewish weddings, it was very popular to bring the bride in to the groom to the tune of the Jewish song, "Seven-forty." We decided to celebrate this date in the same restaurant, "Pac Hay," where we had gotten married. We reserved the date, baked a cake with the numbers 7/40 on it and invited our spiritual and natural parents. It was a great blessing to celebrate this date with our family and friends.

Unfortunately, this harmony and peace in our family didn't last long.



A Hard Path of Troubles

New hardships entered our lives when we found out that my wife had cancer. It was a real shock for me. Again I addressed the One whom I knew and believed in and asked for support, consolation and healing for my dear wife. One year and a half rushed past in a desperate struggle, prayers and tears ... but still her body was dying. We weren't despairing, only because we were supported by the Word of God and our friends. Our tragedy united our brothers and sisters in Christ in prayer and they walked through it with us. It was our Gethsemane where we pleaded with God like Jesus did to take this cup from us. And added, *"Yet not as we will, but as You will."*

While struggling with the disease, Alina's mood was constantly changing. On the one hand, she realized that her death would separate us, but on the other hand, she would be able to be with our God, as Jesus promised. In spite of the pain she suffered, this promise encouraged her and filled her heart with God's peace.

Sometimes, when she realized how much our children needed her, she started to fight more for her life. Once I confessed to her that I wanted to be castrated, because during her disease, I didn't feel the pain and discomfort that she did. She

looked at me and said, “If I die and you are castrated, then how will you marry again?”

The disease was progressing. It was destroying Alina and the stamp of death was already seen on her face. Alina continued to struggle for her life until the final moment. It was a time when we were very close to the Lord and felt special support from our church family. In spite of the pain, Alina still attended church, smiled, communicated with our brothers and sisters and always thanked God, putting all of her trust in Him.

Then unexpectedly, we got a call from the U.S., from a sister in the Lord who informed us that there was a hospital in Tulsa, Oklahoma that treated cancer. We prayed about it and started preparing to go. Many brothers and sisters from different churches donated money for Alina’s treatment. The harder it was for us, the more we felt the support from our spiritual family, especially from Svetlana, the sister who lived in Tulsa. When I asked her to help with interpretation, she joyfully exclaimed, “It is a privilege for me to help my Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ!”

Unfortunately, it took too much time to get a visa for Alina. When she arrived to the hospital, it was too late for treatment, as the metastasis had already reached her lungs. The last 10 days of her life, we spent together in the hospital. They were 10 days of sorrow because two loving hearts, united by 9 years of marriage and 2 wonderful kids, had to be separated. But the most important anchor for us in this tragedy was God. We didn’t lose our confidence and faith in God. He was always the foundation of our life and marriage.

Svetlana was a great blessing for us in the hospital. She wasn't just an interpreter, but a close friend, who took on our tragedy as her own. She took days off work in order to take care of us. She cried and prayed with us. In spite of the tragic situation, she was able to see and was amazed by the harmony of our relationship. Later she said that she had been encouraged by God through the love she saw in our hearts. She was the witness of Alina's last words to me, as she said, "I want to live and to serve God with you!"

That night Svetlana refused to go home, but stayed to support us. All night we spent near Alina's bed, praying for Alina's healing. In the morning, we even had hope that if she had made it through that night then she would've survived. But the doctor informed us that she had only an hour more to live.

I cried near Alina's bed and asked her to forgive all the mistakes I had made in our family life. Pastor Tom called and asked me to read from the Bible the verses he wanted to read for Alina. The last words which Alina heard before she died were from the book of Revelation 21:4:

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

For my Alina, all had passed away. The nurse in our room who watched the medical machines and the doctor recorded the time of her death. The nurse was crying and said that when I had finished reading, Alina's blood — oxygen level had

dropped as if it let her go. It was hard to accept this loss, but God gives His grace to the humble. He promises that love never ends.

Time passed and all the wounds were healed.

I continued to communicate with Svetlana and little by little, we noticed that we were becoming more than just friends. Neither the age difference nor any other obstacle could separate us. God was uniting us together and giving a loving mother to my kids. Through Svetlana, God gave His love to those who needed it. It was a great joy for us because God is faithful to His promises, leaving us examples of His love that never ends.



Svetlana and Miriam

Through the Eyes of a Neighbor

That was the way Svetlana came into my life. Her entire life was a perfect example of love. About this kind of love we may say that “it doesn’t seek its own.” Let me share Svetlana’s testimony, written down from her own words.

Happy Childhood

Excited voices in the yard, high spirits — today we are going to a meeting with all the church youth. I have always loved our happy meetings, picnics and fellowship around the fire. Deep in the fire, we baked potatoes.

I was looking forward to taking the whole baked potato, dividing it into two halves and enjoying its smell and taste. But most of all, I loved singing. All the members of our family could sing and loved singing. Since my childhood, I was present at rehearsals and while singing, I was always overwhelmed by God’s glory. With special triumph, we sang the

hymn, “How Great Thou Art.” But outdoors, God’s presence was almost tangible. It was so real to me, and the words of the hymn, “How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds” were filled with special meaning.

All of a sudden, I remembered that I had promised to go and see one elderly lady in order to help with her house work. I didn’t put it off. Moreover, when I saw her eyes full of thankfulness and love, I understood that my choice to go was right. The words of Jesus came into my mind:

“I was sick and you visited Me ... to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.” ∞ Matthew 24:36, 40

In this moment, just for an instant, it seemed that in the eyes of this woman, I saw Jesus’ eyes. I was so happy that my heart leaped and I was filled with God’s peace.

Uncle Peter

You know how great it is to wake up in the morning and feel the warm sunshine on your face! How sweet is the moment before you open your eyes! Then the first thoughts start to fill your head and your mind wakes up, bringing you back to the reality of a new day!

This was the day Uncle Peter was coming. I recalled pictures of a barbed wire fence, and hungry and humiliated

brothers in Christ. They were imprisoned for their faith and loaded with hard work, but not broken inside. Among them was my Uncle Peter. Some churches in America had invited him to share about God's work behind the barbed wire, about brave wives who were inspiring their imprisoned husbands and taking care of the children, bringing them up in the same faith.

Uncle Peter's departure to America came to mind and how he had tried to encourage us, along with the other relatives. The day went by and again I saw a familiar face with a big smile and eyes full of God's love. Again I heard his voice, "Where is the one beloved by the Lord and by us, our dear niece Sveta (Svetlana)?"

I was always amazed how my busy uncle had time to notice the needs of others and to participate in the lives of the people around him. It touched my heart and filled my soul with love.

Before his departure, we managed to have a conversation. Such conversations were always exciting because my uncle would often ask unexpected questions. This time was no exception. He asked, "Sveta, you are 24 years old now and still not married. Why? Is it because of your own decision or have there been no proposals?"

The Conflict Inside

Humans always hope for the best. When you look at an ugly caterpillar, you understand that one day it will become a won-

derful butterfly. I had the same hope. I was confident about my future and thankful to God that I had been born into a Christian family and was a member of a conservative Baptist church. I thought that my church and pastors were the best, and I didn't realize that this opinion had made me proud. Instead of living according to the living Word of God, I was led to live according to external traditions.

Then the time came when I had to leave my parents' nest, but I didn't feel spiritual satisfaction inside. By that time we were living in America, and I was jealous of other Christians there. I was astonished by their open hearts and love and didn't understand how they could be so free. It was the beginning of a spiritual conflict between a traditional Christian lifestyle and the real, practical Christian life I saw in other believers. I had more and more questions and wasn't satisfied with my own Christian life. I tried to understand how I should spend my life as a Christian and what the purpose of my life was. I started to pray and ask God to show me what I should do and how I could serve Him. I was sure He would answer, because He promised in His Word:

*"You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me
with all your heart."* Jeremiah 29:1

I knew all the right answers in the Bible and I prayed that God would place a mature Christian in my life who would help me to live according to the Bible and counsel me on how to follow God.

By that time, I had a desire to adopt a child. I had been thinking about this for a long time. I had made the decision and even had a plan for the adoption process. Now I understand that this was preparation for my future.

When the Heavens Speak

I love observing the sky after the rain, when the sun's rays start to make their way through the clouds. I love observing a colorful rainbow which looks like a bridge connecting one world to another.

There are no accidents in life. When I read Psalm 139, where it is written that "...all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be...", I always wondered about God's wisdom. Our God knows what is best for us and gives us even more than we can expect. When I prayed to God and asked Him for help, I didn't expect Him to answer in the way He did.

I was looking for a Christian community where I could serve God and feel satisfaction from this. I decided to go to a youth camp in Israel. The director of this camp was my friend who I had been raised with in the same church. I respected this brother and hoped to have support and advice from him at the camp. Moreover, I got a thrill out of the thought of visiting Israel and Jerusalem.

All of a sudden, this brother called me with an unusual request. Later it became a great blessing for me. I didn't have to go to Israel to serve, but Israel was going to come to me, to be served here.

It is hard to retell the thrill I had, when I communicated with people from Israel.

They were different from the Christians I knew. It was easy and comfortable in their company. When I saw Alina, I was amazed by her strength. In spite of the traces of cancer on her skin and her difficulty in breathing, her prayers were full of hope. When I helped her, she looked at me with great love and thankfulness. I took lots of phone calls from her friends in Israel and America. It was the first time I had seen such care and participation of other Christians who were united in a prayer for one sister. But most of all, I was impressed by her husband who constantly called from Israel. He was miles away, but it seemed he suffered alongside Alina.

The first night I couldn't sleep, I saw Alina's sad, but thankful eyes. In the morning, I went to visit Alina, where she was staying with Granny Ann. Ann was doing her housework and Alina was sitting in an armchair. She had a hard time breathing, but was smiling and said, "When I get better, I will definitely help you."

At first, it seemed that the treatment in the hospital was quite successful.

Unfortunately the cancer had spread its metastasis in the lungs and even clean oxygen didn't help Alina to breathe.

Sister Gina from Israel, who accompanied Alina, called her husband and asked him to come.

Several days later, I became the witness of a meeting of two hearts in love. Their communication was very tender. During the last 10 days, I observed great love and tenderness in Misha's attitude toward his wife. He was tired because of sleepless nights and fasting. It seemed that he wanted to give her all the love he had left during this short period of time. I was astonished by their relationship. I had never thought that a husband could love his wife so much. I had never seen such an example, even in books. I wondered how he managed to bear all this without sleeping and eating.

One time, I brought some juice for Alina. She was sleeping and Misha was sitting in an armchair next to her. At first I didn't want to disturb them, but I loved spending time with them. I loved our conversations and time together, and I gave praise to God for every minute I managed to spend with them. I wished Alina could be healed and prayed with them about it. Misha asked the doctors to do something to stop the disease. Unfortunately the doctors couldn't help Alina.

There came a moment when Alina was taken to intensive care. We were informed that this night would be her last. The doctors gave no hope. Then Alina took off the oxygen mask and asked her husband, "Do you believe that God will heal me?"

I saw Misha's tears and he said, "I wish it would happen and I have prayed about this, but I don't know God's will." Then Alina turned to me and said, "My husband has a lack of faith."



Misha and Sveta with the children, Haim and Miriam

Then she said to Misha, “I want to live and serve God with you.” These were the last words she said.

In this moment, God filled my heart with a great compassion towards Misha and his children. Moreover, I was thankful to him that before his departure, he was able to tell me about the correct values of a Christian life. His answers to my questions were so simple that I wondered why I couldn’t understand it all before. After Misha departed, we stayed in touch. After some time, we decided to get married.

Before I agreed, I had some doubts, but overcame them. Misha was always patient with me and gave me very wise advice over time. And now after two years in a happy marriage with him, I understand that he was right about everything. I

Through the Eyes of a Neighbor

am so happy that God gave me a husband who loves me so much, a pastor who has authority in my eyes, and a friend who comes to help even before I ask. I praise God that He has given wisdom to my husband to take all responsibility for our family and that he has helped me build relationships with our children.



My dear Sveta

God Is with Us

On February 15, 2012, my beloved wife Svetochka went to eternity. The labor accelerated the rapid growth of a cancer tumor in the brain, and two months after the birth, the main artery burst under the influence of a fast-growing tumor, which caused instant death. It is impossible to describe how difficult this loss was for me. She loved me and our children so much and served God with such joy that I can only describe her short life with one word — self-sacrifice. She was happy when she managed to make others happy. Now I can say that God is good. Some may say that I am crazy and some may ask, “Can God be good if He took two wives away from you?” But I know for sure that God has never left me alone. These experiences of loss have taught me a crucial thing: to seek for God’s face and find consolation in Him.

When we had just gotten married, Sveta hoped to see at least one repentant sinner. She was happy to see people who were seeking for God and were preparing for baptism. You can imagine her joy when our friend, Viktor became a believer in 2 weeks’ time! Two weeks before Sveta died, she visited a rehab center and she was happy to know that 5 people there were preparing for baptism. She started to serve in the



After Immanuel's birth

mission, “Jews for Jesus” and became a member of our team. She could see the needs of people and tried her best to help them. She was so proud that my students served in the mission as well. She was able to encourage and support ordinary people as well as the pastors in the ministry. That is why she found such close friends in the mission who loved her and helped her as well.

You cannot imagine her happiness when she gave birth to our son and when she fed him and held him in her arms! It was especially important for her, as she had had a miscarriage at first and couldn't get pregnant for a long time.

She had always hoped to give birth to a child and when she became pregnant, she dreamt that our son would look like me.

Before delivery, at the baby shower, she said that her dream was that a child would have all of my qualities. She used to say that there was an angel left on the earth, and by chance he became her husband. As for me, every day I thanked God for her love, which covered everything. Now my Sveta knows the difference between real angels and me. I miss her so much.

When we got married, I was 17 years older than Sveta, which was why I started to prepare Sveta for the day when the Lord might call me home. Once I was leading a group consultation for alcohol and drug addicted people in our house, and Sveta and some guests (sisters from Belarus) were invited to participate in it. The goal of the consultation was to teach people how to behave in emergency situations: To accept the situation as it was, to find places in the Bible which could help to cope with the situation, and to make right decisions.

After the consultation, I said to Sveta, "Dear, imagine that you became a widow..." She replied that she wasn't ready for such a situation. Anyways, I asked her to implement the principles she had learned in the meeting in order to help her to be prepared for this. When the Lord took Sveta away first, I got a call from Belarus. One of Sveta's friends who was in the meeting admitted, "You've taught us and now God is teaching you."

Sveta's death was so sudden that I wasn't ready to implement these principles so early, by myself. But I had no choice, because God had permitted this trial to come into my life. In spite of this fact, I continue to state that God is good, because we have to seek mercy and consolation in Him. There are no other answers.

How I Accepted this Situation

It is hard to accept the death and loss of someone so close to us. Of course we know that one day we will all die, as Solomon wrote in the book of Ecclesiastes 7:2:

"...For death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart."

But how difficult it is to accept it when the one who dies is one flesh with you! To deny this fact is impossible, because life and death are under God's control and any argument or grumbling is useless, as we are much less powerful than God. The only thing left is to believe Him and search for consolation in Him.

What God Showed Me In His Word

Since I had the experience of losing someone I dearly loved, it taught me to trust God and overcome it with Him. During Alina's last days in the hospital, I begged God to comfort me. At that time, I particularly remembered one verse from the Bible:

*“Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!
Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.”*

≈ Philippians 4:4–5

At first I thought, “How is it possible to rejoice when your wife has just died and you are left with three kids?” Then I started to meditate on the verse. It says to rejoice always. It means in any circumstance or situation. “Rejoice” is the Lord’s commandment, and if we do not fulfill it, then we have sinned against God.

Then we have a question: “How can I rejoice in sorrow?” Sorrow and joy are complete opposites! But the thing is that in our God, both states are possible, because in Him, completely different things can coexist. That is why with the Lord it is possible to mourn about the loss and have joy for miraculous salvation. In order to have real joy in difficult situations, we need to learn to be humble in all life situations. We need to remember that God controls everything and will not let us be tempted beyond what we can bear. All we need is to learn from Jesus Christ..

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and
I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn
from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you
will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my
burden is light.”*

≈ Matthew 11: 28–30

God doesn’t give gentleness and a humble heart instantly. It needs to be learned. I think that in difficulties we learn

these things. Also, we learn to trust God and it makes our testimony about God's love and mercy powerful. That is why it is written:

"Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near."

≈ Philippians 4:5

Sveta wanted me to serve in the mission, "Jews for Jesus." I went to the interview and was asked the question, "What is the difference between a humble man and a proud one?" I answered that a proud man says, "God, let my will be fulfilled", but a humble one says, "God, let your will be fulfilled." In order to rejoice in the Lord, we need to accept His will and humble ourselves with the circumstances God has permitted to come into our life. For this we need to remember that God's will is good in heaven, as well as on the earth.

"And we know that all in things God works for the good of those who love Him, who have been called according to His purpose."

≈ Romans 8:28

Quite often we don't know why things happened in this or that way. Tragedies may come into our life and they are just a piece of a big puzzle. Only God can see the whole picture. Sveta was a humble woman who was seeking for God's will in her life. Cheerfulness and happiness were the first qualities people noticed in her. And I tell you that it is impossible to have joy and happiness without gentleness and a humble heart.

Before we got married we prayed and fasted, and Sveta made a serious decision to become the mother of my children. After some years she said, “I am so glad that when we prayed, you said that you wouldn’t dare accept this sacrifice from me unless we had strong love for each other.”

She always looked at me with love and would say, “Dear, you are the best.” Every time, I was embarrassed and amazed how this small, fragile woman was able to see all of my good points and ignore my imperfections. Even now memories of our relationship are very precious to me.

A Decision

With Sveta’s death, all of our plans were ruined. We were looking forward to the moment when I would start my work in the mission, “Jews for Jesus.” I was looking forward to start evangelizing and Sveta was happy that I could serve in this mission and do a lot for God there. She was ready to take care of the other sides of our life to let me serve there without any distraction.

But the Lord’s will was to serve my family first. I acknowledged this responsibility and accepted it without hesitation, because God entrusted me with the responsibility to raise my children for Him. I always told Sveta that God was the main priority in our life. He sustained us and gave us all we needed. Quite often when someone close dies, people start grumbling and forget all the blessings they had before.

God Is with Us

Only by God's grace did I have two wonderful wives, who gave birth to my wonderful children. And I thank God for 8 1/2 years with Alina and 5 1/2 years with Sveta. Sveta wanted to live together as long as it was possible. And even if she would've had to become a widow in 5 years, she would've been grateful that God had given her this island of love and harmony on the earth. That is why I can say that I am happy today.

On one hand, he took two wives from me. But on the other hand, He promised that He would be close and would not leave me without His love and mercy. And nothing can separate us from the love of Christ because we are more than conquerors in all these things through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37). That is why we named our last son



My children: Miriam, Haim and Immanuel

Love Never Fails

Immanuel. In Hebrew it means “God is with us.” God promised that even if a mother could leave her baby, He would stay and never leave. Sveta had to leave me and our children, and it seemed terrible. But God stayed with us and continued to show His love and mercy.



Epilogue

If you stay for a long time in one ministry then you do not always notice how God changes the people you serve. At Sveta's funeral, many believers from all over Israel came; even from Eilat. She became a good friend to many people and all of them had gathered to say goodbye to her. There were so many good words for Sveta! I think if every person at the funeral would've spoken, then it wouldn't have ended.

From the far north, my friend Victor came with his wife. They had been married for 2 months by then. When they saw my situation, they decided that Victor's wife should stay for three months to help me with our new-born son, Immanuel. Sister Valentina came from the Baltic states to help me. Brothers and sisters constantly visited us. Some brought food, and some helped to prepare food. People called and asked how they could help. Individuals and churches donated money to our family. Many believers continued to pray for us.

When I feel sorrow, I call to mind a famous story. It is about a man who meets God in his dream and God promises him that He will never forsake him. When the man looks back on his life, he notices two lines of footsteps in the sand, but in times of difficult trials, one line disappears. Despairingly, the man asks,



Immanuel is 1 y.o.

“You promised that you’d never forsake me. Why did you leave me when life was so hard?” God answers, “I stayed with you, my son. When you were tired and couldn’t walk any longer, I took you and carried you in my arms. I held you up with my own hands.”

Today, God is holding me in His hands and gives me consolation in sorrow. He gives joy in His presence. He fills my heart with peace which is beyond comprehension, and pours His love into me, which never fails.



Hope

Once Sveta was asked where life was better — in America or in Israel. She answered that the question was not correct because the most important thing was with whom you live.

Sveta's parents wanted to take Immanuel to America in order to help me and make his life more comfortable. I think, however, that this was the wrong motive. Instead of choosing comfort and an easy life, it is better to choose truth and righteousness. How could I send my son away, even to close relatives? What would my older children think about that?!

Then a thought came to me, "What if we all moved to America? We could then live close to my grandparents, other relatives and friends. The children would learn English, finish their schooling there, and I could get in touch with American churches. It might happen that then, American and Israeli churches could work together." It seemed like a brilliant idea. Moreover, I had the hope that perhaps I would find a sister in Christ there who would become a good wife and loving mother in our family.

But it is said,

"Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails." ∞ Proverbs 19:21

Preparation to move to America took a year and a half. When we found ourselves in the airport, ready to board, it was hard to leave Israel. This was the country where I was born again and where I grew as a Christian, where I was happy with my wives and where my children were born. It crossed my mind that the one who travels to Israel is called "Oleh" (ascending), and the one who departs from Israel is called "Yorde" (descending). I thought that I would return in five years. However, I would have to come back much earlier.

Half a year passed very well. The older children started school and the grandparents took care of the youngest child. At last I had time to improve my health. I started going to the gym and it helped me to lose weight and feel better.

At that time a teacher, Miss Bi Edwards, helped us a lot and taught English to my children. In a Russian church, they also started to learn the Russian language. I started to connect with American churches and even organized several conferences on the topic, "Israel and the Church." I was assisted by my dear brothers, Aleksander Atlas, who I worked with in Israel, and a native Jew, Eitan Kashtan.

The goal of the conferences was to warn the churches about false teachings, like replacement theology, which states that the blessings for Israel now belong to the Church, and the Jews only have all the curses; and the theology of a "double covenant", which declares that the Jews save themselves by fol-

lowing the Torah commandments, and everyone else is saved by faith in Jesus Christ. Theology is a science which reveals God's will and relationship with His creation. And God's plan is to bless all the nations through the Jewish nation:

"The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all people on earth will be blessed through you.'" ∞ Genesis 12:1-4

I believe that today you can't trust anyone, not even yourself. However, you can trust God because He never breaks His promises. He promised His people the land and gave it to them. He promised to make a great nation and that the Jews would last forever. He promised to bless Abraham's name and it is now known in all the nations that Abraham is the father of the Jewish nation. He promised to bless those who bless Israel and curse those who curse it. And today blessings and cursing are directly connected with the attitude held toward the Jews. He promised that people would be blessed through Abraham and today, through the Jews, monotheism became accepted, we now have the Bible and know the Messiah — Jesus Christ, Yeshua ha Mashiah. It is through Him we have access to God's grace. Unfortunately, some churches have a wrong view. An example of this was how at the dawn of the Christian establish-

ment, “John Chrysostom” made the erroneous statement that Israel had been substituted for the Church and that all the blessings belong to the Church now.

This statement negatively influenced modern Christianity a long time ago. The Church is a community of believers, and that doesn’t mean that God has rejected Israel. However, this wrong point of view has led to the development of anti-Semitism in the Church and has created hindrances for Jews to come to know their Messiah. Another teaching says that the Jews can be saved without faith in Yeshua. This is a false teaching which negates Christ’s sacrifice, the Bible and the fact that Yeshua was “...sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” (Matt 15:24)

It was a good time dedicated to serving God and to educating the Church. However, within six months my older daughter Miriam became depressed. She lost motivation for studying and became very fearful. She started to talk about going back to Israel. I didn’t want to break my plans, and this is why we decided to move to another city, in another state where I had lots of friends. Moreover, there were many Russian churches. But that didn’t help. Miriam became more and more depressed.

Once a Jew was asked, “What is happiness?” He answered, “Our happiness is children!” “And what is misfortune?” “Misfortune is to have this happiness.”

For my daughter’s sake, we had to return to Israel. When we started preparation for the departure, she changed and gladly started to count the days until we would return.

Before we left, one evening, I got an e-mail from a Christian site for singles. One sister wrote me a letter of the following content, "I have never been married and I am younger than you. You wrote on your page that you wanted to make someone happy. So, I want to be happy in my family life."

I should say that I was always skeptical about communication through the Internet. I remembered Sveta's friend who had gotten acquainted with a man on the Internet and came to Israel to marry him. Then it turned out that he already had a pregnant wife. Also I knew some other sisters who had tried to find husbands on this site and became disappointed with Internet relationships. Anyway, the cute face of this woman who wrote me stuck in my head. We decided to meet on Skype.

When I saw her invitation on Skype, my heart missed a beat. And when I read her name I was thrilled. Her name was Shokina Nadezhda (in Russian literature it would be Shokina Hope). I wrote before that I am not superstitious, but there were some interesting coincidences. The name of my church in Israel started with the word "Hope," the place where I worked in Tel Aviv was on the street called Shokin.

When we started to communicate, I found out that her mother's maiden name was Mishutina which sounds like my name (the short form is Misha). I joked

that her mother used to be Mishutina and became Shokina, and now Nadezhda Shokina could again become Misha's wife.

We continued our Skype communication as we felt something special. We found out that we even had common friends



Nadezhda (in Russian the name and the noun "Hope" sound the same and have the same meaning)

in Israel. They had come to Israel from Krasnoyarsk when I was studying at the Bible College. At that time, I had helped one of the pastors whose name was Leonid Odesskiy and our services took place at the apartment of Lena and Volodiya, from Krasnoyarsk. They were very active believers in the church. When their daughters got married, they moved to Katzrin, near the Golan Heights.

Our Skype meetings became more frequent, and every day we discussed Bible topics. I talked with Nadezhda's pastor (Pavel Morozov) by phone who described her as a good sister without any reproach in the church, active in the ministry to widows.

Of course that wasn't enough to make a final decision. We had to meet personally. At last it happened. We moved back



Michael and his wife Nadezhda

from America to Israel and Nadezhda visited us there. We spent three weeks together and understood that we wanted to be together for the rest of our lives. I suppose to marry a man with three kids wasn't easy for Nadezhda because sometimes the way to happiness is not easy. But it is possible to take a step of faith, when you entrust all of your hopes and dreams to the Lord and trust in His *love which never fails*.



Afterword

Three years have passed since the beginning of our family life. God gave us another son. We named him Lior — in honor of Sveta. (In Hebrew, Light is “Ora”, and Lior is translated as “light to me.”) My Nadia has become the one I needed so badly, my beloved; and for my children, their mother. All of my kids love their younger brother, especially Immanuel. Immanuel is in his first year of studying in a French college, with a high level of education. My daughter, Miriam, has ended up serving in the army and wants to become a tutor, like her mother. Chaim was baptized and serves God in worship ministry. And I am writing Gospel books and I want to begin doing my favorite work, namely training in



He hugged his teddy bear, and now Lior

Afterword

local churches, to share my experience in evangelism and to be a good example of a loving husband and a caring father to testify about Love, which never ends.



More arrows in the quiver



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