



Oasis

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By Marty Shoub

Sasha He who endures to the end...

The decisive mark of a disciple is not their words (though they be wise) or even their exploits (though they be strong) but their fruit; the growth and evidence of character through steady and enduring faith and obedience. A day is coming when those who have multiplied their talents will be honored by Messiah. I expect many of those called out for special commendation will not be well known personalities but faithful men and women who perhaps

labored in obscurity attracting no one's attention save the One who sees all things and knows the thoughts and intents of every heart.

If you come to Tents of Mercy, you may come to appreciate the wisdom of some of our teachers or the talent of some of our musicians. It is a privilege to be a part of this ministry but there are many people working behind the scenes who are as worthy of honor as those with more public ministries. Sha'ul puts it this way: **"the parts of the body that seem to be less important turn out to be all the more necessary; and upon body parts which we consider less dignified we bestow greater dignity."** (I Co 12:22,23 CJB)

Everyone who works at Tents of Mercy will tell you that an indispensable member of our team is a man most visitors will never meet. Sasha is our facilities engineer. He can fix or build just about anything, from welding up stock racks to restoring electrical appliances to renovating an office. Sasha keeps us up and running and manages our warehouse too. He is a remarkably talented man whose work, for the most part, goes unnoticed except by those of us who are so beholden to his help and handiwork.

Sasha is from a small village in Belarus. He is from a large family - the 6th of 7 children. Fourteen years ago Sasha married his wife Tamara. They have 4 children, Miriam the youngest was born here in Israel shortly after the family made aliyah in 2002.

Sasha was always intrigued with Israel, Tamara has the Jewish roots but it was Sasha that encouraged her to connect with her Jewish identity. Tamara's grandfather, Moshe was a Jewish believer in Ukraine. Because of his faith he was arrested in 1936 by the infamous "NKVD," Stalin's secret police, the precursors to the KGB. Moshe was summarily executed in a NKVD prison and left behind a wife and 5 children. At the outbreak of WWII the 4 older children were scattered and only Tamara's father, Isaac remained with his mother. In an attempt to hide from the Nazis, Isaac's identity papers were changed, to indicate he was of Ukrainian descent, not Jewish. In those days "Ukrainian" Moshes didn't name their sons Isaac. The ruse didn't work and mother and child were soon rounded up by the Nazis and placed in a concentration camp.

With a call to move to Israel, Sasha and Tamara only had her father's "Ukrainian" identity papers to identify her as a Jew. The Israeli embassy in Belarus told them that this was not enough to establish the criteria for aliyah. Sasha and Tamara took this as a sign and resigned from pursuing aliyah. 3 years later, 2 young ladies from the Jewish Agency came to their town to promote Aliyah. Sasha explained, "When we met them it was like a fire

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Sasha

was started again in our hearts, we knew we must do something.” Sasha and Tamara travelled to the Ukraine to try and find clearer documentation of Tamara’s Jewish heritage. They discovered old NKVD documents in a public archive which explained what had happened to Tamara’s grandfather. (Up to this point all the family had known was that he was arrested and never seen or heard from again.) The records also documented Moshe’s Jewish identity. With this new documentation in hand, Sasha went back to the Israeli

embassy and the family soon received a visa to immigrate to Israel.

Israel said yes but Belarus said “not so fast.” Leaving Belarus was not a simple matter and Sasha and Tamara found themselves beleaguered by a Soviet style bureaucracy that required them to receive permission to emigrate. Everywhere they turned led to a dead end with no one having a clear answer or ability to make a decision. But Sasha would not give up and took the matter right to the Interior Minister. How did it all resolve? Sasha: “It was a miracle!” In an effort to cover all the bases Sasha found what seemed to be an insignificant document but for reasons he still cannot explain, this broke the log jam and cleared the way for them to leave Belarus.

The family left Belarus with Tamara 7 months pregnant. They knew one couple in Haifa, so they took whatever money they had received from the Immigration Ministry and rented an apartment there. They now had no money, and an apartment with no furniture or appliances except for one bed and one table. Adjustment was not going to be easy.

Sasha: “We knew nothing about Israel, not the culture, not the food, the currency, nothing. The only thing we had was faith. I didn’t know how we would make it but I knew we would. It was such a hard time but we made it through.” Their friends and neighbors helped them out - a broken down old appliance that Sasha took home and fixed, a discarded piece of furniture picked up off a street corner; slowly Sasha and Tamara put their new life together. Sasha admitted, “If I knew what we would have to go through beforehand I am not sure I would have had the faith to go through all the difficulties we had to face. But I have never regretted coming here – I really love Israel.”

Because Sasha had a lot of experience as a contractor in Belarus he was able to find work in Haifa. Sasha would work 12 – 14 hours a day and then go home and struggle through the arduous process of learning Hebrew. Sasha and his family joined our Haifa congregation, Shavei Tzion and when Tents of Mercy needed some rooms built, Sasha was referred to us for the job. Guy Cohen was serving as the Tents of Mercy administrator in those days. He was so impressed by the quality of Sasha’s work that he offered him a full time job. We are all still very impressed with Sasha’s skill and work effort!

Sasha understands that to integrate into Israeli society requires perseverance. Sasha: “In Israel every day there is something new to learn. If you stop learning you are going down. In Europe or North America you can live your life but here everything is so much more intense. It is not just life in Israel; it is ‘turbo life.’”

Sasha is not only our facilities manager he is an elder at Shavei Tzion and Tamara oversees the children’s ministry – they are an example to us all. I have never seen Sasha preach a sermon or give a musical performance but his life teaches volumes and his dedication sings God’s praise. ✡

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Our Vision:

Tents of Mercy - to participate in today’s historic exodus by assisting Israel’s returning exiles.

No spectators in the Kingdom - to be a worshiping, sharing community based in homes, equipping each one for service.

Come back Yeshua - to welcome Yeshua home to Israel, by restoring the Jewish roots of New Covenant faith.

A Tribute to a Spiritual Father

by Eitan Shishkoff



In 1975 we were young believers living in Santa Fe. It had been less than a full year since we moved into the city after our six years as hippie farmers in the mountains of northern New Mexico. That year a man walked into our life whose influence would change the course of our destiny. His name was Eliezer Urbach.

On the first day of Sukkot, October 3, 2009, Eliezer stepped into eternity. This article flows from my desire to pay tribute to a father in the faith who nurtured us and linked us to our ancient covenantal heritage. I am convinced that without his contribution to our walk with God, we would not have shifted our entire focus to Messianic Jewish life and ministry, leading us ultimately to the land of Israel.



Eliezer and Eitan in the 70's

HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR

In the infancy of our exploration of our Jewish roots, God sent us a real Jew. A Holocaust survivor, Eliezer fled Poland as the Nazis were coming to exterminate his family. After interminable years, thousands of kilometers, numerous brushes with death, a forced stint in the Soviet army, imprisonment, escapes, and ravenous hunger he arrived in Palestine. Having lived by his wits and by the unseen protection of God through the most dangerous and disastrous era in all of our history, Urbach was now needed by the fledgling state as a soldier, to resist the onslaught of Arab nations attempting to destroy Israel at birth. The full account of Eliezer and Sarah's story is recorded in a compelling book titled "Out of the Fury." I recommend it. You will be touched, inspired and drawn into a portion of the modern Jewish saga that forms the immediate backdrop for our portion of history.

DISCIPLE of YESHUA

The early 1950's were not easy years in Israel. By now Eliezer, his wife Sarah, and their children (Nechama and Chaim) were struggling for economic survival. They sought a new beginning in Brazil, where a relative spoke of opportunity. They did find a new beginning, but it was an entirely unexpected one. Through the kind, patient witness of a Brazilian believer, Eliezer encountered his Messiah. Returning to Israel, the Urbachs took part in one of the first Israeli New Covenant congregations in the 20th century. Fresh relationships always energized Eliezer. That, combined with his newfound burden for Jewish people to know Yeshua led the Urbachs to North America, Bible training and entry into full time ministry.

MENTOR to the MESSIANIC MOVEMENT

Eliezer became a spiritual father to us when we were only beginning to discover the meaning of being both Jewish and followers of Yeshua. The visual epitome of the Jewish patriarch, Eliezer patiently instructed and loved us in his warm, charming way. His passion for accessible authenticity of Messianic Jewish expression and tireless readiness to introduce Jewish people to our Messiah were contagious. We grew steadily in the miracle of Jewish biblical celebration as believers. He gave us our first chanukiah (Chanukah lamp), our first shofar, led our first Messianic Passover Seder and helped us attend our first Messianic conference in 1976. Bringing his own homemade Shabbat wine, this devoted friend created warm and happy memories for our families that became a foundation for decades to come.

These years were also a strategic time in the development of the emerging Messianic Jewish movement. Eliezer impacted numerous young Jews like ourselves, who had searched for spiritual reality in the plethora of alternative lifestyles and religious paths of the 60's, 70's and 80's. Many of these are now leaders in the movement. For those



Eliezer as a young soldier in the fledgling IDF

of us who were born in the aftermath of the Shoah, and on the relatively unscarred shores of America, this man was a living bridge to our history as Jews. Eyes heavy with what he had seen, he nonetheless smiled with a redeeming twinkle in his eye. When we were naïve, he did not chide us, but patiently filled in the numerous gaps in our awareness.

SERVING GOD'S PURPOSES

We often use the phrase "lay down your life for Yeshua." Here was a man who truly did that.

Looking back, there was a six year period during which Eliezer left a permanent imprint on our lives. From 1975 until 1981 he visited once a month, faithfully travelling from Denver to the Albuquerque /Santa Fe area. Though Eliezer usually stayed with Russell and Jane Resnik in Albuquerque, a few times he came up to Santa Fe and was our house guest. Those were treasured occasions which included generous attention to our children, David and Hannah. During those visits Eliezer was determined, yet patient, in finding opportunities to speak with Jewish people about Yeshua. These conversations could stretch into hours. It didn't matter.

Through devoted friendship, stories, humor, unfeigned knowledge and a passionate heart for each of us to participate in the redemption of our people, Eliezer left an immeasurable, unforgettable and inspiring example for us to follow. What a valuable life! How much impact one person can have! How many people can be touched by one yielded heart? It is now for those of us in whom Eliezer invested himself, to make ourselves all the more available to the Most High.



Eliezer officiating at his son's wedding

For 55 years he served God's purposes, blending a natural attraction to people with an amazing gift for languages (I lost count, but Eliezer could function well in no less than 10). That example stirs me to ask, what are you and I pursuing? Where are our energies and our days focused on? Am I touching the lives around me as Eliezer did? I long to.

This is what Abba Eliezer taught us. But true learning is transformation. It happens through emulating our teachers' lives, not just memorizing their lessons. In the days to come we will need the courage, creativity and consistency with which our brother pursued the calling of the King.

Eliezer Urbach made it possible to know the Jewish saga through the soul of one who traversed our worst tragedy: the Holocaust, fought in Israel's War of Independence to establish the Jewish State out of its ashes, and then took hold of Tikvat Yisrael, Yeshua the Messiah. Now that he has been united with the One he served, my family has a compelling need to express our gratitude to the Living God for placing this man in our lives. What a gift he was to us, arriving just when we needed him the most! May we now follow in Eliezer's footsteps. ✡



30 years later