



The Bridge Report

R.K.'S TRAVEL LOG PART 2: KAZAKHSTAN



Almaty's main mosque, signifying Kazakhstan's Muslim roots.

The next morning, after a good breakfast, I said goodbye to the Shaws and headed for Heathrow Airport, again. This time, boarding the plane from London to Almaty went smoothly. The flight was almost full, but I had one seat free between myself and a young American in civilian clothing whom I detected to be a soldier, due to his crew-cut hair and fit body. Sure enough, he was working for the US military, deployed on a one year mission on a presumed secret US military base "somewhere in Central Asia". The region which includes Afghanistan, is a strategic area in the fight against terrorism and Islamic extremism, being that all the countries are Muslim. The U.S. military has established, what they consider, strategic bases throughout the region, from which they can deploy troops and military equipment into areas of concern. Having learned from the nationals on the ground where those are, I deducted the location of the base – and guessed right, again.

Having left a young wife and a two year old son behind, his heart was heavy at the thought of being so far away from his family for so long. He seemed happy to be engaged in a conversation about other things. We spoke about politics, economics, our new President – and then an interesting dialogue opened up about faith, God and life's destiny. Yes, he was Jewish, but not religious at all – all that "God stuff" was left to his Christian wife to figure out. Had he ever read the Old or New Testament, or the words of Jesus? Not really. Would he be interested in at least examine what Jesus said? No, not now – life was full and good; but then he added, "there is a Bible on the base.. If I get real bored, I may pick it up and take a look." I suggested that he simply find one with Jesus' words in read and focus on who He was and His own words in the Gospels. He smiled and said he would remember my advice. When we parted, he thanked me and warmly said goodbye. A seed sown into a heart is in God's hands as to how and when it will sprout and yield fruit!

MOUNTAIN RETREAT WITH CHURCH PLANTERS AND MISSIONARIES



The plane arrived in the middle of the night, so I was anxious to know whether my message of the change of schedule had reached Yuri. To my relief, **Sasha** greeted me with a wave and a smile at the airport. For seventeen years, he was a heroin addict and drug dealer in Almaty, the capital city of Kazakhstan. After a dramatic encounter with the transforming power of Jesus Christ a decade ago, he is now one of Agape's full time staff members.



Sasha with his three handsome sons

Sasha drove me to Mission Agape, located nearby where I had a few hours of sleep. Then, we continued on to a retreat center in the mountains above Almaty, where Agape's staff, church planters, and field missionaries were gathered with their families.

On the way to the mountains, I kept contemplating the similarities and differences between the two men

I had just met. Both are soldiers, but in two different armies with similar goals: to fight evil and make the world a better place to live. The first is enlisted with the U.S. Army, the largest military power in the world. It has enough resources and physical weapons to enforce its geo-political goals. Victory, however, is tenuous and limited to changes of people's external circumstances only.

Sasha is also enlisted, but in a different army — God's Army. With negligible resources and no military weapons available, he possesses a different kind of weapon: the Spirit of God. Invisible to the eye, yet the strongest force in the universe, God's power transforms people's hearts and minds by love and forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ. Through the lives of the redeemed, communities and circumstances are permanently changed.

Over one hundred adults and forty five children had arrived from various regions of Kazakhstan and neighboring countries one week before the Celebration. This is an annual event during which they enjoy



Multi-ethnic fellowship at breakfast table: (from left) Iranian, American, German, Norwegian, Uighur, and Russian



some R&R while spending time with the Lord, their families, and one another. The relaxed atmosphere is conducive to the building of mutually strong relationships and friendships as they have fun, share their lives, minister to one another, receive good teaching, unite in worship and prayer. This retreat is a life



Good fathers — good leaders — line for many of the field workers, especially those who labor for the Gospel in remote, isolated regions where they experience great resistance against their faith. They return to their battlefields refreshed, encouraged, strengthened in faith and hope, better ready to embrace the challenges at hand.

I entered the auditorium during the morning meeting, and was met with enthusiastic worship in which everybody participated. There was a

sense of joyful anticipation. A banner hung above the stage which read, “*Celebration Agape 20 Years*” with pictures of **Baikal and Elena, Yuri and Irina, Nikolai, Piet, and myself** signifying those who have been the main contributors toward leadership and support in the foundation and development of Agape since its inception. An even larger banner hung on one of the sidewalls with pictures of Yuri and Irina, surrounded by staff members, church planters, and missionaries.



Fellowship with some of the Kazakhs and Uighurs

This is a continuation of Travel Log 1 from the June issue, in which I reported on my most recent ministry trip to England, Kazakhstan, and Russia. In it I relayed the travel preparations and unexpected changes of the airline tickets. However, the obstacles turned out to be “divine appointments” that caused me to meet new people who serve the Lord in different spheres of ministry. Travel Log Part 1 ended with my overnight stay with David and Rosemary Shaw, dear friends and ministry partners in London.

In this issue, I have focused on the week-long retreat at a conference center tucked into the mountains above Almaty, for the staff, church planters, and missionaries serving under the umbrella of Agape Evangelical Center. It was an awesome experience to spend time with these men and woman and observe their maturity of faith in action. Thank you, partners, for your prayers and finances that helped train and prepare these field workers for service! You were a participant, therefore a recipient of the fruit!

MORE TO COME IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF The Br. Rep.

It is hard to describe the mixture of thanksgiving, pride and humility I felt as I shared the Word of God with this precious multi-ethnic-lingual group comprised of **Americans, Germans, Iranians, Kazakhs, Koreans, Kyrgyz, Russians, Tajiks, Uighurs, Uzbeks,** and more, who live in harmony and peace while serving one another and their communities. I was keenly aware that behind each person there were scores of others throughout Central Asia who have been impacted by the Gospel through their lives and ministry — sometimes hundreds, even thousands. **Steve and I thank God that we were entrusted the privilege of participating with the nationals and our Bridge partners in building the Kingdom of God in a Muslim country which, only twenty years ago, was freed from seventy years of Soviet atheist rule!**

The worship rotated between different individuals and teams. I was impressed by the quality of musical talent among them. They also took turns teaching, preaching, and giving testimonies. As the week progressed, I was also impressed by the spiritual maturity, depth of faith, comprehensive Bible knowledge, and unwavering commitment to God’s purposes among them. I had profound conversations with many of them, and learned about their joys and struggles.



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