

Dnepropetrovsk: The New Jewish Capital of the World?

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*The chief Rebbe of Dnepropetrovsk and the Dnepropetrovsk region **Shmuel Kamenetsky**, one of the most influential religious figures in the post Soviet space, organizes the International Judaic University (IJU), at which the dogmas of “Habad-Lubavitch” will be taught. According to the Rebbe, 50,000-60,000 Jews live in Dnepropetrovsk, the number of worshipers of the main synagogue of Dnepropetrovsk – about 30,000. The Jewish diaspora of Dnepropetrovsk is the second in numbers in Ukraine, but the communitarian center “Menora” – with an area of nearly 122,000 sq.m – is the largest such construction in the post Soviet space in Europe, and possibly, in the world. (The Moscow Jewish communal center in Maryina Roshcha has an area of only 17,000 sq.m).*

Dnepropetrovsk Jews are Hasidic. Hasidism, the doctrine of Ashkenazi Jews, was born on the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and extended together with Jews across all Russia. The word “Hasid” itself is close with the word “kind”. Hasidism – righteousness, the doctrine of piety. In Hasidism there are various directions, at the head of which stands Tzadik (teachers, righteous persons, saints). According to the doctrine of Hasidism, God is present everywhere, in each phenomenon and event. The task of the person is to merge with divine light. Hasidim consider joy as the greatest virtue, consider singing and dancing as a way to serve the supreme. It is exactly from here that Jewish music and dances originate. Hasidim consider it correct to comprehend God through emotions. Generally, the doctrine looks certainly positive, but don’t be in a hurry to get in line eager to get into the Kingdom of Heaven through this door. As is known, this road is opened only (with rare exception) for representatives of people chosen by God. I won’t go into details, as the danger of belief in your national exclusiveness is a subject for a whole book, or perhaps not just one.

I already wrote that the Hasidism consists of a number of branches – Karlin-Stolin, Bratslav, Satu Mare, and other Hasidim. In the basis of everyone there was a righteous person. The most powerful network on the distribution of their version of Judaism was created by Hasidim of Habad (Habad-Lyubavich). Their network totals about 3,000 Rebbes – “messengers of the Rebbe” worldwide. According to information from the media, the turnover of Habad reaches \$1 billion a year. (For comparison – 10 years ago Deputy Mitrokhin estimated the income of the Russian Orthodox Church as a whole at approximately \$500 million. The income of the Pope and all his administrative facilities (curia) – investment in shares, bonds and real estate, and also the means received as donations from devout Catholics in all corners of the world – is about \$1 billion).



Hasidic Community (Source: The Forward)

Its name, Habad, was taken from the little town Lyubavichi in the Smolensk region. The first Rebbe from Lyubavichi arrived to Lyubavichi two hundred years ago. Since then the rank of Lyubavichi's Rebbe was passed on. Ponder – the position and status of one of the most influential people of the world is descended, like in a monarchy!

The ideological concept of Lyubavichi's clan is set out in the book "Tanya" written by the founder of the movement Habad-Lyubavich Rebbe Schneour Zalman Schneersohn.

If you see a person in a long black coat or the same color frock coat, trousers from under which white socks are seen, in a black hat from under which long curls of hair protrude, then you have Hasid in front of you. On the footwear there shouldn't be laces or buckles. Some people tuck their trousers into their socks, which symbolizes distance from terrestrial dirt. It is a lot of men with beards.

Of course, there is no need to observe all rules, for example, women in Habad have to shave their head and wear wigs. Fortunately, now there is not many who do it.

In total there were seven Lubavitcher Rebbe. The most dramatic destiny belonged to the Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn. In the 30's, despite the fact that traditional Judaism continued to exist on Soviet territory, it is said that, on Stalin's personal order, the Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe was nearly shot. However, thanks to the protection of the international organizations, in particular, the Red Cross, he was left alive, but deported to Poland. Thus, Habad was forbidden in the USSR as an ultra-orthodox sect. For the second time the clouds became dark over the Rebbe in 1939. This time the Sixth Lubavitcher Rebbe managed to survive thanks to the protection of the US **Secretary of State Cordell Hull**, and the head of Abwehr the **Admiral Canaris**.

Yosef Yitzchak Schneersohn without any obstacles crossed the territory of the Reich and moved to the United States. Since the 1940's the headquarters of the movement Habad-Lyubavich is in New York, in Brooklyn. From 1950 to 1994 the organization was led by the Seventh, the last, **Lubavitcher Rebbe Menachem Mendel Schneerson** – Yosef Yitzchak

Schneerson's son-in-law, who took his surname and continued the dynasty of Lubavitcher Rebbe. During the governance of **Menachem Mendel Schneerson**, Habad reached unprecedented political and financial power. For reference: Trump's son-in-law **Jared Kushner** is a Habadnik. Trump's daughter Ivanka passed through giyur (procedure by means of which the non-Jew can accept Judaism) and now follows the rules of Habad. It is precisely on this line that Kolomoisky and Bogolyubov, who are one of the main sponsors of the Dnepropetrovsk Habad, built a new relationship with the new American President.

Habad returned to the post-Soviet space after Perestroika, and cemented itself as the dominating structure of the Jewish world. The father of the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe is from Dnepropetrovsk (Ekaterinoslav), even his house remains. Here he was arrested by Bolsheviks. Exactly here, in Dnepropetrovsk, he sent the then future Rebbe of Dnepropetrovsk Kamenetsky. And it is also because of this that Dnepropetrovsk became the Habad capital of Ukraine.

The Jewish world is a part of our big world. A very significant part. The processes happening in the Jewish world have a serious impact on culture, economy and politics, on the processes happening around the world. Jewish society is very non-uniform and conflictual. Conflicts are inherent in any human society, and its Jewish part is not an exception. Even in the doomed Warsaw ghetto there were two Jewish underground organizations clashing with each other. The relationship between the quickly growing Habad and the rest of the Jewish world are not at all simple. Their American Jewish relatives denied my Dnepropetrovsk acquaintances when they knew that they are Habadniks. It doesn't belong to the topic of this article, but without an understanding of the deep internal processes happening in the Jewish world there will be no opportunity to understand many global political processes.

Ukrainian, and especially Dnepropetrovsk Jews, in their main mass adopted and supported Maidan. I don't know what caused this. Maybe it's because Habad and its Tzadiks at the time were forcibly obliged to leave Russia. Maybe it's because the Dnepropetrovsk Rabbi Shmuel Kamenetsky is mentally American. When he arrived to Dnepropetrovsk, he wasn't able to speak Russian. He couldn't rent an apartment for a long time because, according to him, the employees of the KGB impeached him. According to him, the employees of the KGB didn't allow him to communicate with the only Jew in Dnepropetrovsk who spoke Hebrew.

Or perhaps the reason is in something else. During Maidan one of my good acquaintances, a businessman and politician, a member of Habad, told me that I didn't choose the good side. That, according to reliable information from the US, the Russians in Ukraine will lose. That, supposedly, hard times will come to Russia, and it isn't clear if Russia will remain. He had no purpose to convert me. He simply advised me as it seemed to him what was better for me. You remember how in "Taras Bulba" Yankel was surprised that Bulba became angry at Andrey, who came over to the side of the Poles:

"And you didn't kill him immediately there on the spot, the devil's son?" exclaimed Bulba.

"For what to kill him? He went under his own will. What is he guilty of? There it is better for him, so he went there."

I think that it seemed to my acquaintance in this situation that it was logical to side with the winner. For him it was organic as it was for me to organically take my position. Especially in

such a situation and in light of such prospects for my Motherland, as my acquaintance described it myself.

It is interesting that the emergence of Habad is connected with the fact that in 1800, at the time when a part of the Jewish leaders supported Napoleon and France, the first Lubavitcher Rebbe (which then still didn't live in Lyubavichi) supported Alexander I by word and actions. Under his call the Jew Hasidim participated in the Patriotic war of 1812 on the side of the Russian army as scouts. It is precisely because of his position at the time that his family and a part of his followers, fleeing from the coming Napoleon's army, were compelled to leave Liadi and to move to Lyubavichi. The contribution of the Rebbe in Russian history was noticed and evaluated by the Tsar, who awarded the Rebbe with the title "Hereditary Honourable Citizen", and then five generations of the head of Habad used this privilege. It is remarkable that after two hundred years of their history, in front of Hasidim appeared the same choice, like before the Jews in 1800, and it is a pity if Jews of the religious Habad in this world confrontation will make not the same choice that was adopted for himself and his followers - the founder of the movement Habad-Lyubavich, the honourable hereditary citizen of Russia Rebbe Shneur-Zalman Schneerson.



Shmuel Kamenetsky (Source: theapricity.com)

Nevertheless, **Shmuel Kamenetsky** himself repeatedly publicly spoke about the fact that in Ukraine the Jewish world in its main mass supported nationalist Maidan. Moreover, he considers that Russian Jews are zombified by television and intimidated by the authorities. Many Dnepropetrovsk synagogue sponsors, such as Korban and Kolomoisky, created and supported nationalist battalions "Donbass", "Azov", "Dnipro-1". Many of my Jew acquaintances after Maidan passed in everyday life from Russian to Ukrainian. The help of Jewish activists in supplying ATO fighters is unprecedented in volumes. It is amusing to see in the newsfeed on social networks a photo of my some acquaintances in which they alternate their clothes from lapserdak to vyshyvanka, depending on what holiday is on the street - Ukrainian or Jewish.

It is necessary to say that ideas of the Ukrainian nationalism are clear for habadniks, after

all, it is they who most actively among all the Jewish world resist the process of assimilation of Jews and are fighters for the purity of blood. Rebbe Shmuel repeatedly stated that their main objective is the “preservation of Jewry and the fight against assimilation”.

It is obvious that such peace and friendship can continue only until the Ukrainian power is able to keep Ukrainian nationalism from aggression in relation to Jews. From communicating with fellow countrymen from Dnepropetrovsk it is seen that the Jewish community is now alarmed. Many are afraid that the activity of the Ukrainian authorities, in which there are so many Jewish people, can strengthen the already-present everyday anti-Semitism. They are afraid of the fact that the impoverishment of the population against the background of the growth in quantity of armed Ukrainian Nazi can lead to pogroms. They are afraid, and seriously, that the anti-terrorist training that in large quantities is carried out now in universities and high schools and the hysteria that now is fomented concerning possible terrorist attacks aren't accidental. That the power, for the consolidation of the people, will organize acts of terrorism itself, as a result of which children will suffer. Let's agree that it looks strange that the authorities for nearly three years every week state the alleged detention of tens of Russian terrorists and about alleged hundreds of prevented acts of terrorism against the background of the fact that no act of terrorism was carried out.

As a result many Jews start taking their families out from Ukraine. A symptom of such fears became the increase of security measures in synagogues and bodyguard allocation to Kamenetsky, according to the decision of leaders of the community. Such precautionary measures are introduced for the first time in 18 years of work of the Rebbe Shmuel Kamenetsky in Dnepropetrovsk.

Recently in Jerusalem 64-year-old high-ranking **Rabbi Menachem Mendel Deitsch** died. Consequences of injuries that he received as a result of an attack in Zhytomyr became the reason of his death. Boris Steklyar – a 94-year-old Jewish veteran of the Soviet Army, is on trial in Ukraine, who fought against Nazism without knowing that not much historical time will pass and the grenade that he threw in 1952 into a cache with nazi-Banderists will be recognized as a war crime.

Coming back to the beginning of the article. The organising in Dnepropetrovsk of the International Judaic University will lead to the fact that all the world Habad's Rebbenate will receive a start in life from Dnepropetrovsk. And the financing of the University not only come from Dnepropetrovsk – patrons appeared in the US, Israel, Canada. Many already anyway said that Dnepropetrovsk is the new Hasidic capital of the world, but the opening of the university constitutes what was earlier simply spoken about. In fact, after that Shmuel Kamenetsky can safely apply for the status of the eighth Lubavitcher Rebbe. Shmuel Kamenetsky can become one of the most influential people in the World. But it will happen only in case the stake that was placed on Ukrainian nationalism at the time is correct – if the nationalism that transformed into Nazism will not devour those who were so welcoming to it at the time and helped its establishment.

*Translated by **Ollie Richardson & Angelina Siard.***

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