



ОБЩЕДОСТУПНАЯ РОССИЙСКАЯ  
ТЕОЛОГИЧЕСКАЯ АКАДЕМИЯ  
(THE OPEN RUSSIAN THEOLOGICAL ACADEMY)



Dear Christian friends!

Great thanks to you all for the words of encouragement and your promises to pray!

I can only thank God for the answers to prayers. In fact I believe that much more was achieved than I could plan or hope for that trip. I can also thank Him for the supernatural physical strength He gave me for that trip – I have been to 4 different Asian countries, 9 cities and numerous villages, met with many Christians and all this during just 2 weeks time. I spent about 50 hours in total in the airplane and perhaps the same amount of hours in the car going to different places. I thank God for many new Christian contacts and all the new information I could receive during such a short time.

My trip had two main goals:

1. To share about the SEAN TEE program we are using as ORTA in the Far East of Russia and to teach a three-day tutor-training seminar for the church leaders in Kyrgyzstan about how to use this program in their churches.
2. Another goal was to collect information about the life and persecution of Christians in three Central Asian countries: Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Being a Russian citizen I did not need a visa, which was a great advantage, because in many cases it is impossible to get a visa to these countries, especially if it is connected with Christian ministry

The first country I visited was **Tajikistan**. I stayed in the capital Dushanbe in the family of Tamara Bessarab who is the widow of the pastor Sergei Bessarab who was killed in January 2004 by Islamic extremists. It was a tremendous blessing to spend two days with her. I also visited a small Christian orphanage for the boys that is run by Tamara's church. Together with her pastor and a group of other Christians from that church I traveled to the ancient city Kulyab to meet with a group of Christian believers there. The city is 2500 old and is situated on the ancient Great Silk Route – it is predominantly Muslim. On our way there we made a stop at a village Sangtuda and had a fellowship with a small group of Tajik believers there. Tajikistan is an extremely poor country and very often there is hardly any food in the house but people are still very hospitable and they will share with you the last that they have. For the Christians in the villages, where they will be excommunicated from the whole Muslim community, the life is even harder because nobody will help them but they stay amazingly faithful to the Lord. And the Christians from the city churches, although being needy themselves, are helping them with what they can – this time as I traveled with the church team it was a sack of flour which would be distributed among the believers in the village. Next day I spent almost the whole day at a women's prison and was even asked to be a in a jury of the sports competition there – it was organized by the prison authorities and a prison ministry team. I was very much impressed to see a very well organized church in prison – some of the Christians were sharing the Gospel and inviting other prisoners to come to the church meetings, others were praying faithfully for this. After the competition there was a Christian service for the prisoners where I shared my testimony and about my Christian ministry. I was amazed to find that there is a tremendous desire to grow spiritually and to study the Bible among the prisoners; some of them even do a correspondence course based on Moody Bible Institute materials. When they heard about ORTA they expressed a big desire to use SEAN courses as well. *When I saw faith in Christ in these women it was very difficult to cope with the thought that they are actually criminals punished for actual crimes like murder or selling drugs. It is amazing how Jesus finds and saves people.* After women prison we went to a women rehabilitation centre which is Tamara's responsibility and met with some of the women who live there now. The centre is on self-support and they are trying to raise chicken to earn money for food and other expenses. Tamara has a vision to start a Christian fellowship connected with the rehabilitation centre and to invite the people from the neighborhood. I felt that my time in Tajikistan was too short and would like to come again and be of more help to all these people. The pastor said that I should

come again and next time not less than for 10 days to be able to go to many different places and meet with more people.

From Tajikistan I went to **Kyrgyzstan** – the organization that invited me was the United Theological Seminary in the capital city Bishkek – I met with the staff and the students there to share about Open Russian Theological Academy (of which I am International Director) and the SEAN materials that we are using in our work. After that I taught a three-day tutor-training seminar on TEE to the church workers from different churches – they were mainly ethnic Kyrgyz but also a few Russians. I was very much encouraged by the students' response and much enthusiasm with which they worked in the groups during the seminar. 21 students received certificates from ORTA and UTS at the end of the seminar. Most of the students expressed a big desire to start groups in their churches. Some of the seminar students are now part of the group called KYSh (a Kyrgyz work meaning POWER) and they are planning to do the same work in Kyrgyzstan as we do in Russia as ORTA (translating and printing SEAN materials and do tutor-training) – we want to keep in touch with each other. A week after our seminar they taught their first tutor-training seminar but in Kyrgyz language and as I heard it was a very good one! During the seminar I had a chance to speak with some of the students about Christian persecution and how the Christian community around the world can pray for the Christians in their country. *I found that too many of the students persecution is a normal part of life, which comes mainly from their own Muslim families and community, and they just learn how to keep on going looking at Jesus despite it.* After the seminar I went to Osh (a large ancient city with 500 thousand population, 1000 mosques and a tiny percent of Christians) where I spoke to a small group of seminary students and a group of church leaders about ORTA and SEAN and also about my involvement in persecuted Christians' ministry. We discussed the needs of the churches in the area of theological education and the ways how we can stand together against Christian persecution.



From Osh I took a risk to go across the border to **Uzbekistan** to meet with two persecuted Uzbek pastors – one in Fergana and another one in Andijan. I was told that the authorities are very strict at this part of the border and they search you and sometimes do not let you cross the border finding different excuses. However, I did not experience any difficulty and was able to visit both pastors and come back to Osh on the same day. I flew back to Bishkek and after a couple of more meetings connected with TEE work I flew to Tashkent – the capital of Uzbekistan. I came quite late and was met at the airport by an Uzbek Christian sister whom I never met before and she took me to her home – we had a great time of sharing with Rohila who is a wonderful Christian sister connected with YWAM and I could learn many things from her about the situation with the Christian churches in Uzbekistan. I had only one day left to spend in Uzbekistan and I was suggested to go to Kokand to meet with a young Uzbek believer who was recently detained, beaten and tortured by Uzbek police who tried to make him to convert back to Islam; they kept him for 15 days in a solitary cell that nobody could see him. Of course, I grasped this opportunity and we traveled again for several hours to get there by the Great Silk Route again and crossing over the Tyan-Shan mountains – it would be a most picturesque view except that when we came there it was quite dark already and I could only guess how beautiful it looks at day time. But I was very blessed by hearing and writing down the young believer's testimony of persecution. He said that he was told that many Christians were praying for him while he was in prison and he knows that he was very much strengthened by their prayers. I came back to Tashkent at 4 o'clock in the morning and had to get up at 6 a.m. because I had a meeting with Christian lawyers in

Tashkent before my flight. I praise God for these faithful Christian workers who experience double pressure from the authority and the society: they are Christians but they also are lawyers who help other Christians who are under persecution. I felt again that there was not enough time and I need to come back again if God wills.

From Uzbekistan I flew to Kuala-Lumpur **Malaysia** where I had a 23 hours gap between the flights and slept for almost 10 hours there feeling absolutely exhausted after all the travel. I spent the rest of the day visiting the bird park and butterfly park, which was a great relaxation for me, before flying back to New Zealand.

Here I am now: back to my family duties, my translation work, lots of correspondence and my Christian ministry. I thank God for my very patient and supportive husband Mikhail and all the other members of my family. It is really good to be back home! (However, I am already planning another trip to Russia in mid-February...)

*A **small meditation** at the end: It is interesting to note that I observed much more true joy in the Christians who live in the situation of persecution and poverty than in many Christians who live in the situation of more freedom and material prosperity. Perhaps the reason for this is that those who are poor and persecuted realize their need to have Jesus as the main source of their joy and happiness, while those who are more prosperous and do not suffer because of their faith are quite satisfied with what they already have. I ask myself: where I am now and what is the source of my joy and happiness? I would like to say Jesus but I know that it would not be completely true – I have been poisoned already to some extent by the materialistic society I live in. Being in touch with the persecuted Christians, with those who live in poverty but are much richer spiritually, doing something for them, meeting their needs has a healing and purifying effect on me and I feel like the true joy is poured into my life from being their servant.*

I hope you found it interesting to read about this trip. Sorry if it is too long, but I only managed to write a small part of what I actually saw and experienced. There is so much more to share - I could write a book!

Please, pray:

- that there will be good continuing fruit from the seminar in Kyrgyzstan and there will be many churches using SEAN as a tool for continuing discipleship. For the KYSh team that they will be led and strengthened by God in the work they are doing, especially in translation and tutor-training
- that God will help me to keep in contact with the new Christian friends in these countries and give me the resources to help these Christians and many others
- that God will help me to make a good use of all the information collected during my trip on Christian persecution and the needs of the Christians who live under persecution and in conditions of financial hardships and poverty in Central Asia, that I will be able to present it in such a manner to different Christian groups that it will bring good prayer and financial support for the Christian work in those countries

May God bless you and keep you growing in Jesus every new day!

Anneta (Anya) Vysotskaya  
International Director of Open Russian Theological Academy  
Russian Ministry to Persecuted Church  
Member of Religious Liberty Commission of World Evangelical Alliance