

2014—Tabasaran People

“Come visit us anytime!” the warm-spirited invitation was given on the village paths in the highland Tabasaran village. The year was 1996. The unusual thing about this invitation was that the invitation was being given by local Tabasarians to the first international family to ever live in this mountain region in southern Dagestan. Furthermore, the international family at first didn’t know what to do—maybe when they would go to visit it would be an inappropriate time, or not convenient? But eventually this family discovered that in this culture to go and visit “without an invitation” is an even higher honor to the hosts than if something is pre-planned. And every time that a warm visit was ventured was always a good time. Why is this? In village Tabasaran culture, friendship & hospitality is placed at the highest value. If a person has many friends, they are a ‘wealthy’ person. This was true not only for first-time international friends, but within the culture day by day in friendship hospitality with one another. If a guest came to your home, everything else was dropped and the friendship relationships took first priority.

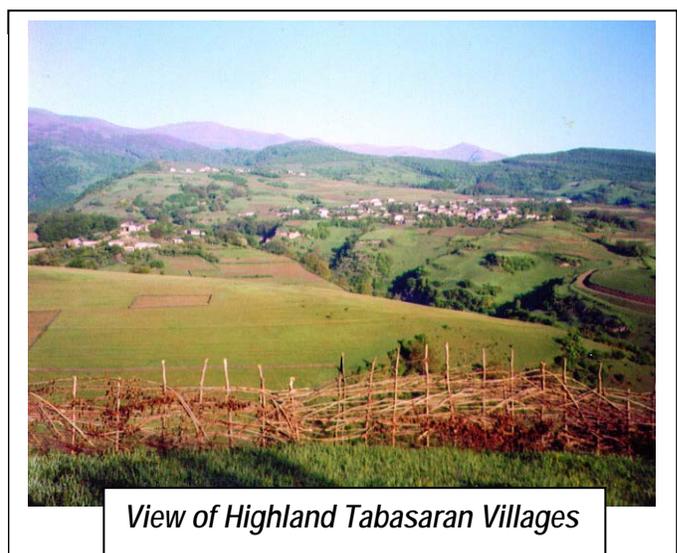
The Tabasaran people—approximately 140,000, living in 99 villages in southern Dagestan and also in many urban enclaves—consider that “they are the most hospitable of all Dagestani people.” This claim might be argued by other Dagestani cultures, because once you are inside any Dagestani village culture hospitality functions at an amazingly high level. But for this new family, living among the Tabasarians as new ‘friends of the Tabasaran people,’ the Tabasaran assertion was hard to argue with in the midst of experiencing the remarkable and truly pleasant features of hospitality in the Tabasaran culture.

Other salient features of ancient Tabasaran culture were also evident: *respect to the elderly, mutual aid in daily life through the seven-generation ‘tookhoom’ structure, local artisanry such as carpet-making and Tabasaran music, the ‘godekan’—the male collective decision-making body at the center of each village, societal care for the sick and the poor, and warm responsiveness to all weddings and funerals.*

Not all was easy, however, in Tabasaran culture. Male drunkenness has reached alarmingly high levels since the introduction of Russian vodka in the late 1800’s. Lack of historical sources of grace, either in the culture or in Islam (which came to Tabasaran in the 8th Century), results in a noticeable harshness at many levels of society—both in the home and in the school. Fear and shame are widely felt as controlling forces of traditional conformity. Cycles of vengeance and violence beset the region, along with fierce power struggles—capped by the omnipresent corrupt bribery demands, emanating from those in power.

This striking combination of factors yields the following observation, “*The Tabasaran culture, like other mountain Dagestani cultures, has many outstanding cultural historical strengths; but also a tragic deficit of grace, forgiveness, and agape love. Due to this redemptive deficit, in recent years even many of the historic strengths have been getting progressively dimmer due to the devastating effects of sin.*” But, for the Tabasarians, new hope is springing forth. In

1997 the first Tabasaran-speaking person came to Jesus. This was followed by dozens more in the decade following, both in village regions and in urban regions of Dagestan. There are now more than 100 Tabasaran believers—including in some regions outside of Dagestan. The New Testament has been published in Tabasaran (2010), and translation work is underway in the Old Testament. Two thrilling Tabasaran Christian music recordings, in authentic Tabasaran style, have also widely circulated through the culture. In the midst of the fierce Muslim tensions of Dagestan, loving relationships—coupled with widespread prayer—hold the hope for further redemptive impact into the Tabasaran world.



* Pray for the Tabasaran believers to shine as bright lights in the midst of the Tabasaran world. *Phil.2:12-15*
 * Pray for the Holy Spirit to work powerfully (*John 16:8*) in the lives of many Tabasarians who have already heard the Gospel—that they will have courage to respond. *Isa.42:16*
 “And I will lead the blind by a way they do not know; in paths they do not know I will guide them. I will make darkness into light before them, and rugged places into plains.”
 * Pray for successful work on the remainder of the Tabasaran Bible translation—goal to be complete with whole Bible by 2020; & for creative distribution. *Heb.4:12*
 * Pray for men and women of peace (*Luke 10:6*) in each one of the 99 Tabasaran towns/villages, to be keys to welcoming the love of God, the grace of Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit into each Tabasaran community in the years ahead. *Matthew 9:36-38 & Hebrews 2:3-4*

NAMES OF MAJOR TABASARAN TOWNS:

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|------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Khiv | 4. Chu-lat | 7. Koosh-til’ |
| 2. Khuchni | 5. Sir-teech | 8. Mezh-gool’ |
| 3. Khu-rik | 6. Yer-si | 9. Kho-redzh |

NAMES OF TABASARAN VILLAGES :

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|---------------------|---------------------|-------------------|
| 1. U-luz | 31. Kha-peel | 61. Roo-shool |
| 2. Koozh-neek | 32. Ta-teel | 62. Ar-keet |
| 3. Kha-rag | 33. See-kookh | 63. Tsa-nakh |
| 4. Shi-le | 34. Koor-eeeyag | 64. Tee-neet |
| 5. Goo-lee | 35. Koov-leeg | 65. Khor-eeeyakh |
| 6. Kyoo-rak | 36. Ser-teel | 66. Gali-Gooreyag |
| 7. Ool-tseeg | 37. Ga-seek | 67. Burgan-kent |
| 8. Chur-daf | 38. Gareek | 68. Ah-treek |
| 9. Pee-leeg | 39. Kha-nakh | 69. Khorsa-teel |
| 10. Ru-gudzh | 40. Khor-teel | 70. Ver-teel |
| 11. Khya-nag | 41. Afna | 71. Ur-ga |
| 12. Tsan-til’ | 42. Dzhuli | 72. Ya-ragh |
| 13. Gur-khoon | 43. Goo-mi | 73. Fur-dagh |
| 14. Dyoo-bek | 44. Bukhnag | 74. Koo-leekh |
| 15. Khoos-teel | 45. Kha-log | 75. Lyakh-la |
| 16. Oog-neeeyag | 46. Doo-morkeel | 76. Gya-reegh |
| 17. Yorg-leeg | 47. Tsur-ee-teel | 77. Koo-veegh |
| 18. Dzool-dzag | 48. Vech-reek | 78. Ur-teel |
| 19. Dzool-dzoo-neef | 49. Kur-kakh | 79. Za-an Yarakh |
| 20. Koo-leef | 50. Zhag-teel | 80. Zyur-dyagh |
| 21. Goo-reekh | 51. Varta-teel | 81. Ashara-Yarakh |
| 22. Lakh-eeeyah | 52. See-ka | 82. Ar-choog |
| 23. Gee-seekh | 53. Too-rog | 83. Gan-zheekh |
| 24. Kharkh-nee | 54. Neech-ras | 84. Tsu-deekh |
| 25. Gookh-reeeyag | 55. Tsee-ee Lee-zha | 85. Chu-vekh |
| 26. Dag-ni | 56. Za-an Lee-zha | 86. Zil-deekh |
| 27. K’vag | 57. Tsookh-deeg | 87. Cher-eh |
| 28. Ah-kah | 58. Ipsh-neeeg | 88. Yar-geel |
| 29. Tsa-lakh | 59. Too-reef | 89. Lee-kah |
| 30. Yahg-deeg | 60. Fur-keel | 90. Syu-goot |

