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FIGHT TO THE FINISH

By **Shira Sorko-Ram**

David was born the oldest of six children. His parents, Chaim and Miriam Ratner made Aliyah (immigrated) from Ukraine to Israel in 2005 when David was two and a half years old. The Ratners were not believers at the time. Chaim had experienced a severe crisis when his brother was killed fighting in the Russian army in Afghanistan. It was then that Chaim began searching for truth and purpose—wondering if there is actually life after this world.

Chaim began to read the Bible. That summer he went camping with some of his buddies. All his friends had gone to sleep, but he stood around the campfire, looking at the stars. Suddenly, he felt a voice speak deep within him, “All the nation of Israel shall be saved!”

Chaim had heard from some Christian friends that all the Jewish people were supposed to return to Israel. This statement felt like destiny, so Chaim came home and told Miriam that he believed their

By Mail:
Maoz Ministries
P.O. Box 535788
Grand Prairie, TX 75053-5788

By Phone:
U.S. 214.677.0560
CAN. 866.712.0188
U.K. 01732 886441

By Email:
usa@maozisrael.org
canada@maozisrael.org
UK@maozisrael.org

Online:
www.maozisrael.org
www.istandwithisrael.com
www.IsraeliWorship.com

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Chaim & Miriam,
and their five
children

family should move to their ancient homeland. As they made their preparations to move to Israel, a friend told them he knew a family in the city of Ashdod who might be able to help them settle in.

Upon their arrival, the Israeli family invited Chaim and Miriam to stay with them for a couple of weeks until they could find their bearings. During their stay, this family, who were Jewish believers and true prayer warriors, invited the Ratners to visit the Beit Hallel Messianic congregation led by Pastor Israel Pochtar. They soon accepted

Yeshua, and would raise their kids in that congregation. David would become best friends with Guy, Pastor Israel's son.

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David Joins The Army

From an early age, David was very adventurous and so often got himself into trouble! But he loved sports and always had friends from different secular, religious, and ethnic backgrounds. He was never afraid of letting them know he was a Messianic believer. He was never afraid of anything.

In the summer of 2021, David was drafted into the IDF, and qualified for the elite Golani combat unit. His parents knew it wasn't just any fighting force. Even among those chosen, not everyone was able to complete Golani's training. It is mentally and physically demanding—a prestigious unit in Israel. In every major conflict, the Golanis are the front fighting line.

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During his training, David didn't complain, and he kept his thoughts to himself. But Miriam and Chaim could see that his service was, indeed, very difficult for him, physically and spiritually.

“We watched and prayed from the beginning,” his parents said, “But it affected his faith. When he was able to come home, like once a month, he basically stopped going to our congregation, though he continued to be in touch with his Messianic friends.” When his parents raised the subject, David replied, “I need to find God my own way. I am on my own journey to seek out God for myself.”

As a soldier, David was involved in many serious military operations in the West Bank, in Lebanon and also in East Jerusalem, fighting against terrorists.



David receives third award for excellence in IDF

Yet, during this time, he still had this spiritual sensitivity and connection with his parents, because often he would call and ask, “Mom, have you been praying for me just now?” And the answer would be, “Yes!” They had been praying!

It wasn’t just a sensation either. David had his share of miracles from the God of his fathers. Once, he took part in an operation in the West Bank and sent a message home: “Pray for me.” The whole family began to pray. During that very operation David and his fellow soldiers had just barely passed a wall when it exploded! Two seconds earlier, he would have been dead.

David’s parents’ prayers were fervent. “We were constantly praying because we knew that one day he would come back to God.” And sure enough, when he was able to return once a month for a weekend, he began again to attend his congregation.

Drive to Paradise

On a weekend in mid September, David asked his mother to give him a ride back to his army base alongside the kibbutz of Nahal Oz. While driving there, he began to talk about spiritual things.

He told his mom, “One of my friends is looking for God, but he doesn’t understand Yeshua. So please pray for him; he needs help.” Miriam said, “You need your own miracle first; you need to come back to God yourself.”

David smiled, “I don’t need a miracle anymore, Mom. I am already following Yeshua. He is the Lord! Now I know and believe for myself and I will follow Yeshua.”

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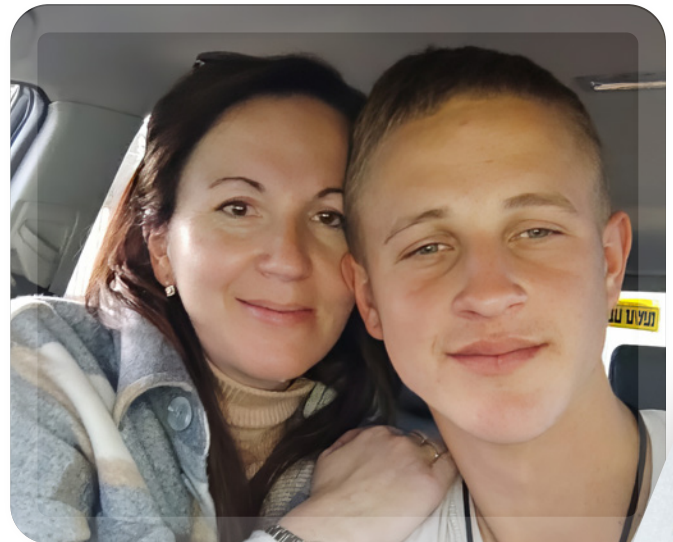
Miriam recalls, “I won’t forget his eyes; he looked out of the window with his blue eyes and said, ‘Mom, look how beautiful our sky is!’ He added, ‘Thank you, for being such good parents.’ Then he said, ‘You never complain. I want to be like

you. I want to get married, and I want my family to be a part of the congregation, and I want to live like you.’”

Miriam continued, “He didn’t usually speak this way. In fact, this was the first time he ever talked like this to me.”

Miriam had never seen that part of Israel, so when they arrived at the military base by kibbutz Nahal Oz, she said to David, “It is so beautiful here! Like in heaven, the Garden of Eden, Paradise!”

“Everything was very green and beautiful. But I noticed his base was right on the Gaza border. So when I looked at the military base wall, I said, ‘You are really on the border!’”



Miriam and David take a pic together as she drives him to his base



David and his partner during a training mission

David released from army to meet his new baby sister in the hospital

'Mom, every night something happens here. They try to break in, to break out.' And he even showed me pictures of terrorists trying to get in, and how they were dropping Molotov cocktails, or poisonous gas.

"He answered, 'Mom, every night something happens here. They try to break in, to break out.' And he even showed me pictures of terrorists trying to get in, and how they were dropping Molotov cocktails, or poisonous gas. He told me that he felt something was going to happen soon. 'Things are boiling, there is going to be a big war,' he told me."

In the beginning of October, he was given leave to visit us at home for a few hours. It was the beginning of the Feast of Tabernacles and he was missing his family. He talked a lot about, "The next time I come home, we'll go camping in Galilee! I just want to spend time with our family!" Of course, we were thrilled.

Normally, as you know, a young guy would have gone out with his friends. We saw such changes in him. I never dreamed that would be the last time we would see him.

Saturday, October 7

A week later, on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles before dawn, his squad commander woke him to the news that army observers had just called his platoon reporting, " Hamas is attacking us!" David immediately dressed and took his machine gun. They divided their 12 fighters into 6 groups of 2 and scoured every area to protect their base.

David climbed a tower and from there killed dozens of terrorists. The exact number is unknown because of the total chaos. Witnesses who lived through the massacre verified that he took down several dozen terrorists who were rushing through the fences and walls towards the base in huge numbers.

Then he left the protected area and went down to check on his friends. There he killed another 6 or 7 terrorists. His partner said that David then went by himself to check on their observers, usually young female soldiers, and again he killed another 6 or 7 terrorists.

Alive

Since David was engaged in such heavy warfare, he was unable to use his phone, as many others did that day. So as the sun went down, the Ratner family did not know if David was alive or not.



That Saturday night, four of David’s siblings (all except the baby) dreamt of David! In every one of their dreams, he was very much alive! So when they all woke up, they said, “David is alive! I just saw him!” Their dreams were so real that they felt it physically. Even Guy, the pastor’s son, and David’s best friend, dreamed that Saturday night and saw David alive. But Guy’s father, Pastor Israel, understood the “alive” in their dreams differently when he heard the Lord speak to his heart, “I am the God of the living, not the God of the dead.”

Because of the catastrophic level of the October 7th massacre, it took two days before David’s family received the news that he had fallen that Sabbath.

The family was told that when David attempted to return to the protected area after taking out dozens of terrorists, he took a bullet in his back. His friends began treating him with a make-shift tourniquet. Wounded though he was, he continued fighting the terrorists for six hours until he died.

That military base is spread out, and there were few places to shelter from such a massive attack. On some other similar bases along the Gaza strip, all the soldiers died. One of David’s fighter friends told the family that 20 other wounded soldiers reached their shelter because David covered for them.

When the army finally informed the family on Monday, David’s father shared with the soldiers about their experience and belief in Yeshua. “Wow! What stories!” they responded. “I want to hear more of this!”

Honoring His Birthday

On January 11, 2024, David would have celebrated his 21st birthday. The Ratner family decided to honor his birthday by inviting all the families from his platoon and other units who lost their sons or daughters that Black Sabbath day.

Some 150 people attended the gathering that took place at their congregation Beit Hallel in Ashdod. Chaim took his time and gave his entire testimony of his faith in Yeshua. Nearly all those who came were hearing the Good News for the first time. After the event, a number of people came to Chaim and invited him to their homes to hear more about his faith.

To grow up and live a life that honors the Lord in Israel is no easy task. David chose Yeshua. And even in death, his testimony is lighting the way for those searching for the path to their God, the God of Israel. ■



Carved into David’s tombstone are Yeshua’s words, “Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends.”



February 2024



Dear Lover of Israel,

Since the beginning of this war we have **spent almost half a million dollars on equipment for soldiers, evacuated families, education and Israel's agriculture.**

These efforts only **add to the strength of our voice** when the message of the Prince of Peace is delivered to our people. Maoz partners have enabled us to support the work of evangelism through many congregations in Israel and have supported Beit Hallel congregation in Ashdod from its early years.

The war is nowhere near over and we're nowhere near done being the hands and feet of Yeshua to our nation. We need your help!

Around the world people are wearing these necklaces as a reminder to **pray for the release of the hostages and victory over terrorism.** You can have one of your own **military grade necklaces** made and printed here in Israel for a gift of \$50 or more.

Everyone can do something that matters. **You can do something that matters.** Give. Pray. Volunteer. Engage others.

Your Partners from the Land,

Kobi and Shani Ferguson

Kobi & Shani Ferguson



FRONT LINES

Both our military forces and our civilian patrols need basic supplies and tactical gear. We get calls almost daily from units all over the country requesting everything from Go Pro cameras to thermal and protective body gear that the army has not been able to supply.

As soon as Maoz partners give, we purchase and deliver the gear ourselves to keep our soldiers as well equipped as possible to do their job.



HARVEST

Whole fields and farms of animals have been abandoned near Gaza and on the Lebanon border. It's a difficult loss but we can still fight to save what remains and prepare to rebuild those areas after the war. If you know of groups that would be interested in coming for an extended time to gather the harvest, please contact us.



EDUCATION

Maoz Israel and the city of Ra'anana have completed building the school for evacuees! Children from kindergarten through high school now have a safe place to gather daily, continue their studies, and begin to heal from the trauma they've suffered. Because of Maoz partners, this school—complete with school supplies and bomb shelters (see photos below)—is being used daily from sunrise well into the night!



CARRY THIS **PROMISE** WITH YOU

These IDF army tags have become a symbol of solidarity in this war and an unspoken prayer for the return of the hostages.

You can receive your own for a gift of \$50 or more towards the war relief effort.




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