



Shani sharing the vision with visitors at the Maoz offices in Jerusalem

JUNE 2022 | SIVAN - TAMUZ 5782

Going and Growing

By Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson

Every month we like to highlight something we are doing at Maoz Israel Ministries! Whether it's the latest music projects, the training of young leaders, *I Stand with Israel's* emergency assistance, the support of local congregations and promising up-and-coming ministries, or the publishing of Bibles and other spiritually rich resources—we love to **give you windows into the work that exists because of Maoz supporters.** Every once in a while, however, we like to show you the Maoz team that is behind making this work a reality.

Some of them came to Maoz fresh from their college studies. Some had higher-paying jobs before they came to us. Some of them sold their apartments and relocated to work with us. **All of them are here because helping fulfill the vision of Maoz is how they want to spend the one life they have been given.** Made up entirely of Israeli citizens, Maoz builds its team with long-term impact in mind.

When people visit our facility (both believing and secular Israelis alike) they often remark

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about the “family vibe” they experience. “Are you guys cousins?” we’ve been asked more than once. “You guys treat each other like you’re related.”

If you’re on the inside of Maoz, you understand why. The Bible talks about prioritizing the home. We like to say, “What does a man profit if he saves a whole nation and loses his family?” So, we place as much emphasis on the well-being of our team and their families at home as we do making believers strong all over Israel.

I know not everyone can come in person to our headquarters in Jerusalem, but I hope as we cover some of the different departments of Maoz you will get a tiny glimpse into the people behind the impact Maoz has made—and is making—in Israel. **If you’re ever in the neighborhood, let us know!** We would love to show you the headquarters where it all happens.

THE *Team*

(From left to right) Back row: Alan, Will, Stefan, Tanya, Roman, David, Veronica, Irina, Shani, Kobi
Front row: Alisa, Dana, Birgitta, Ruben, Gabriel, Andrew, Liraz



Studio

At any given time there are at least 5 rooms in this studio dedicated to creating new music of various genres and languages. Restoring modern-day Levites to their posts (like Nehemiah did) probably looked a little like this—minus the modern technology, of course. Dozens of believing kids from all over the country are trained musically. We invest in the future of worship makers from a young age. Excelling in their music lessons has opened doors to everything from their congregation's worship team to playing before government leaders to recording original worship music in our studio. The Levites in the Bible were warriors in the Spirit so raising up an army of worshippers is exactly where we're headed. And these are some of the guys making it happen.



Finance

My grandfather, Gordon Lindsay, used to say, "There are three things that are important in ministry: Number one, integrity. Number two, integrity. And number three, integrity."

To the average person, the accounting department is the quiet corner reserved for those strange humans born with a love for numbers, stats and other small unexciting details. But to us, this department is the foundation of everything we do. It is the reason we share about the work of Maoz with such confidence—we know the money is going where we promised it would go. It is because of the health of this department that we receive top ratings year after year from third-party auditors and charity watchdogs like *GuideStar*.



Media

These guys are in charge of showing you Israel. They can drive from Israel's most northern city to the most southern tip in the same week to document for you the much loved *I Stand with Israel* stories. They're the ones behind the "Families of Israel" calendar that give you photos of beautiful landscapes with real families to pray for. They're also behind the variety of music videos we release. It looks like fun and it is. But just know that getting up at 2 am to be at the Dead Sea camera ready when the sun rises is included in the job description.



Books

They say literacy is the cure to poverty—because books hold within them a plethora of information that opens worlds of understanding to the mind. A mind that can now take action. In the same way, books with spiritual truths can open up worlds to the soul. That is why we have translated and published over 160 books—including a unique Bible—into Hebrew. The process of bringing a book to its final printed form and into the hands of Israelis is not only long and complex, it requires extreme attention to detail. Thankfully we have a team of translators, proofers, editors, graphic designers, and typesetters who are as passionate about reaching Israelis as we are!

INHABITING GALILEE

Looking north from Galilee
to Mount Hermon

HOW IT ALL BEGAN - PART 15

By Eitan Shishkoff as told to Shira Sorko-Ram

I had just begun my second year in college when I dropped out to join the conscientious objector wave protesting the Vietnam War. It was a short jump to marijuana, a blues-rock band, and more drugs. But then I met Connie, the love of my life, and we married in 1969.

We became happy, full-fledged hippies and lived in several communes nestled in the beautiful mountains of northern New Mexico. I was a devout organic farmer and for six years we farmed enough to live the life we wanted. We built a one-room house made of rocks and mud—Navajo Indian style—with no electricity nor indoor plumbing. My philosophy of life included Native American pantheism, Eastern mysticism and astrology, with the assurance that mankind was good, and that if I worked hard enough, I could create my own purity.

But one day tragedy struck our lives. An extremely dear friend was murdered in cold blood. My mish-mash philosophy gave me no answers for why my buddy's life ended so brutally, so wrongly. I was undone. Suddenly I knew that man was not inherently good. I realized I could never become truly pure and unselfish.

One day Connie said she had met two interesting hippies and had invited them to supper. As we sat eating our simple meal of tortillas and beans, they started talking about Jesus. Suddenly, in my mind's eye, I saw Him. I was no longer aware of anything around me. I saw Yeshua on the cross. His eyes locked on mine, and I felt His love being poured into me. It was His eyes. I suddenly knew that His suffering was God's response to the injustice and evil of the world. It was also His response to my own inability to live the pure life I so

longed for. I had an instantaneous life-changing experience. My wife, Connie, had already secretly believed in what these two Jesus-believing hippies had witnessed to her. We repented and never turned back.

Jesus is Jewish

My parents had considered the Bible to be “fables” and life after death was in no way literal. When Connie and I became believers in Yeshua in 1972, we did it because we knew He was real. But we never considered that what we were doing was part of our destiny as Jews. The Old and New Testaments always seemed separated by vastly different portraits of God.

Then one day, while reading the Gospel account of the Last Supper, it dawned on me that this meal was a Passover Seder celebrating our deliverance from Egyptian

slavery in Moses' time. Suddenly, the Bible was one book—not two. And much like the Old Testament, the New Testament was a story by Jews *about* Jews!

Jews for Israel?

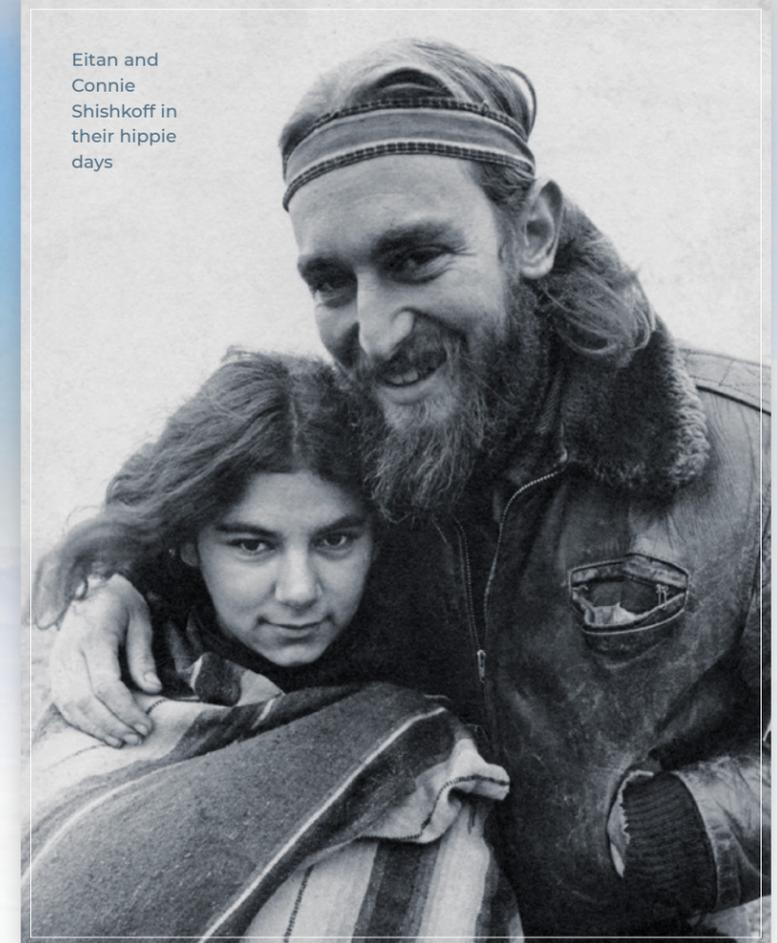
In 1977 I was in a meeting where Shira Sorko-Ram was appealing to believing Jews to make aliyah. It was the first time I heard that God's plan included bringing the Jewish people back to Israel from all the countries to which we'd been scattered. In the margin of my notebook I wrote, “This is our destiny. One day we will live in Israel.”

When I look back, that was a profound turning point. Shira boldly challenged us, as Jewish believers, to examine the Scriptures about Israel's restoration/resurrection. Pointing to passages in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, she set the stage for me to hear God's voice in my heart.

At that moment, I wanted to be part of this drama foretold by Israel's prophets. And yet, 15 years would pass before the timing would be right for our move. When the time came, we would leave our role as elders at Beth Messiah, a booming Messianic Jewish congregation in Maryland. We would leave lifetime co-workers. At the time, our family included a son and daughter of college age, and an active four-year-old whom we named Avi, short for Abraham.

It was a strange thing to be in our mid-40s, deciding what

Eitan and
Connie
Shishkoff in
their hippie
days



belongings from our 20+ years together to pack and what appliances to buy that would work with Israel's 220 electric voltage. It was even more surreal when during these preparations Connie found out she was pregnant! Apparently, the Creator wanted us to experience Israeli life from birth onward.

We had so many questions about how to do life in Israel and needed answers from people with real-life experience. We'd become acquainted with the Sorko-Rams at Messianic conferences and had done radio interviews with Ari on our *Gates of Zion* radio show. So, we called them to give us up-to-date facts

about living in Israel. But it was their constant encouragement that helped us the most in this intense transition.

Once we arrived, as part of our absorption into Israeli culture, I started a business with another English-speaking immigrant. We began a mobile service known as “car-detailing.” We repaired small damage to bumpers, dashboards, and windshields. The going was rough. And though nobody got rich by any means, the days spent “pounding the pavement” for work, and meeting Israeli customers on their own turf, earned us invaluable street smarts.



Eitan and
Connie
Shishkoff
today

Born in a Warehouse

At the same time, we started a house group that multiplied into several more. We met other Messianic believers who were looking for fellowship and some not-yet-believers who would soon receive Yeshua. They wanted to join forces and meet as a congregation. So, we began searching for a place, and found ourselves looking at a run-down warehouse in an out-of-the-way industrial area in Kiryat Yam (meaning “town by the sea”).

in reply, I heard inside myself, “If I could be born in a stable, why can’t you see a congregation born in this warehouse?” We rented the place and began cleaning it up. Our first meeting was on December 3, 1995. We called ourselves *Tents of Mercy*.

Of all the random languages I could’ve studied in my unsaved college days back in the 60’s, I had studied Russian. So, when more than a million Russian Jews flooded Israel in the 90’s, I had a solid foundation to minister to

spiritually-starved Jews who had just escaped from anti-God Soviet Communism.

Pioneering in Galilee

In the early days of our *Tents of Mercy* Congregation, I wore many hats. At first, I led worship (in Hebrew, Russian, and a little

English), gave the messages (in my beginner Hebrew, with Russian translation), and provided transportation for those attending (very few immigrant believers had their own cars). We bought a Torah scroll—typical of every synagogue throughout the world. It contains Genesis through Deuteronomy, written by hand. We began reading from it each week, always pointing out the integral connection with the New Covenant.

Within a couple of years, to our gratitude (and delight!), two families of co-workers from our U.S. congregation also decided to make aliyah and join our new-born congregation. Showing how God sovereignly puts together ministries, Moshe and Katya Morrison’s teaching gifts gave depth to our congregants’ understanding of being a Jewish follower of Yeshua.

Marc and Leah Chopinsky came a year later. Leah was a prayer warrior and Marc was the consummate musician and composer. As a Messianic pioneer, he had written many songs known throughout the English Messianic movement and translated many of them into Hebrew.

Haredim Strike

In the late 1990’s, members of Israel’s government were attempting to pass laws against our freedom to worship and share our love for Yeshua. In October of 1997, a major paper that had previously published an inflammatory article about the national Messianic youth conference published an article describing the perceived war Haredim (ultra-Orthodox Jews)

were declaring on the growing Body of Jewish believers in Israel. Three days later, I was awakened by a phone call. “Our building is on fire! You’ve got to get down here!” When I arrived, there were fire trucks and flames shooting out of the roof. Learning there were no people inside, my thoughts turned to our precious Torah scroll we kept in the main hall. I ran in with an elder from the congregation and together we pulled it out unharmed.

In many ways it was a defining event that accelerated our course. The sudden and total destruction of our administrative headquarters including extensive smoke, burnt Bibles scattered on the floor and water damage, left our small facility in a shambles.

The next day a police investigator found phosphorus residue, indicating a military level explosive. Someone powerful was sending us a message that we weren’t welcome in our area. Somehow

our tiny congregation was a threat to the massive religious status quo.

But the immediate local and international outpouring of support actually paved the way for us to move into a better place! After all, this was our home no less than it was theirs. And our gathering together to worship Yeshua in the land of our ancestors was a phenomenon foreseen by the prophets. To us, if our meeting place was worth bombing, it must be worth establishing!

Within a few years, our one congregation birthed four more in the northern Galilee area. Eventually we did what every successful Jew dreams of doing—passing on their life’s work into the hands of capable descendants. And so, *Tents of Mercy* is now led by Avishalom and Hannah Tekle—our son-in-law and daughter—where it has blossomed as they built extensive relationships with the local citizens.

What about the youth?

As the congregation grew, I noticed that the teenagers in our congregation were languishing, and a bit marginalized. Being a Messianic teen in Israel is hard, in that being a teen is hard anyway—and adding Jewish belief in Yeshua is still way outside “normal” Israeli culture. So, as a pastor, I felt compelled to do something about it. I was convinced the future of our movement rested with our youth.

Around that time, in the mid 90’s a U.S. ministry called *Souled Out* began holding events for Israeli Messianic youth. These kids from Chicago were singing, dancing and witnessing on the streets. From the deep-hearted way our young people responded, I was impressed and was ready to learn all I could from them. They understood how to create environments of worship where God’s presence could change lives.

One thing had to change, though—ministry to Israeli youth had to be in Hebrew. Otherwise, their experience of God would not be able to reach the core of Israeli culture. For five years I volunteered to work side by side with the *Souled Out* team as their leaders, Cathi and Ed Basler, continued to bring groups to Israel several times a year. Out of this bold and anointed ministry of *Souled Out*, we birthed *Katzir*. *Katzir* means “harvest” in Hebrew. We launched our first *Katzir* conference in the winter of 2000, during the holiday of Hanukkah. The governing board of *Katzir*, from the beginning, has been made up of leaders from several



Eitan and Marc Chopinsky leading worship at their *Tents of Mercy* congregation

Three days later, I was awakened by a phone call. “Our building is on fire! You’ve got to get down here!” When I arrived, there were fire trucks and flames shooting out of the roof.

Before signing a rental contract, I came back and walked around the property praying. “Lord, is this where you want us?” Then,



Eitan sitting in the middle with youth from the Katzir camp

congregations, including Ari, thereby giving excellent oversight and support from multiple streams.

In the last two decades of youth camps, thousands of young Israelis have been served by counselors and speakers, and basked in the joy of just being with a bunch of other kids who follow Yeshua. Many have supported *Katzir* over the years, as we only charge one-third of the actual cost for the conferences. This enables families of all economic conditions to

send their youth. Among those who've contributed the rest of the costs, *Maoz* stands out as our strongest donor. I can't conclude my story without giving abundant thanks for the incredible way *Maoz* has stood with us.

Many things in Israel take years of prayer and toil to bring to pass, which makes a victory extra sweet. Property ownership is one of those things. It means being able to have a facility tailored to the means of the work. It means not having to wonder if the owner will want to raise rent or

sell at a whim. But most of all, it means being able to worship and minister without fear of being kicked out. That is why we're so grateful for the new facility we've just purchased in the Golan Heights that will be used for the intensive, extended discipleship of young people. There are no short cuts when it comes to impacting Israel, but there are definitely milestones—and this is surely one! ■

To be continued...



Youth from Katzir camp overlooking the Sea of Galilee after hiking up a nearby mountain



June 2022

Shalom from Jerusalem!

“You know, Maoz is a bit like the sandal maker who has no shoes,” a respected minister recently told us when we said we are looking to purchase the facility that serves as Maoz’s ministry headquarters in Jerusalem. *“You’ve helped so many families get their own apartments—and ministries get their own facilities—and you don’t own your own home or ministry facility yourself,”* they concluded.

Ok, so we get **a little excited** when we see opportunities arise for others in the Body to purchase property—especially since property is **not just expensive, it’s complicated to get**. We always think of ourselves as part of the national Body of believers—so **a win for them is a win for the Kingdom, is a win for Maoz!** For believers all over Israel to own property is one of our core prayers before the Lord.

And now, **finally, after 46 plus years of going and growing** we have settled in Jerusalem and have an opportunity to purchase the **offices, studio and ministry center** that make up our headquarters. The price is a lofty **\$1.5 million**, and this purchase is the goal of our summer tour in early July, culminating in our **Generations Conference** in Dallas, TX July 15th–16th.

This is a big task, and our God is a big God! And your gift will be your own investment in a little slice of Jerusalem for the Kingdom.

The studio is already a magnificent place, with **state-of-the-art equipment**, and is being used daily to **create and declare His majesty in song, artistry, and media**. We have been renting space for years and now have an **urgency to BUY**. Owning will allow us to customize the valuable space and make better use of every square meter.

Will you help us? We are committed to **stewarding this property for His glory!** And with it we will continue to help the needy, **make new melodies, print new books, and build the Body of believers all over Israel**.

In His service,

Kobi and Shani Ferguson

Kobi and Shani Ferguson





Foxes have dens and birds have nests...
Israeli worshippers need a place to call home.

Join Maoz Israel
in purchasing their Jerusalem Headquarters!