

SINCE 1976

maoz israel

REPORT



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Boots on the Ground

By Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson

For over half of the nation of Israel's modern existence, the *Maoz Israel Report* has shared its front row view of what has been happening on the ground. From the earliest pioneering days of Jewish believers, to the political ebb and flow of this nation that was born in a day, the MIR has been an incredible resource for staying in the know about Israel from both a physical and spiritual perspective.

As the years have gone by, Maoz has grown from the tiny team of Ari and Shira and their part-time secretary, to becoming a powerful force for building the Kingdom of God in Israel with international offices in half a dozen countries.

And while we love to show you the many projects and various ministries with whom we partner, none of it would happen without the individuals who pour their blood, sweat, and prayers into the intense work of Israel's restoration.

Their life stories are riveting, their giftings unique, their passion contagious, and the impact they have on making the Maoz team so efficient and effective—undeniable. Here's just a snippet from each of their stories. You should get to know them—they are your hands in the field; your boots on the ground.

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BOOTS on the GROUND

The OFFICE

Omer

My family immigrated to Israel from Peru in the late 1990's when I was still a teenager. Before we moved to Israel I gave little thought to the idea of God. While I believed a higher power existed, He seemed too scary to explore. **But the minute our plane landed on Israeli soil, something switched on inside me, and that began my journey towards knowing God.**

A few years after getting settled in Israel, I heard about Maoz from some friends who were working there. I've now worked with Maoz for almost 20 years. The variety of projects I've been involved with over the years are both the most challenging and the most exciting part of my job. I specialize in graphics and have designed everything from books to music CDs to the *Maoz Israel Report*. (I even wrote the music for one of Shani's songs in *Garden of Secrets*). I also oversee all of Maoz Español, which is Maoz' representation in Spanish-speaking countries, and am very encouraged to see the awareness of Israel growing in these countries. ●

Liraz

I was first told about Yeshua by a boy in my school. He would go on to become my high school sweetheart, and today we are married with a beautiful daughter. I was born and raised in a very secular home in Israel and had no idea there was such a thing as a Jew who believed in Yeshua—let alone a whole community of such believers in Israel. The idea was intriguing to me, so when I found out a local congregation was offering classes on the subject, I signed up. It took a few months of teaching, but once I could wrap my head around this incredible truth, I gave my life to the Lord.

Although I attended services with my then boyfriend, I found myself wanting to be able to study more on my own. I sought out books for study and found many from Maoz available in our congregation. These books had a powerful impact on the richness of my new-found faith. A while later when one of my friends heard Maoz was looking for someone to lead their Hebrew publishing department they immediately thought of me. I went in for an interview and left feeling this would really be something I could pour myself into.

I've worked at Maoz now for eight years and I love the challenge of seeing a book through from the initial paperwork, to the finished product. I love the fact that each completed book can bear fruit many years into the future. But most of all, I love knowing that the knowledge and wisdom shared in these pages can change the lives of my fellow Israelis just like it changed mine. ●





BOOTS on the GROUND
The OFFICE

Irina

I grew up in a chilly corner of Ukraine, dreaming of one day moving to a warm nation with a warm culture. As I grew older, my dream became more of a determination that Israel, a nation built with such faith and hope, was the place I wanted to one day raise my children. When I turned 23 my husband and I moved to Israel. We would, indeed, go on to have two beautiful girls born and raised in Israel; both of them serve in the army today.

About nine years ago I came home after a long day at work and turned on the TV. As I flipped through the channels, I caught a minute of a woman speaking to a crowd of people. **I didn't know at the time it was a faith channel, but I had a strong feeling suddenly that what she was saying was important.** For several nights I sat glued to this channel watching different shows. I knew the next step was to find other people near me who believed like this and was overjoyed to find an entire congregation of new immigrants from Ukraine.

That year I finished my studies in accounting, and the pastor's wife told me she'd heard that a ministry she knew called Maoz was looking for an assistant bookkeeper. At first I didn't even want to go in for an interview. I had so little experience and to get a job at a huge respected ministry like Maoz seemed like asking too much. But I'm so glad I took a chance. From the moment I set foot in the place, I was overwhelmed by the warm and welcoming family atmosphere. They not only accepted me with the skills I had, they sent me to additional courses to fill in the areas I would need to eventually become the head bookkeeper—which I am today.

As a numbers and stats type person, of course, I value the longterm stability and faithfulness that Maoz offers the Body in Israel. However, I also love witnessing miraculous answers from our times in prayer. And I especially love that our work often is the answer to other people's prayers. ●

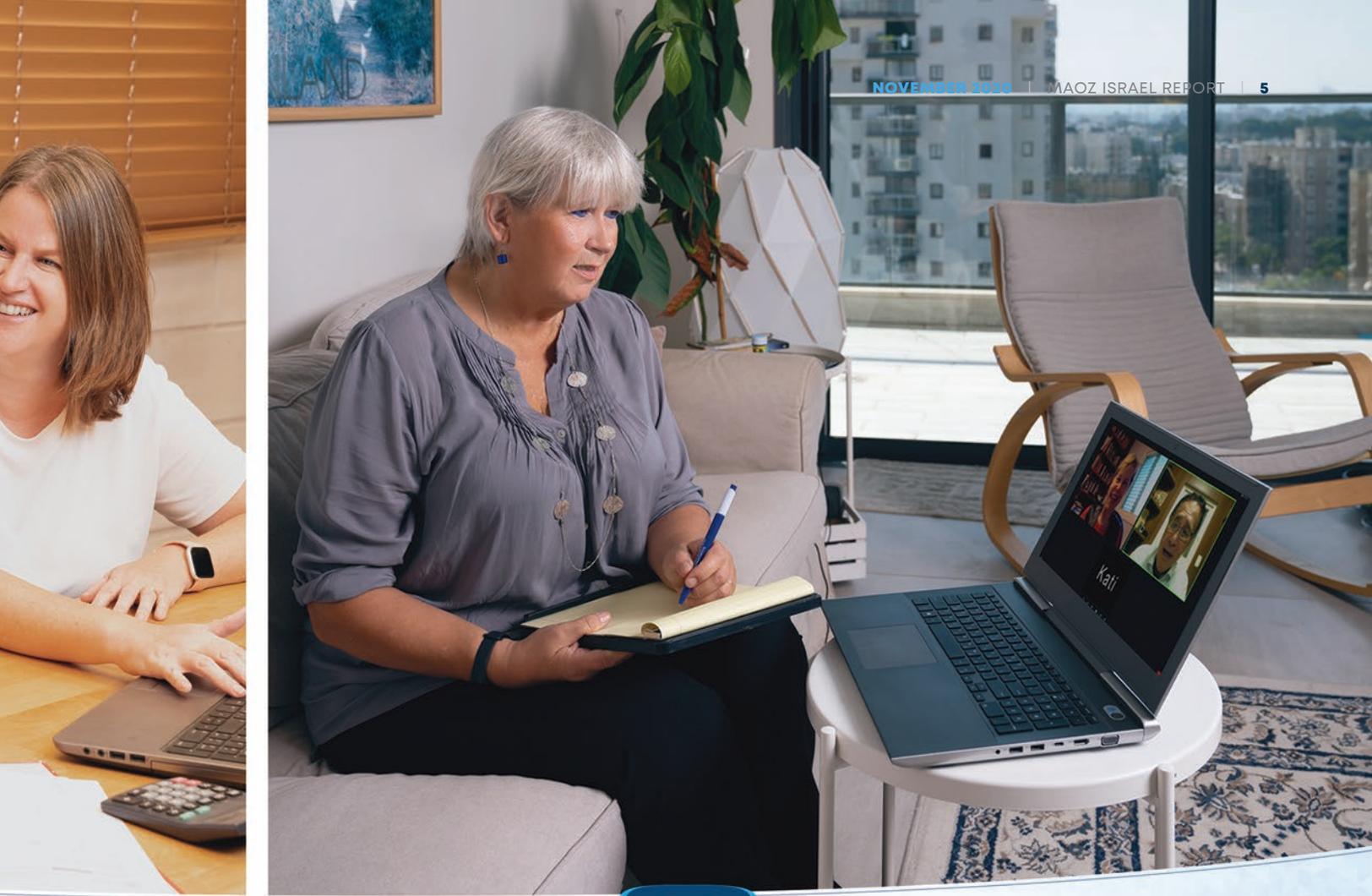


Veronica

I was born and raised in Denmark by Polish Jewish parents. When I turned 20 I decided to connect a bit with my Jewish roots and volunteer at a kibbutz in Israel. There I met a handsome soldier; we started dating. It wasn't long after that we married and moved to Tel Aviv. There my husband began attending Tiferet Yeshua congregation, led by Ari and Shira. **I wasn't really interested in anything religious at the time, but at some point, I decided I preferred to go with my husband rather than spend Saturday mornings alone.** Within a few months of attending, everything they were saying began making sense to me and at the end of one of the services I went forward and prayed with Ari to receive the Lord.

A while later, Maoz took a team of Israelis from all over the country to the Messianic conference in the U.S. and I joined. Since the body of believers is small in Israel, meetings are usually just a few dozen people. So, Maoz likes to strengthen their faith by showing them they are part of a much bigger picture, and this experience really strengthened our faith.

I got to know Ari and Shira on that trip, and soon after returning to Israel I began working as their personal



Kati

assistant. One day as I was cleaning out some files, I came across an old prayer letter in which Shira had updated the Maoz prayer partners that the previously requested prayers for my salvation had been answered!

After a few years I felt strongly that the Lord was calling me into the field of accounting. Even though they knew I would be leaving them, Maoz helped cover the costs of my studies for this next step in my life. I began overseeing the finances for several Messianic organizations and now, with a decade of experience, I have returned to serve Maoz as their Head of Finance as well.

I especially enjoy my role with the *IStandwithIsrael* fund as I know so many people who love Israel are trusting us to pass on their gifts to Israelis most in need. I love numbers and I love having the knowledge and ability to help organizations who are doing excellent work to have the same excellence in their finances. I strongly believe that excellence and accountability in finances is an incredible testimony to all the unbelievers we work with and ultimately gives God the most glory. ●

I immigrated from Finland back in the 1970's. Learning Hebrew came easy to me and I quickly adapted to the culture. I married a lovely man and lived on a kibbutz where we raised our three children together.

As the kids grew older we moved to Tel Aviv and I heard about a congregation of Israeli believers called Tiferet Yeshua. I loved the Hebrew worship and Israeli feel of the services, and began attending on a regular basis. Within a year, Maoz hired me to take care of the various needs of the congregants. I took care of many practical areas but I very much enjoyed praying and ministering to people after each service.

Over the years my role at Maoz has evolved and I've been everything from a national conference coordinator to my role today as Ari and Shira's personal assistant. I love being part of a work that is always looking at the bigger picture of God's kingdom. Though this year's restrictions have resulted in my mostly working from home (and canceled any options for conferences), my role as point person in vetting requests for *IStandwithIsrael* has kept me busier than ever.

I believe Maoz' willingness not just to help individuals, but to help other ministries in the country has contributed so much to the unity of the Body here. Perhaps that is why I consider the last 15 years that I have worked at Maoz to be the best years of my life. ●



BOOTS on the GROUND

The STUDIO



Then I gathered the Levites and singers together and stationed them at their posts.

Nehemiah 13:11



Roman & Tanya

I was nine months pregnant when my husband Roman and I landed in Israel to begin our new life. We'd been married just over a year and we knew we wanted our children to be born in the land of promise. The first seven years were very difficult. We had two children during this time and our move to Israel meant starting over with a new language, a new career path, a very different culture and no family or friends.

Before we left Ukraine, Roman completed his Master's degree in Orchestration and Instruction and I completed a Master of Music Conducting. I dreamed of one day conducting a choir of children

and teens. But the reality in Israel meant we had to work wherever we could. Roman did all sorts of odd jobs—carpentry, postal work, warehouse restocking—he even had a paper route. I cooked meals at a day care and tutored kids with homework after school.

In 2006, we visited *Tiferet Yeshua* congregation. I was so overcome by the presence of God in the place that I sat and cried the whole service. At the end of the meeting, Ari, who was the pastor at the time, walked up to us with a big welcoming smile. We sat and talked a bit and then he asked to pray for us. **He began saying God would use our giftings in**



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music to impact young people in Israel, and I just wept, because this dream was so deep in our hearts. But our current jobs had nothing to do with music.

Within a few months of attending we were overjoyed for the opportunity to join the worship team—and then the second Lebanese war broke out. Roman’s job at the time was dependent on shipments that came through the Haifa port. The war resulted in the port’s inability to dock ships and Roman was one of many to lose his job. The timing for this, however, turned out to be



excellent as Maoz was looking for someone to oversee the office maintenance and distribution of their published Hebrew books.

We continued faithfully in the worship team and a few years later, Maoz had another job opening that included work with children. It was in its infancy, but that job blossomed into the *Music Making for Kids* program that currently sponsors music lessons for 60 talented and hardworking kids from 27 different congregations. Some of the musicians from our program are good enough to join their congregation’s worship team by the time they’re 13. We’ve also been able to train enough kids vocally to form a kids’ choir and record a kids’ Hebrew worship album called *You are Special*. The original songs from this album are still sung today in camps and conferences.

When Kobi and Shani transitioned into Maoz’ leadership, they merged the *Fellowship of Artists* with Maoz. With the scope of all the *FoA* has going on, Roman and I would not only both be working full-time in our field of expertise with a whole team in the studio—we could now mentor young artists from the beginnings of learning an instrument and songwriting, all the way to recording and publishing music. **It’s beyond what we dreamed and gives me hope that everything Ari prayed over us that first day he met us—was God’s dream, too.**



Yaron

I was born in a small town in Israel's southern desert. As a young teen I began studying modern instruments like guitar and drums, but soon became fascinated with more ancient eastern instruments. At the age of 17, I went to a "new age" music festival on the Sea of Galilee and there I heard about Yeshua for the first time. I knew when I heard the message that it was the truth, and before the festival was over, I was in.

About 10 years ago I recorded my Persian Tar for Shani's *Garden of Secrets* album but I didn't make the Maoz connection until several years later when I joined a delegation of Israeli musicians Maoz was sending to lead worship at the MJAA Conference in the U.S. A year or two ago I began hearing about the *Fellowship of Artists*. Their vision to create a space for artists to develop their skills and provide fresh Hebrew songs for local congregations and songs for the larger Israeli population was fascinating to me as a songwriter. Having toured extensively with bands like Miqedem and having just completed my Master of Musicology, I knew I was supposed to be part of this team.

My days in the studio are both challenging and inspiring. While I currently play over 100 different instruments, our goal is to write music that feels familiar to Israelis so they'll enjoy worshipping with them corporately. At the same time, we want to push the boundaries of the typical music people are used to associating with worship. Israel has historically been an incredible resource for worship that still influences the world today. **So I believe the calling is in our blood to blend both the ancient and the modern into music that can draw both believers and unbelievers to a place of awe of Him.** ●



Stefan

I was born in Communist Romania and lived there until the age of four. I remember waiting with my grandfather in the snow for an hour for our turn to get fish and bread from a shop that opened just once a week. Despite our Jewish roots, I also remember the subject of religion being a forbidden topic by both the government and my parents, who were good Communist citizens. **It was the pan flute that first awoke my father to the idea that there could be a God. The first time he heard it he asked himself, "How could a sound so beautiful exist if a higher power didn't create it?"**

By the time I turned four my family had had enough of the abject poverty in Romania, and we immigrated to Israel. Soon after we arrived, we stayed in a guest house where my parents found a stack of videotapes of random historical figures—one of which was a movie about Yeshua. The story fascinated my parents and they quickly became believers. Their enthusiasm was so contagious that the owner of the guest house (who explained he simply collected movies about people he deemed "positive world influences") also became a believer.

I, myself, never felt a personal connection to whatever they had. In my early teens though, my mother found out she had cancer. She battled it for several years but died when I was 17. I'd heard my parents talk about God for years, but losing my mother made me consider where she'd gone, and what I needed to do to assure I would eventually join her.

My father passed down his love for music to me and I spent my teen years learning half a dozen different instruments. I first met Shani, when we were teens, at a youth conference Maoz hosted and subsequently at several summer camps in the years following. Our first time working together, however, was when I worked extensively with Shani on the *Garden of Secrets* album. At the time, I was writing many songs that were sung by congregations all over Israel, but my main income came from janitor work.

Shani used to tell me how ridiculous it was that my talents were going to waste cleaning toilets, and that



one day they would figure out a way to pay me to write music. Sure enough, as soon as they opened the *Fellowship of Artists* studio, I was the first person they brought in to begin building the in-house team of musicians to produce music.

Since the *FoA* vision is for its team of creative talent to develop our giftings and use them to bless the entire Body in Israel, we are encouraged to teach music, play at conferences or on congregational worship teams and even at local houses of prayer. When I worked in maintenance, I used to write songs that would come to me during work on bits of paper and go home and try to recreate it on my simple computer. Now, I not only have an unbelievable supply of top-quality recording tools at my fingertips, but I get to work with a team of musicians who are as dedicated to seeing God's glory fill this land as I am. My dad was right. Not only did God create beautiful music, He created us to play it for Him. ●

Gabriel

I'd played the drums ever since my family immigrated to Israel from France when I was six years old. So, I thought it was a great opportunity when, shortly after completing my compulsory army duty, I received the invitation to play drums with a Maoz worship band that was traveling to the U.S. A few years later, I played drums for Shani who was leading worship for a well-known minister who was visiting the country. After the service, she told me, "One day, you'll do music full-time." **It seemed fantastical at the time, since in Israel, virtually no Israeli believers get to focus on worship full-time, and besides at the time I was contracted with the army.**

A little while later, Kobi and Shani told me they'd acquired a recording studio in Jerusalem dedicated to creating Israeli worship music, and they wanted me to be in charge of it. When they shared their plan for the *Fellowship of Artists* and the vision to see the restoration of modern-day Levites, I knew this was the place for me.

During that time, I was drumming with the band *Miqedem* and we toured globally. With our band's success and the studio work, and my military contract being up for renewal,

it was the perfect time to take the leap. I was beginning a life dedicated to serving in worship just like the Levites did in Bible times in this very city! Today, I not only manage the studio, but mentor and produce music for young up-and-coming musicians and worship leaders across the country. There's just nothing like this anywhere else in the country and I'm beyond honored to be part of it. ●

Andrew

I grew up in a Christian home in Fresno, California. At the time, I was looking to move to Japan as I have Japanese roots, when I found an opportunity to spend some time volunteering in Israel with a local ministry. Eventually, they brought me onboard as their webmaster. **I never dreamed I'd end up in Israel long-term, but that was before I met a beautiful and fiery Israeli who would eventually become my wife. Ten years later I'm an Israeli citizen and we're raising our three children in the hills surrounding Jerusalem.**

I'd played guitar since I was a teen, but I really enjoyed the technical side of music. Recording and mixing music is an art unto itself, and that is where my passion lies. Maoz believes Israeli believers should be in every sect of society so when they heard I'd applied to the prestigious Rimonim Music school, *IStandwithIsrael* covered all my school costs. Since I've completed my studies I've been able to work in everything from live music events to TV production.

I heard about the *Fellowship of Artists* studio while I was still studying and wanted to have a role in raising up believing Israeli artists and musicians. I've only been involved about a year, but I find working in a studio entirely dedicated to producing music that glorifies God to be an amazing opportunity. ●

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Will

Just after graduating college in the U.S. I made a trip to Israel. I'd grown up knowing I was Jewish but nothing would prepare me for the epiphany I received when I visited Israel and realized I would end up living here. Soon after I returned to the U.S., I heard Shira speaking in a congregation about her heart to equip young Israeli artists. As I had just graduated with a degree in theatre, this was very encouraging to me.

After several years of living in Israel, I heard about the *Fellowship of Artists* and all the music they were putting out. I was excited to see the practical application of what Shira had talked about. But even more so when, in the middle of a conversation with Kobi and Shani, they told me of their desire to expand beyond just music and showed me that the *FoA* logo was made up of a music record, a pencil (to represent writing and fine arts)—and a film reel!

I've only just recently joined the *FoA* team. But I've long viewed Maoz as a ministry that supplies resources to enrich the Body in Israel and the nations and I am looking forward to putting my hands to the plow of this vision. ●





Tim & Alisa

I grew up in Ukraine with a special love for children and performing arts. **Even in my teen years when kids my age were getting into trouble, I was busy planning summer camps for orphans.** By my early 20's I had completed my university studies in TV production and was spending all my free time organizing singing and theatre programs for orphans. I was definitely in a happy place in my life. The only wild card for me was that, as a Jew, I had this love in my heart for this far off land called Israel.

Even though I felt I had everything I needed right where I was, I've always loved new challenges. I began studying Hebrew and eventually immigrated to Israel. I knew my first years in Israel would mean starting simple and working towards doing what I love. So, I got a job at a local shop while I studied Hebrew. During that time some of my friends introduced me to their congregation and I began attending. That's where I met Tim, my future husband, who, just like me, had a passion for film.

After a few years of getting established, I began looking for work more suited to my passion. My husband and I attended a worship conference Maoz organized in Israel and we were both very moved. Soon after, I heard Maoz was looking for a secretary. Even though my role wouldn't involve media and children (my passion), I thought how amazing it would be to be able to pour my heart into a work that would have an eternal impact.

My role as secretary included the usual calls and paperwork, but Maoz has a big heart so whenever I had an idea to help at-risk kids or children in the hospitals, they would encourage me and help make it happen. The longer I worked with Maoz, the more I could see the Lord using my giftings. Most recently I've been charged with capturing (on film!) the fascinating stories of those helped by *IStandwithIsrael*. My husband, Tim, who specializes in film, had worked with Maoz on several of these projects and just recently joined the Maoz team full-time. I can't say how pleased we are to be pouring ourselves into a work that is able to bless people so profoundly on both a practical and spiritual level. ●



MaozCanada _____

Helio & Stephanie

I first heard about Maoz when I was a student in Bible school. I felt like working with Maoz would mean looking back one day and realizing I took part in transforming a nation (Israel) for the Kingdom of God. I look forward to the day I will tell my children and grandchildren that our service contributed to the fulfillment of eternal purposes.



NORTH AMERICA

SOUTH AMERICA



MaozUSA _____

Ray & Christy

I met Ari and Shira on a road trip in the late 80's. My family had long had a love for Israel, and so when I heard they were from Israel I asked the fateful question of what they did and why they did it. By the time we reached our destination I knew my destiny was tied to theirs.



MaozEspañol _____

Rita

Two years ago, I volunteered in Guatemala to help at a Maoz of the four-day conference. Maoz' vision for Israel's salvation to educate the Church about Maoz is the best chance I have to receive this same revelation.

MaozBrazil _____

Matheus & Bianca

I had heard about Maoz when I heard they were looking for leaders around me who told me they're really doing. I quickly became a Kingdom family and I knew



MaozUK

Brian & Elizabeth

I had been raised with a strong but secular Jewish identity but thought when I recognized the truth of Yeshua in my 20's that meant letting go of my Jewish heritage. Ari and Shira's visit to a church I was pastoring in 2008 began a reawakening of my roots. So, it just felt right when I was invited to take part in Maoz' vision to see all of Israel saved.

Chip

I first heard about Maoz when I lived in Israel as a teenager in the 1990's. In a recent visit to Jerusalem with some worship leaders from the UK, we visited the FoA studio. Having worked extensively in the UK in the area of music, I knew what came out of that studio would not only impact Israel, but would somehow affect worship in the UK and I had to be part of it.



MaozGermany

Gabriela

I am Maoz' most recently-added member. I've always had a passion for Israel and had been praying for God to give me a way to do more than just love Israel from a distance. So, when my friends told me about Maoz' work in Israel and that their German branch had an opening, I knew this was God's answer to my prayers.



MaozIreland

Miriam

About 20 years ago I heard Shira speak in Ireland and was shocked to realize that most Irish erroneously accepted Replacement Theology, and this was incredibly detrimental to Ireland's participation in God's end-time plan. I knew I could offer my networking skills to combat this travesty and got involved.

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November 2020

Shalom from Israel,

Even as we gathered all these personal stories from our staff, we found ourselves in wonder of how **God has orchestrated each step, each person, each God-encounter** for everyone He has brought to Maoz for His purposes. It is remarkable to see in all these stories how their investment in Maoz has helped them realize their own God-inspired dreams. **And that is exactly how God works.** He uses all of our circumstances to bring about *our* dreams for *His* purposes.

While we get to enjoy the Maoz team on a daily basis, we wanted you to get to know them as well —because—as a Maoz partner, **this team is YOUR team.** Their wins are **YOUR wins.** The fruit of their labor is the fruit of **YOUR effort**, as well.

This year has held incredible challenges as well as unique stories of triumph that only adversity can bring. We will never forget the rush of distributing funds just before the lockdowns to singles and families who, **forbidden to go to work during the two lockdowns of Passover and Sukkot were simply unable to buy food.** We experienced an incredible sense of purpose and duty—**Israel needed what we had to offer.**

Our FoA musicians did not take their role for granted during this time either, and worked long and crazy hours recording music with FoA artists like **Shiloh Ben Hod, Birgitta Veksler, the Sakhnini Brothers and Evan Levine**, to name a few. In turn, they couldn't help but feel God's appreciation when the studio was given special permission to stay open during the spring months-long lockdown. After all, **worship is essential.**

Often it is the years of plenty that **yield unimaginable fruit**, but it was this year's pruning that brought the fruitfulness to the forefront for Maoz in a way **only God can orchestrate.** This team of "incredibles" is truly a tapestry of lives, built around HIS Kingdom agenda for Maoz—to **make believers STRONG in Israel.**

We thank you for your continued support and pray that as **your story intertwines with the story of Maoz**, you will find yourself in this same tapestry of God-fulfilled dreams.

For the future of Israel,

Ari and Shira Sorko-Ram & Kobi and Shani Ferguson

Ari & Shira Sorko-Ram *Kobi and Shani Ferguson*

