



Moti ministering
at Tiferet Yeshua
congregation in
Tel Aviv

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ISRAEL'S FIRST **INDIGENOUS** *Pastor?*

By **Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson**

You are about to witness a historic moment for believers in Israel.

Birthing in 1995 by my parents Ari and Shira Sorko-Ram, **Tiferet Yeshua was the first solely Hebrew-speaking, Spirit-filled congregation planted in Israel since Bible times.**

Moti Cohen was among the early fruits of the street outreach in Tel Aviv when Maoz Israel and Tiferet Yeshua joined forces with several local ministries in the late 1990s.

Just a few weeks ago, Moti was instated as the new pastor of Tiferet Yeshua (Hebrew for the “Glory of Yeshua”), the congregation he has been a part of since he was 16 years old.

Moti is notably the first Israeli-born pastor who doesn't speak English.




Keep reading to find out why this is so significant.

By Mail:
Maoz Israel 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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Moti and several other young people started a group called “Neged”—a Hebrew acronym that roughly translates, “Youth of the Tel Aviv Area” and also means “resistance of the status quo”!

The Backstory

I was a teenager in high school when Moti Cohen first popped into my world. He had a ponytail, loved Metallica and was always surrounded by other kids. From the earliest memories I have, I had witnessed to my friends, and I remember many of them showing interest. But Moti was the first person I ever led to the Lord. (You can read his full testimony in the February 2022 article, *“The Only One Who Made it Out”*.)

Moti’s decision to follow the Lord took place in 1995 at what has since become a legendary youth conference.

The conference earned its status for three key reasons. First, its size was remarkable for the time—130 youth in attendance! Second, it marked the birth of a youth movement called Souled Out, which changed the paradigm of youth ministry in Israel and eventually evolved



Moti with two friends from his boarding school while attending the legendary youth camp where Moti committed his life to the Lord

into today’s Katzir youth

camps. And third—

as is often the case with

spiritual breakthroughs—it sparked controversy. A local journalist, who happened to stop by our event published a scathing article filled with salacious, criminal accusations against my parents, Tiferet Yeshua and the five other congregations who partnered with us in organizing the conference. All our Messianic leaders were investigated by the police. Her claims were so unfounded that she was ultimately fired and the newspaper’s lawyer wrote us an apology.

A few years later when Moti was volunteering at the Katzir youth camps, he unexpectedly received a prophetic word from one of the camp speakers. He said, “You are like a tree planted by the river with deep roots. Your congregation is this river and everything you need you are going to find there.”

Moti explained, “For me, that Word wasn’t just accurate; it was a promise from God. As someone who deeply values stability and consistency, the ability to anchor myself in one community and grow deep roots was the best gift I could have been given.” He reminisces, “Over the past 30 years I’ve been a part of Tiferet Yeshua. I didn’t just find the usual fellowship. I

After completing his army time, Moti worked at the university, helped out at the congregation and spent several years volunteering in the police force



met my wife, dedicated our children and discovered my calling. And when we found out we were expecting our 6th child, the congregation—together with Maoz and other local ministries—blessed us with a vehicle large enough for our growing family (which is no small feat in Israel, where cars are extremely expensive)."

Generational Blessing

Moti's story has some fascinating side notes.

What comes next demonstrates just how much our steps are ordered by the Lord—even in the midst of apparent chaos.

Tiferet Yeshua was founded in our basement in Ramat Hasharon during my high school years. As the congregation grew, we eventually outgrew that space and relocated to a building in the heart of Tel Aviv for a season. We were there for probably a year or two until, on an otherwise ordinary Wednesday, the person in charge of the place abruptly decided that our congregation was no longer welcome to meet in that building, effective immediately.

My dad looked frantically across Tel Aviv to find a place where we could possibly hold our Shabbat service in three days. Avi Mizrahi, pastor of the congregation 'Adonai Roi' at the time, heard about the situation and graciously offered his place since his congregation met

on a different day. We survived the first service and for a while, both congregations met in the same place. Adonai Roi eventually relocated and we were able to rent that hall where Tiferet Yeshua continues to meet until this day.

Moti's dad was a professional plumber at the time. One day when the coffee corner in the congregation was having plumbing issues, he asked his dad to come fix it. When his father arrived at the location, he was shocked. "Do you know what this place is?" he asked. "Yes," Moti answered, "this is where our congregation meets every Shabbat."

His father smiled and said, "This place used to be an event hall. Your mother and I were married in this very place, and you had your Brit Mila (baby dedication) here."

Eventually, Moti's own children would have their baby dedications and Bar Mitzvahs in the same facility. Needless to say, the location has already been a blessing for three generations!

The Best Kind of Tourists

Moti recalls, "I remember many times over the years when tour groups would visit Israel. The most fascinating tourists were ones who kept up with the **Maoz Israel Report**.



As someone who deeply values stability and consistency, the ability to anchor myself in one community and grow deep roots was the best gift I could have been given. Over the past 30 years I've been a part of Tiferet Yeshua. I didn't just find the usual fellowship. I met my wife, dedicated our children and discovered my calling.

They were always in the know about so many things happening in Israel. Among the stories of the growing Body in Israel were updates about me.

Meeting them felt a bit like being in the movie *'The Truman Show,'* where you just think you're living your life on your own, but in reality, so many people are watching you from the outside. They would come up to me time after time and excitedly tell me how they had followed my story and prayed for me since I was a teen. It was very moving to me that strangers from overseas saw me as valuable enough to include me in their prayers for years. It also helped me realize the importance of what God was doing in my life in the context of the salvation and restoration of Israel."

First Employee

For three years after his army service, Moti worked at a local university and volunteered at the congregation.

Moti and Ari Sorko-Ram immersing a new believer. Moti has long been Ari's right-hand man. And while different leaders and elders have come and gone over the years, Moti remained a steady force even when Ari passed the leadership baton to Asher Intrater, who later turned it over to Gil Afriat.

When he was offered a job at the congregation, he resisted the idea. As an Israeli, he didn't understand the idea of full-time ministry. "I love volunteering," he said, "why would you pay me?"

Soon, however, he understood the significance of being able to entirely focus on developing the congregation and became Tiferet Yeshua's first employee. Once he



Moti has disciplined many boys through the multi-year process of their Bar Mitzva dedication.

was no longer spending his days working at the university, there was more time to develop the youth ministry, among other things. Moti and several other young people started a group called “Neged”—a Hebrew acronym that roughly translates, “Youth of the Tel Aviv Area” and also means “resistance of the status quo”! They gathered teens from different congregations in the area for activities. That group still exists today, and even Moti’s teenagers are now a part of it.

As a child, Moti lived in a poor neighborhood and would regularly have to step over drug addicts to get to his building entrance. It was out of his early exposure and deep compassion for the marginalized that his outreach, called “*Feed Tel Aviv*” was born. For years, *Feed Tel Aviv* has supplied more than 1,000 hot meals a month to the lost of Tel Aviv. And Moti shared joyfully, “Today, I have friends—brothers and sisters in the Lord—who were once drug addicts and are now clean and walking in the ways of God.”

Full Circle

This past fall during the High Holidays, Gil, who has led Tiferet Yeshua for the past nine years, approached Moti about taking on the role as head of the congregation. Moti admittedly had never considered becoming the pastor. He enjoyed the stability of holding down the fort and being in every service. Additionally, he doesn’t know English.

Though Moti had completed postgraduate studies in theology and Biblical counseling, his dyslexia had made it difficult for Moti to study other languages his whole life. Why, you ask, would English be a criteria for a pastor of a Hebrew-speaking congregation?

Well, in the early years of the growth of the Body in Israel, congregational services were usually held in homes and the overhead costs were limited to snacks and folding chairs. As congregations grew too large for homes, spaces were rented for meetings. The major issue with this is that the two greatest expenses in Israel are vehicles and real estate.

This will likely come as a shock to most, but renting a space in a major city for a congregation of 100-200



In addition to all of his responsibilities, Moti started Feed Tel Aviv where he and a team make and distribute meals to the poor

people (large for Israel) can easily cost upwards of \$20,000 a month. And a growing congregation will require a van (around \$100,000), as there are always those who need rides to and from the congregation because there is no public transportation on Shabbat. That is an impossible load to put on the tithes and offerings of a couple hundred middle class Israelis who already pay high taxes and rent on their apartments.

The Good and Less Good News

The good news is that Christians around the world have pitched in and helped cover the cost of many of these expenses. This engagement by the Church has done wonders to the Body’s growth in Israel! And so, I tread carefully to explain the following problem.

The less good news is that in order to raise funds for their congregations, Israeli pastors must constantly travel and speak, as well as advertise their activities abroad to attract donors. Some pastors can spend six months out of the year outside of Israel. *The greatest consequence of this issue is that no pastor of a congregation with a building in Israel can dedicate all their attention to their people.*

This challenging scenario affects the quality of discipleship and ministry Israelis



Four generations of Tiferet Yeshua's pastors (from left to right Asher Intrater, Gil Afriat, Moti Cohen and founding pastor Ari Sorko-Ram)

receive in their congregations. It can also jeopardize ministry to new believers, who may be scared away by their stories being shared all over the internet for fundraising purposes. But what other choice do leaders have?

If you consider the average gift is around \$100, Israeli pastors will interact with hundreds, if not thousands of people annually—who each want to sit for coffee and hear testimonies and see pictures...thousands of people who are not their congregants. The gifts are lifegiving,

but the methodology is relentless, demanding everything in its pursuit.

I hesitate to discuss this because I do not wish to discourage Christians from being wholeheartedly engaged in the physical and spiritual restoration of Israel. But I believe in the sincerity of our readers and partners who wish to make the most positive impact possible for the Kingdom of God in Israel. And for this to happen, we need a paradigm change.

We can reset this model together. The vision is for local pastors to teach their congregants about tithing and generosity while Christians can commit to supporting an Israeli congregation as a matter of principle that is not dependent on a pastor actively fundraising. Read the “Shalom from Jerusalem” section in the [Maoz Israel Report](#) to find out how!

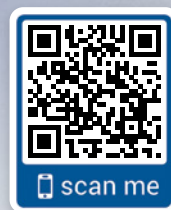
This is one reason Moti's appointment as pastor of Tiferet Yeshua congregation is so significant.

It is why he is arguably the first “indigenous pastor” of a sizeable congregation in Israel—the first native-born Israeli pastor who doesn't speak English, whose eyes will only see his people before him.

This is just the beginning, but it could be the beginning of something great! ■



Tiferet Yeshua's congregation in Tel Aviv



Shalom from Jerusalem,

Moti's new role in leadership is such a beautiful, full-circle story for me. **We've walked with him and watched him grow from a rowdy teenager into the solid man of God and father that he is today.**

For some time now, my heart has been burdened to see pastors just be allowed to pastor. **The weight of so much simultaneous financial responsibility contributes to much of the burnout we find among leaders in Israel. And we already have so few Israeli-born leaders.**

That's why when Moti told me about his English language barrier I actually became excited. **What looks like a disadvantage to others is actually the most incredible opportunity to prove this can be done.**

This opportunity doesn't eliminate the congregation's financial needs. But it does give YOU a chance to change the paradigm of how congregations are developed in Israel.

Whether you want to commit to giving or praying, we can help you find a congregation to give to directly. **Or, if you do not know Israeli congregations well enough to choose, our designated Israeli congregations fund goes specifically to this cause.**

As a ministry, networking with people overseas to inform the Church about Israel and raising funds for worthy causes **are the important roles we have played in Israel for decades.**

One of the ways Maoz has worked to alleviate this pressure is by **supporting congregations behind the scenes. Over the years we have quietly covered rent for meeting places and even pastor's salaries so they can be more focused on the sacred task of shepherding.** We pass on thousands of dollars a month to multiple congregations and frequently are able to offer leadership and stability during tumultuous times.

And so of course—as Moti takes on his new responsibilities—we will continue to support Tiferet Yeshua as we have since its inception in 1995.

There are many exciting prophecies and current events happening in Israel. But the everyday grind that occurs in Israel's local congregations is **where long term impact will take place.**

Your trust is valuable to us. And we are honored that you would join us in helping **protect indigenous leaders in Israel like Moti.**

In His service,



Kobi & Shani Ferguson

Kobi Ferguson
President & CEO

Shani Ferguson
COO



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