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maoz israel
 REPORT

DECEMBER 2024 | CHESHVAN - KISLEV 5785

Overcoming **EVIL WITH GOOD**

FIVE I STAND WITH ISRAEL STORIES DURING WAR

Kids and activities
 from Israel's Sports
 and Leadership
 Camp

By **Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson**

The Bible tells us of evil forces that will come against us as we fulfill God's will and work, but encourages us not to be overcome by evil. Rather, we are to overcome evil with good!

Overcoming evil with good can look like kindness when someone doesn't deserve it. It can look like words of life from the Bible to those who don't know of God's goodness and mercy. It can also look like creating a healing environment for people who have experienced extreme trauma.

As per tradition, the December **Maoz Israel Report** is dedicated to giving you a small taste of the activities of the "*I Stand with Israel*" benevolence fund. And so, these are just some of the many impactful ways we've spent this historic year of war in Israel.

To make it easier for the people of God who wanted to help Israel's war-relief efforts, we launched a campaign called "**Israel Needs Me.**"

IsraelNeedsMe.com was shared everywhere from billboards and church bulletins to radio stations and TV shows. Believers from around the world answered the call and supported us in accomplishing so much in 2024. Beyond our publishing of Bibles and life-changing books, producing worship music, supporting local congregations, and promoting God's heart for Israel among the nations, here are just a few of the more unique stories of *I Stand with Israel's* war-time endeavors that you made possible this year.

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Sports & LEADERSHIP CAMP

Semi-professional sports have proven to be an incredible tool to help kids feel safe in a structured but exciting environment. Yet the Sports and Leadership Camp is not just about letting off steam. The summer camp's unique schedule that includes mentoring, devotional time, team worship and even harp lessons is one of the reasons **Maoz has for years sponsored it and has repeatedly sent its staff to take part as team counselors.**

One of the moms shared, "My son has been to several camps, but this one is his favorite—especially in the midst of the pressures of the war. They had so much



Alisa from Maoz who has years of experience working with kids and orphanages is always excited about serving at the Summer SLC

fun running around and in the meetings, the presence of God was so strong. Kids started coming up and asking for prayer and confessing sins that they hadn't even addressed in the messages. Other kids laid hands on each other and wept. So much healing took place, it was amazing to watch!" ●

Sing A NEW SONG

We met **Limor** in one of Israel's many evacuee hotels early on in the war. I say early, but it was several months into it—enough time to get sick of sitting around and realizing this war was going to take a while. That is when Limor decided that learning music was something that

would help pass the time as well as give voice and healing to much of the turmoil families were experiencing.

Limor took us to several places in the hotel where lessons were taking place and



Shani Ferguson meets with Limor Livneh from Kibbutz Yad Mordechai near Gaza

a storage space where instruments were lent out for practice. Limor shared the vision of making the lessons and instruments available. Now, as these evacuees are returning to their kibbutzim (villages) down south, the program is expanding from hotel rooms to designated centers in several locations near Gaza.

ISWI joined in and purchased instruments so that committed individuals could spend more time practicing. We also invested in basic recording equipment so they could develop song-writing skills.

When Israel crossed the Red Sea into deliverance from their enslavers, their first action as a free people was to write a song and worship their God. This is what we are believing for today as we pray for deliverance

once again from our enemies! ●



Evacuees take darbukah (Middle East drum) lessons and learn to play together. The lessons are both educational and therapeutic.



Will shares about his experience at an Irish Bible study

Maaz INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERS

Will never dreamed that selling his printing business in Arizona and moving to a kibbutz (village) near Gaza to help restore the damage caused by the October 7th Hamas attacks would earn him a trip to Ireland and a meeting with Israel's president—but it did!

The Ireland visit happened because Israel gives out visitor visas only three months at a time. In between visas, volunteers must leave the country for a bit. As a Maoz volunteer, we wanted Will's time outside of Israel to be meaningful. Since he had recently discovered some Irish blood in his lineage, we thought it would be perfect to send him to visit the Maoz branch in Ireland (**Maoz Israel is the first and only recognized Messianic organization in Ireland by the way!**).

Our Maoz team showed him around the stunning Irish landscapes, but Will came back most impressed by the people and his encounters with them.

"Israelis think most Irish hate them, but I had conversations with maybe a hundred of them and only found two who were adamantly anti-Israel, and only one of those two refused to even speak with

me. The rest weren't against Israel, and were so thankful I was able to give my personal testimony and a firsthand witness of my experience in Israel as a Christian and a non-Jew. I realized the only thing solidly anti-Israel in Ireland—is the media," he shared.

Will returned to the Kibbutz Nir Am where his hard work and sense of purpose for being in Israel **has become legendary among the soldiers stationed in the area**. When the President of Israel came down to plant a tree as a symbolic gesture, Will was the one up at 6:00 am digging the hole and picking the tree that would go in the ground.

At first the secret service was suspicious of him and wouldn't allow him near the President, until enough of the locals insisted the two meet! When Will shared a bit of what he does in the day to day— including digging that hole for the tree, the President smiled and whispered loudly, "Shhh, they're supposed to think I dug that!" ●

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Israel's Amputee Football (Soccer) League players come from all over the country twice a week and practice late into the night

Football (SOCCER) ON ONE LEG

At 36, Tzach, the captain of the Israeli Amputee Football League (IAFL) has built what he considers “a team.” But for those on the team, he has created something much deeper—a lifeline and a second family.

The team is made up of amputees who have lost limbs due to accidents, diseases—and of course, those disabled from the current war. The players can use crutches and one working leg and the goalies, one arm. Team members travel from all over the country twice a week to practice. Practices also include treatment from physiotherapists and provides invaluable emotional and mental support for teammates. The highlight is when they fly abroad to represent Israel as they compete against other countries.

On Oct 7th last year the team was slated to play and win a game that would bump them up yet another grade in the league. They, however, woke up that morning to horrifying reports, texts and uncensored video clips of the atrocities taking place back home.

Tzach founded the team back in 2020, which makes Israel the youngest team in European Amputee sports. Tzach was joined by Sharon Paz, who had, over the course of some 20 years, coached all kinds of players—youth, women, men. But if you ask him, he considers the amputees he coaches today to be the most people he has ever worked with.

They began competing for fun—an added challenge for the process of healing and bonding as a team. Then they started winning. They beat Ireland, Germany, Belgium, Scotland...and suddenly they found themselves being moved up in the league ranks.

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As the war progressed, there were so many new amputees, the need for a team like this only grew.

The IAFL's presence in games abroad opens up valuable opportunities to build interpersonal ties with other countries—a crucial step in combatting the Islamic strategy of isolating Israel.

On one hand, the team's inclusive nature that boasts Jews and Arabs, secular and religious, politically liberal and conservative, **is a testimony to the freedom of worship and thought, which is so rarely found in the Middle East.** On the other hand, all team members are perceived by outsiders simply as "Israeli" which places them in danger when they play in countries with active antisemitic sentiments.

While Israel as a people are proud of the team's accomplishments, the government has not granted the team official status which would give it a budget for flights, considerable health insurance policies and security detail. Those expenditures, for the meantime, must be raised benevolently. Seeing this cause as both beneficial for the recovery of Israelis from war trauma as well as the impact they have internationally on

behalf of Israel, **ISWI is proud to join in and cover some of these expenses and are looking forward to a long-lasting relationship with the league.**

IT'S NOT A GAME

For the most part, losing a limb tends to make people a more decent kind of human being. So, despite the political divisiveness of the war in Gaza, most of the opposing teams do not show open hostility. They are also considerate of the rigorous security precautions the Israeli players must have during tournaments (such as the complete lockdown of hotel entrances at certain hours, etc.).

But this year, the Turkish team made headlines in the most recent European championship held in France when they turned their backs on the Israeli team during Israel's pregame national anthem. They also refused to shake hands and used their crutches to spell out Gaza at the end of the match. Turkish fans also chimed in by cursing the Israeli players the entire time.

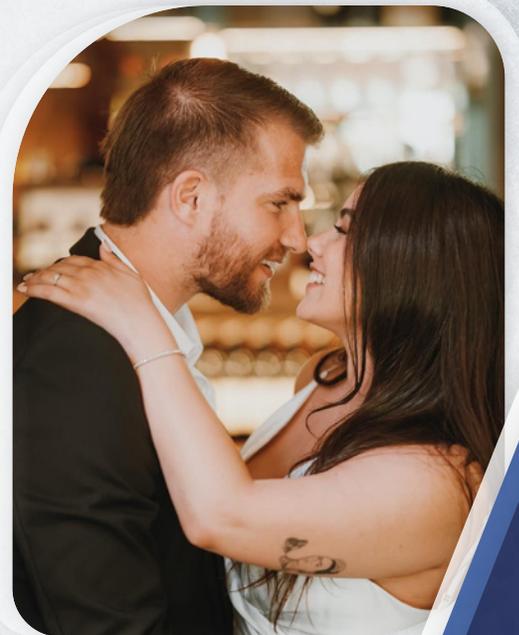
The hostilities mostly backfired as the Israelis' calm response to the severe unsportsmanlike behavior turned the hearts of many, who were previously "undecided," in favor of Israel. "We've heard so many bad things about Israel," the French locals told them, "But we now see how you react to such treatment and it shows what type of people you are and what type of people your enemies are." ●

INSPIRATION & RESILIENCE

One of the many inspiring stories of the team is Ben Benjamin and Gali Segel. Ben was already playing professional soccer and had just gotten engaged to the love of his life when one week later, on October 7th he and his fiancé, Gali, found themselves crowded in a small roadside bomb shelter.

Hamas terrorists indiscriminately threw 4 grenades inside the shelter packed with people. Both Ben and his fiancé, who were further inside the shelter, survived, but each lost their right leg.

Ben had 3 surgeries, Gali had 14. The journey was not easy, but their rehabilitation, iconic wedding (photo right) with sparkly prosthetic legs (photo left) and his joining the Israeli Amputee Football Team, all won over the hearts of the nation as a symbol of the resilience of our nation.



Ukraine REFUGEES IN ISRAEL'S WAR

Irina fled the war in Ukraine only to end up in another war in Israel—the most intense since its rebirth in 1948. In Ukraine she managed a non-profit for orphans and special needs children. The non-profit is still functioning but her grown children and grandchildren fled to Israel. She followed them here wanting to stay with her family. Israel allowed her refugee status but offered no financial benefits. As the number of soldiers in need of physical care from injuries grew, she spent time studying massage therapy. **I Stand with Israel's** war relief efforts sponsored her training and today she cares for many suffering patients; including the patient who just wrote her this note:

*Irina,
I wanted to thank you for your dedicated care. The doctors wanted me to undergo serious procedures, but I decided to try your natural methods. After a month and a half of your care I have experienced incredible relief from the unbearable pain I had in my joints. I am so appreciative of your support and attentiveness in this process.*

In Ukraine, Irina managed a non-profit for orphans and special needs children.

The non-profit is still functioning but her grown children and grandchildren fled to Israel. She followed them here wanting to stay with her family.





Hag Sameach (Happy Holidays) from Jerusalem!

For the athletes of the national **Israeli Amputee Football League**, this is more than a game.

For **Will who sold his business** to come work in the unforgiving sun and icy desert nights near Gaza, this is a destiny.

For those **returning to the villages near Gaza** after a year of evacuation, **Limor's** music program is chicken soup for the soul.

For **Ukrainian refugees like Irina**, caring for Israelis during their own war is a way to give back.

For **young children growing in the Lord** while learning how to become leaders in their circle of influence, the sky is the limit.

The **best part** about all these stories is the role **Maoz supporters** play in bringing them to life.

The projects funded by **ISWI** are designed to strengthen believers who are struggling as well as build bridges between Messianic Jews and the larger Jewish community. (Many Christians don't realize Jews have long been hesitant about building relationships with the Messianic community because of poor treatment by the Church in the past.)

This year **ISWI** sponsored everything from leadership training to therapy training and treatment and from music lessons for young worshipers to sports teams for amputees.

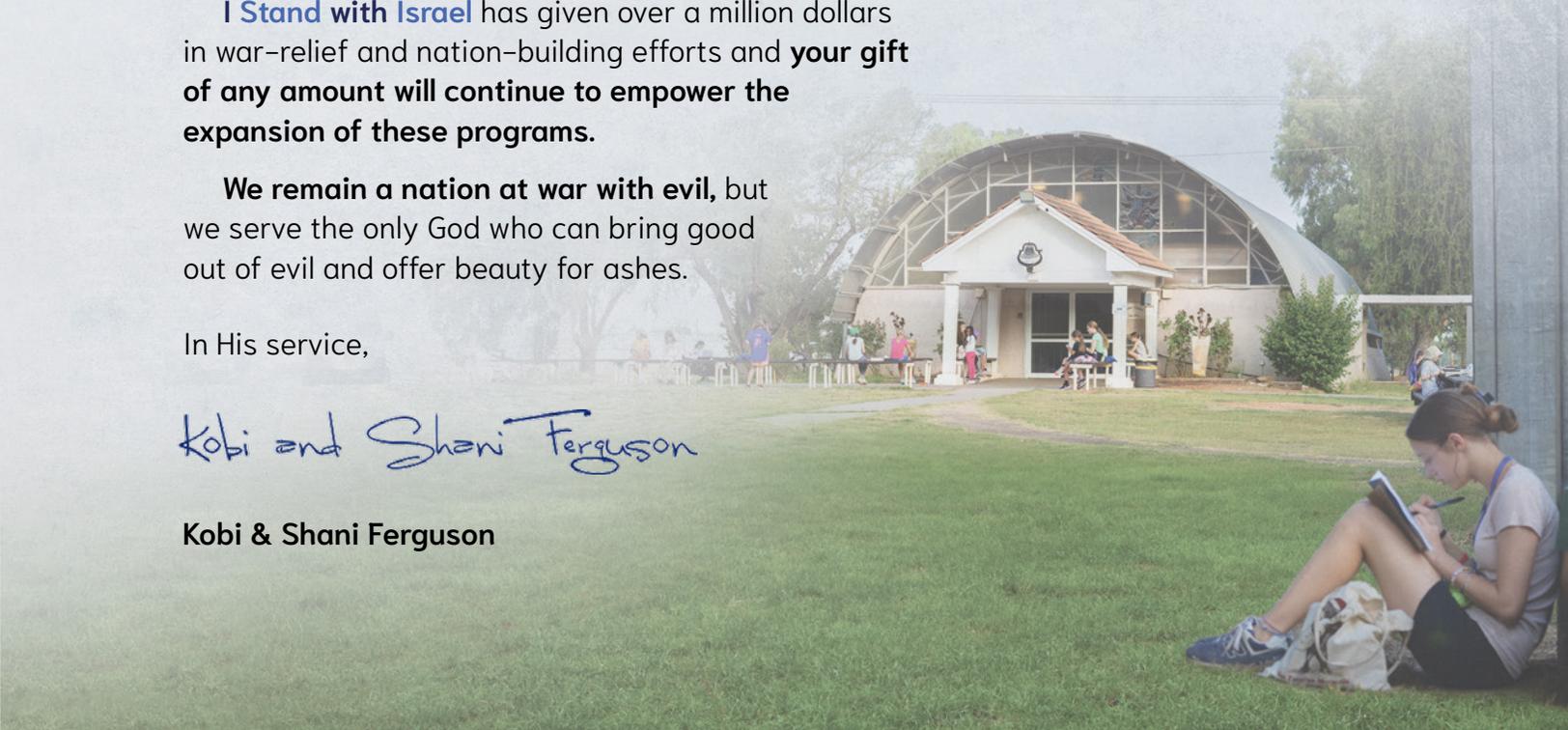
I Stand with Israel has given over a million dollars in war-relief and nation-building efforts and **your gift of any amount will continue to empower the expansion of these programs.**

We remain a nation at war with evil, but we serve the only God who can bring good out of evil and offer beauty for ashes.

In His service,

Kobi and Shani Ferguson

Kobi & Shani Ferguson





Happy
Hannukah

From Ari & Shira
Sorko-Ram,
Kobi & Shani Ferguson,
their children and the
Maoz Israel team
in Israel

