



אלהי מצודי Maoz Israel

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R E P O R T

A Muslim from Galilee Meets Another Galilean

A testimony by Nour Yassin given at Congregation Tiferet Yeshua, Tel Aviv

I grew up in a large Arab Israeli family in Galilee. As the firstborn of six children, I received the honor and attention traditionally conferred upon the eldest son of a Muslim home. Allowed to do just about whatever I wanted, with little restraint, I was spoiled, self-centered and expected everyone to wait on me. Even when I disturbed the prayers in the mosque, no one corrected me, so I assumed I was the center of the whole world.

My family lived in a house owned by my wealthy grandfather. My extended family lived nearby - but there were disadvantages to such close quarters. I can say that the lack of privacy harmed my parents' relationship with each other.

Another difficulty was the fact that my mother came from a city (Acco) and my father grew up in a village where they live until today. My father's family had the mentality of village folk and they found it difficult to accept into their family a girl from the city. She never felt like an insider in the family and suffered much because of it.

Although my grandfather was, at one time very rich with many acres of land and much money, he lost most of it through poor business deals and generously helping other family members in trouble. Both he and my own father had generous hearts and both always seemed to be giving everything we had to others. The problem was that there never was enough for our own family.

Once my father had an accident and was to be paid a large sum of insurance money. Incredibly, he was swindled out of that money, which left him with almost nothing.

We finally in-herited a piece of land, but again my father gave it to relatives who were in need. Father was good and naïve, and in the Middle East, others take advantage of such a person. Because we were so poor, our family could not afford normal things that were important to children - like getting sweets or new clothes during the Muslim holidays.

As long as I can remember, it was always my goal to get rich and seek revenge on all the people around me -



ARI SORKO-RAM, PASTOR OF CONGREGATION TIFERET YESHUA, PRAYS FOR NOUR.



“My parents taught me about love, but what I saw around me was hatred and jealousy - the mentality of Islam. I dreamed of some day getting a gun which would help me carry out my plans.”

because I felt they made my family feel so inferior. My parents taught me about love, but what I saw around me was hatred and jealousy - the mentality of Islam. I dreamed of some day getting a gun which would help me carry out my plans.

When my father was young, the Israeli army built a base nearby. In doing so, they annexed land that our village claimed was ours. The base made it difficult for us to get to our olive trees, and from then on we always had the Israeli army in front of our eyes.

But we didn't talk about the Jews at home or in school, and, really, I didn't think about them. We were fairly isolated in our little village except for the protests of Land Day which has been commemorated every year among Israeli Arabs since 1976 when more Arab land in Galilee was appropriated to create industrial sites in the north.

And then the Intifada broke out. As I witnessed the hatred of many Muslims for the Jews, I felt as if I wanted to kill them myself.

As I grew older, I began visiting the cities in northern Israel - Acco, Haifa - and there I saw Jews and Moslems liv-

ing together in peace. Deep down, I seemed to realize that something was wrong with my hatred. I even started to hate the Arabs who sometimes seemed to me to be the source of all the trouble. In my confusion, I would try to figure out just what was right and what was wrong.

I would think, "What idiots those terrorists were! What do they need all this killing for?" I felt fear for my own family. What if something happened to them in this war zone? As a defense mechanism, I began to take on an attitude of not caring for anything or anybody. I was as far from religion as one can imagine. I wanted to know God, but I just couldn't reach Him.

When I finished high school, I moved to Tel Aviv. At that point I was bursting with hatred toward the Jewish people. I now have the opportunity as I stand before this [Jewish] congregation to ask forgiveness from everybody for the hatred that came from the devil and

from misunderstanding.

When I arrived here I started to work at hotels and then I also began to get acquainted with all kinds of Jewish people and I felt perplexed and bewildered as I found Jews that I liked. Here in the Middle East, your identity is wrapped up in your religion. I was trying to figure out who I was.

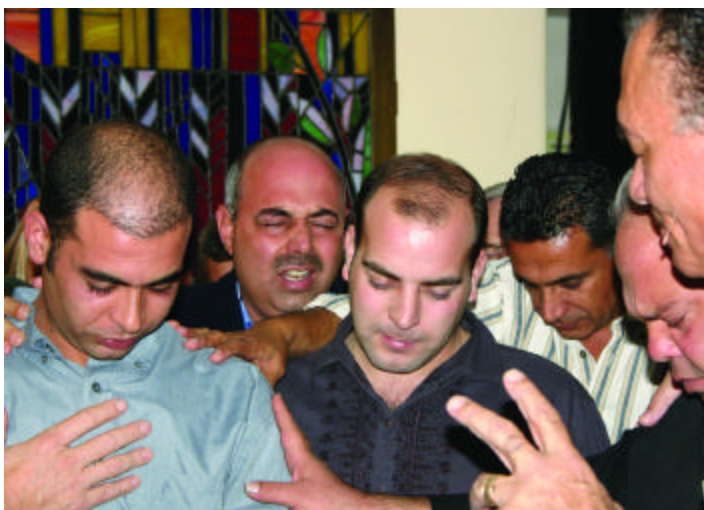
I had always observed the ritual commands of Islam - for example, fasting from sun up to sun down during the month of Ramadan.

But as a Muslim, I knew we were supposed to do other things besides fast - like refrain from bad words and live a straight life for the whole month. Yet, I personally didn't keep any of those other commands. Islam didn't change me, and it was boring - not a religion I found worth loving. But I always found myself talking to others about religion.

“ I had always observed the ritual commands of Islam... Yet, I personally didn't keep any of those other commands. Islam didn't change me.”

There was this old sheikh with whom I spent hours trying to get to the source of truth.

On the other hand, I started to take an interest in Judaism because I was looking for peace and love - the two things I thought most important in my life and heart. That is why I wanted to get deeper into Judaism and to understand what caused anger, hatred and all the wars. I would spend long



ARABS AND JEWS TOGETHER BLESS NOUR



ARAB LEADERS VISIT OUR CONGREGATION TO HEAR NOUR'S TESTIMONY. BELOW FRONT ROW, LEFT: IBTISSAN AND YOSEF HADDAD, PASTOR OF LEBANESE CONGREGATION, NAHARIYA; VICTOR BAHBAH, PASTOR OF ARAB ASSEMBLIES OF GOD, JAFFA; AND HIS ELDER ELIAS SHA'AWAN. BACK ROW: EDDIE SANTORO, ELDER TIFERET YESHUA; AND ARI.

hours talking with a rabbi who would always tell me: "You are half a Jew inside; it is a pity you are not a Jew!" At the beginning I liked what I heard and even considered converting. But then I began to see that it wasn't what I thought it was - that there were nice words with nothing behind them, and then my anger returned.

I even checked out Christianity, but it didn't seem feasible, as we learn from birth in Islam that God does not have a son. So the deity of Yeshua contradicted my convictions. I couldn't figure out who was right. At times I thought that Islam might be the right religion after all.

Finally, I found myself full of despair and anger at all the people in the world. I lost faith in everyone. My best friends were the sea and moon and everything that didn't move and everything that wasn't human - until one day I was on the

beach promenade and met a guy named Oren. He came up to me and wanted to give me a book. I asked him what it was and he answered that it was about peace.

I laughed and said "What peace? There is no peace. It's all just illusions." But still there was something in my heart that told me to listen to what he had to say. So I said "Ok,

"I thought, : "I am an Arab Muslim, I was born into a Muslim family"... Even if you are not religious, you cannot believe in something else!"

what kind of peace is it?" He told me that it begins between yourself and God and then starts to grow: family, friends, village, city, country, everywhere.

Wow, that sounded good! He asked if I had time and then we sat down and talked and he even prayed for me. I liked very much what I heard. I felt so good, and I felt that this was what I had been looking for all my life.

After that, I was invited to Yacov Damkani's house where Oren lived. I entered the house and one of the strongest, most special and beautiful things I had seen until then was the smile of Simcha Davidov. That is something that I will never forget because it caused a change to happen in me. At that point in my life, I do believe I was looking for just one person that would smile with his whole heart. But

"I entered the house and one of the strongest, most special and beautiful things I had seen until then was the smile of Simcha Davidov."

I hadn't found anyone and thus decided that happiness was all fake. So when I saw Simcha's smile, I was in total shock. I was amazed and said to myself, "This is what I want!" They said, "No problem, the road is simple - it's Yeshua." I said "OK!" But after that the battle started.

SIMCHA DAVIDOV AND YACOV DAMKANI



I thought, "I am an Arab Muslim, I was born into a Muslim family." Not very religious, but all Muslims deal with the issue of



NOUR MET A LOVELY CHRISTIAN WOMAN FROM AUSTRIA. THEY HAVE RECENTLY MARRIED IN EUROPE AND WE ARE WAITING FOR THEM TO RETURN TO ISRAEL. YOU CAN BE SURE WE WILL HAVE A GREAT CELEBRATION FOR THIS NEW COUPLE IN THE LORD!

religious zeal. Even if you are not religious, you cannot believe in something else! I had struggles with the fact that Yeshua is God's Son, that He was crucified - and all kinds of other issues that Islam speaks against. It took me one and a half year after I spoke to Oren, to finally accept the whole truth. But deep inside me, I knew that this was the Truth and the Way and I had nowhere to escape. Nevertheless the battle was very hard.

Sometime later, I visited Yacov and he challenged me and said the things that I needed to hear at that time. He gave me the strength to come to my senses.

Simcha brought me to Congregation Tiferet Yeshua for the first time, and I can tell you, I didn't like you [the members] and I especially didn't like Ari. I was angry with him and even hated him in some way.

Ari, I really ask you to forgive me....

I then decided that I was not coming back here anymore. But then I came another time and, again, I decided that this was not the place for me. But this whole time I stayed in contact with Yacov, Simcha, and Oren. I continued to ask questions and we talked. But still the battle inside me raged on; many times I almost broke down. I wanted to run away from it all. I even thought about committing suicide because it was all too hard for me. Where is the truth?

One day I screamed, "God, I have no more strength. I will give you half a year. You will either show me the truth or I will come to you [i.e. kill myself]!" This was the first time in my life that I really prayed from the bottom of my heart. I didn't see anything, but fell into a deep sleep. Until then, I had trouble falling asleep and didn't sleep well. But the night I prayed to Him, "Show me the truth because I don't have any more strength; I am so tired and so frustrated," I slept through the whole night.

I was living next to an outdoor market where I was working. I hated the place and I hated the people there. When I woke up, I went down to work, and suddenly I saw everyone in a new light. I told each and everyone that I loved them! They all looked at me strangely and asked if I were drunk. I didn't know myself what was happening, but I worked the whole day and I felt great. In the evening I called a friend. I dialed her number, but somehow instead it seems that I dialed Oren's number. Again, I couldn't understand what was happening, but suddenly I felt something inside me very strong.

I found myself telling Oren I wanted to be immersed in water and to follow Yeshua. He asked me when. "Now!" I

“The moment that I went under water, I saw my whole life before me - all the black, all the sins that I had forgotten about. I saw many sad things and bad things I had done. After that I saw something white and beautiful...I felt as if I could fly!”

told him. Since it was already night we arranged to do it the next morning. Yacov came to pick me up and we went into the Mediterranean Sea. It was the 4th of January, 2000. The moment that I went under water, I saw my whole life before me - all the black, all the sins that I had forgotten about. I saw many sad things and bad things I had done. After that, I saw something white and beautiful. When I came out of the water I felt really strong. I felt as if I could fly!

I moved into Yacov's house, and I started coming regularly to the congregation with Simcha. Simcha was and still is part of this congregation, so I started coming here with him.

In the beginning, I felt unconnected to everything going on here - the music, the worship - it wasn't for me and I always sat in a corner. I looked at everyone and judged everyone, and many times I told myself that I didn't want to come anymore.

Now I have the chance to thank Simcha, Yacov and Ari - all of you that you accepted me here, that you loved me and that you kept encouraging me even though I pushed you away.

One day, I said, "That's it! I can't take it anymore!" Then it was as if I heard God say to me, "Listen child! You are fooling around too much! Either you change and do something with yourself or just be quiet!" I decided to do something....

One day I decided to invite the young people of the congregation to Yacov's house for fellowship. More people than I expected showed up and it was really a wonderful time. I felt very happy. From that day, God began to change my heart. I began to love the congregation, and I began to love the people.

"I stepped out of the meeting for a moment, and then I saw Ari standing outside the door alone... His face was full of light, and he was smiling."



AFTER NOUR FINISHED SPEAKING, HE ASKED TO WASH ARI'S FEET. THEN ARI WASHED HIS. THE CONGREGATION WAS MOVED TO TEARS. WHAT A GREAT GOD WE HAVE WHO CAN CHANGE A MAN'S HEART AND HAS MADE US ALL LITERALLY NEW CREATURES!

On a Wednesday, not long after that, I was at the young adults' Life Group. I stepped out of the meeting for a moment, and then I saw Ari standing outside the door, alone. It was dark, and he was leaning against the wall and looking at us through the glass door. His face was full of light, and he was smiling. Somehow, God made me see his heart, his true heart, and it really touched me.

I continued on my way and suddenly it hit me. What a Father! What a God that gave us Ari! Such a good man and so real! Then I understood that he is the right man that God has put in place here, and I felt so sorry that I hadn't understood this earlier. I have asked forgiveness from Ari, and now I do it again.

As time passed, God made me see more and more of Ari's heart, his loyalty and his love. I began to love him more and more and more. I have no words to express how much I love all of you, and I thank God for this wonderful family that He gave me, this great blessing, because without Yeshua, without the truth, I would now be dead, an alcoholic or just lost. I was full of frustration, fear and worry and normally people like me - they are lost!

So, thank you all, thank you Yacov, Elisheva, Simcha, Bella, Oren and Ronen, Sharon, Ari, Shira, Asher, Eddie, Jackie. Thank you all for the love, the loyalty, that you accepted me...

Yacov has been an evangelist for many years in Israel. He and his wife, Elisheva, are members of Congregation Tiferet Yeshua. Simcha, also an evangelist, is a member of Tiferet Yeshua along with his wife Bella. Sharon is also a member. Oren and Ronen are believers from the south of Israel. Eddie and Jackie are elders of Tiferet Yeshua. ■

From an Israeli Perspective

The Road out of Gaza

By Shira Sorko-Ram

The number of Jews in Israel is 5.2 million. The number of Arabs living in Israel-governed areas is approximately 5.1 million, according to UN numbers (which are received from Palestinian sources.)

Although recent studies* conclude that the Arab population in Israel, Judea, Samaria and Gaza may be considerably lower (as low as 3.8 million total) the fact remains that the average Arab Israeli woman's birthrate is 4.8 compared to the Jewish Israeli woman with 2.7 children. And amazingly, the birthrate of Arab women living in Gaza is literally the highest in the world - 7.4 births per woman, according to University of Haifa's professor Arnon Sofer. (NewsMax.com.19Oct.2002)

ISRAEL'S DILEMMA UNLIKE ANY OTHER IN THE WORLD

So what's the deal? The issue, of course, is that Israel was founded as both a *democratic* state and a *Jewish* state. To those of us who believe the establishment of the modern state of Israel was overshadowed by the prophetic purposes of God, we can prayerfully ponder this unsolvable predicament.

1. To maintain itself as a democratic state, *Israel cannot perpetuate rule over several million Arabs who have no franchise to vote.* That is not a democratic state.

2. On the other hand, in order for Israel to remain a democratic state, *she must keep a Jewish majority which has a tradition and culture of democracy.* She cannot sustain a majority of voters who would elect an Islamic mullah or terrorist leader.

3. Furthermore, Israel was established as a Jewish state - the only one in the world. Israel was to be a shelter and a homeland for Jews who had wandered the earth for two millennia. *Again, the only way to survive as a Jewish state is for Israel to maintain a Jewish majority.*

However, there is a minority of Israelis (and we mean a minority) who would be willing to live under "one state" in

Israel's victory over Islam is the supreme embarrassment of Allah, and therefore Israel's demise is Allah's supreme aspiration.

the Holy Land with both Jews and Arabs in a democracy. But 99% of Israeli Jews know this is a pipe dream; of the 17 Arab Muslim states in existence today, there is not a single one of them with a working democracy.

Moreover, Israel is the principal obstacle to Muslim the-



ology of which its ultimate aim is to conquer the world and establish Islamic sharia law. Israel's victory over Islam is the supreme embarrassment of Allah, and therefore Israel's demise is Allah's supreme aspiration.

What have we here? In the simplest of terms: For Israel to remain a Jewish state, she must have a Jewish majority. To remain a democratic state, she cannot rule over a large population of disenfranchised (Arab) citizens. Neither can she afford a Muslim electoral takeover by a rapidly-growing Muslim majority that has no tradition of democracy and hates Israel.

Professor Sofer and others have sounded the alarm that if Israel continues to rule the Arab-occupied areas of the Promised Land, by the year 2020 - just 15 years away - Israel will no longer be a democratic Jewish state. (Ibid.)

ARIEL SHARON'S ONLY CHOICE

This is the reason Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has come to the conclusion that the only possible answer to Israel's dilemma is to get out of Gaza and parts of Judea and Samaria, by turning the land and its Islamic peoples over to the Palestinian Authority.

Actually Israel has been trying for a couple of decades to hand over the heavily populated Arab areas to the Palestinian Authority. But the PA has never cooperated with Israel's single demand that before the lands are turned over to Arab sovereignty, the PA must stop terrorist attacks against Israel. That's all the Palestinians had to do to get their own state years ago - just stop the terror.

Meanwhile, Israelis continues to settle the ancient lands given to Abraham in a covenant from God, creating facts on the ground. Today, there are close to 250,000 Israelis living in the disputed territories of Judea and Samaria.

During the last 10-15 years, terrorist organizations have become bolder and more strident in their declarations that their one and only goal is to destroy Israel and establish an Islamic state in its place. Israel has reluctantly come to believe they mean what they say; terrorism has not stopped because the goal of the PA is not a democratic Muslim Palestinian state next to Israel. That just is not enough to satisfy Allah and his followers.

Sharon's unilateral disengagement from Gaza - slightly larger than twice the size of Washington D.C. - set for July 2005, is different than all past decisions.

This time he is not requiring a thing from the Arabs. In other words, no amount of continued terrorist attacks will stop the Gaza pullout. Sharon simply wants to free himself of the demographic disaster that he sees careening towards the democratic Jewish state. And the world is happy because they believe this is the first step towards establishing a Palestinian state.

So far so good??

Not really. In fact, not at all.

BUSINESS AS USUAL

There are no signs of P.A. Chairman Abbas permanently reigning in the terrorists. Abbas' leadership is basically a continuation of the Arafat-style tactics of denying responsibility and claiming weakness. He has done nothing to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism that is in the DNA of the Palestinian entity (because Palestinian children are brainwashed to hate Jews from kindergarten.) In fact Abbas has agreed to co-op Hamas - the major force behind a four-year suicide bombing campaign and sworn to the destruction of Israel - into their political system.

Hamas leaders in Gaza plan to run for office on July 17,

If some day a Palestinian state is established (and there is no certainty that this will actually occur) Israel will wake up next door to an Islamic terrorist dictatorship.

days before Israel begins her withdrawal from Gaza. *Some* terrorist groups have said they might temporarily halt terrorist attacks under certain conditions. At the right time they will be free to reengage their war against the Jewish democratic state. Their express goal remains unchanged -- to establish a Islamic religious dictatorship under sharia law in the whole of the Middle East.

Nevertheless, President George Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair, along with the U.N. and the rest of the world, are determined to see a Palestinian state rise up along side of Israel. Sharon is resigned to work toward that goal because of the demographic problem which seems insurmountable if Israel retains the lands along with its Arab inhabitants.

Yet, just this week Gaza's Jewish towns were bombarded with 74 mortar shells and two Kassam rockets. And in Gaza, a newly formed band of "Islamic modesty police" murdered an Arab woman who was walking down the street with her fiancé. As we write this article, a 15 year-



old Palestinian has been caught with five pipe bombs on his person, ready to be detonated. Also in the last few weeks, Chairman Abbas has signed the death warrants of 15 Arabs who had reported terrorist activities to the Israeli authori-

“The tension here, the atmosphere here, looks like the eve of civil war. All my life I was defending the lives of Jews. Now for the first time security steps are being taken to protect me from Jews.”

Israel's Prime Minister Ariel Sharon

ties. And there are many more "collaborators" on death row in Arab jails. So much for Abbas' commitment to stop terrorism. (IsraelBehindTheNews.com; 1Apr.05)

No government, not the U.S., not Great Britain, not anyone is really pushing the Palestinians to democratize. Everyone talks about it, but no one is putting his foot down and saying "Thus far and no more." If some day a Palestinian state is established (and there is no certainty that this will actually occur) Israel will wake up next door to an Islamic terrorist dictatorship.

Meanwhile, the evacuation of Gaza is at hand. Orthodox settlers are resigned to evacuating Gaza, but are determined to cause as much disruption to the country as possible by blocking the main highways during heavy traffic hours, especially around Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. There are threats on Sharon's life. Orthodox settlers living in the West Bank who are afraid they will be next in line for evacuation are threatening civil war.

From where Sharon is standing he has 100,000 demonstrators in the street, and the Shin Bet security service saying there are 200 people wanting to assassinate him. His party is completely divided believing he's utterly betrayed his principles by evicting 8,000 settlers from their homes and there's talk among the Shin Bet that they are concerned that some extremist Orthodox Jew may try to blow up the Temple Mount. The people who want to kill Sharon are Jews, not just Palestinians. (pbs.org,newhour/ Israel's Settlement Policy, 11Apr05)

On an NBC interview during Sharon's last trip to the U.S., he said, "The tension here, the atmosphere here, looks like the eve of civil war. All my life I was defending the lives of Jews. Now for the first time security steps are being

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taken to protect me from Jews."

While in the U.S., Sharon warned Bush that Iran, whose number one enemy is Israel, is only one technological step from enriching uranium and from that point achieving nuclear capability is just around the corner. (Jerusalem Post, 12Apr05)

God has checkmated Israel. She will one day understand there is no place to turn, no place to run to, no place to hide but in Him. That is why we Messianic Jews are working with every fiber in us to see our people find the only salvation there is. That is why our precious Arab Christian brothers and sisters in Israel are doing the same.

We have the Hope of Glory, the Prince of Peace, the Answer. No one else does! We are all on our faces looking to God for more opportunities and ways to rapidly reach our people with the Gospel. ■

* New findings presented at a conference of several think tanks in March, 2004, including the American Enterprise Institute and the Heritage Foundation by a prominent team of American and Israeli researchers. (See www.aei.org, The 1.5 Million Population Gap, 10Jan.2005)

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Ari & Shira Sorko-Ram

Dear Maoz Partner,

There is no political solution to the Middle East. None. Nix. Nil. Zero. But there is a spiritual solution.

In the middle of this darkness and confusion are spiritual lighthouses in the cities across Israel - congregations where Jews and Arabs can come and receive the truth and be saved.

Congregation Tiferet Yeshua in downtown Tel Aviv is one of these places of refuge. The ongoing investments of Maoz partners have made possible the growth of the congregation to over 200 adults and about 90 children and teens.

Now we have outgrown our present facility. We are bursting at the seams! Each Shabbat, people line the walls for the first hour of the service until the children leave for their classes.

Our Sabbath services start at 11:00a.m. and end at 3:00p.m. The last hour and a half our members move to the fellowship room for coffee and cake as they interact with unbelievers and newcomers who are coming each week.

It is also a time for our members to encourage each other as they prepare for the next week they will be spending in a world that does not acknowledge Yeshua.

Israeli believers often live and work in an environment hostile to their faith, and so on Shabbat they stay on just to be with other believers. That is why our services last so long. We need each other!

But now the present size of our building is affecting our growth. We have no where to go. Because of the lack of a large enough pool of volunteer teachers and worship leaders, and for many other reasons we won't list here, we do not feel

that at our size it would be wise to go to two regular meetings on Saturday.

We are therefore prayerfully looking throughout downtown Tel Aviv for another facility. We are asking God for a place suitable for an auditorium seating at least 500 people.

Some of you who read this letter will have a deep excitement and desire to see a large and growing, spirit-filled, Hebrew speaking, Messianic Jewish congregation in downtown Tel Aviv.

Today we are all of the above except the large! For right now!

Because of the past intifadas, the economy of Israel has become distorted. Though the economy as a whole is on the rise, the press reports that there are more and more poor from year to year.

According to a Bank of Israel study, 600,000 salaried workers - 30% of the total - are now making \$430 or less per month. This does not include another 200,000 unemployed. The cost of living for a family of four is at least \$2500. So we have many poor - in Israel and in our congregation.

We also have a high number of college students who live "hand to mouth," plus our soldiers who receive pocket change from the army.

With all this, we can gratefully tell you that our congregation is tithing about \$8,500 to \$9,000 per month - which covers rent, taxes and utilities (for our present 1000 square feet.) Maoz Ministries adds another \$6200 per month to cover the remaining expenses.

With a new facility that would give us space for growth and outreach, our rent and utilities could easily rise to \$25,000. Therefore we need your help to make this all-important move to allow us to keep growing.

Maoz ministries is not in debt! We have taken on new outreaches and projects as the Body of our Messiah has invested in Israel through Maoz. But it is now time to make the leap to greater growth.

Will you consider investing an additional \$25, \$50, or \$100 or more per month as an ongoing pledge for a new facility? For the members of Congregation Tiferet Yeshua? For those who have not yet come into the knowledge of salvation through Yeshua? We believe you will help us!

For the fulfillment of God's promises to Israel,

Ari & Shira Sorko-Ram

P.S. Your gift will be greatly appreciated if you are able to begin your pledge now before we sign a new lease, as we will have to pay several months' rent in advance! If you live in the U.S. or Canada, your "rent money" for Tel Aviv can be credited from your account automatically through "EZ-Giving". Just call our office in Dallas: 800-856-7060.