



Oasis

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By **MARTY SHOUB**

Light in the Darkness

It's a beautiful, bright, winter morning, the sort of clear day that is rare in Israel. As I look north, I see the Jezreel Valley, verdant and growing. I can see clearly across the valley to Nazareth, Afula and the Galilee hills beyond them. Directly behind me is a more somber view: tall, grim concrete walls, razor wire and steel gates. I am standing in front of an Israeli prison, preparing to go with the House of Light team into this house of detention.

The House of Light is the ministry of Anis and Nawal Barhoum, Arab Christians who live in the Galilee and reach out to prisoners throughout Israel. For over seven years Anis and Nawal have been traveling to twenty two prisons, from Tiberius in Galilee to Beer Sheva in the Negev. Prison rules require they only contact prisoners who identify themselves as Christians, but within these guidelines they minister not just to Arab men but to prisoners from every background, from Russian immigrants to African migrant workers who have overstayed their visas.

When Anis started ministering in the prisons he would find himself sitting in a room on his own. But with patient faithfulness, Anis now has more opportunities than he can meet. He and his team have earned a reputation for integrity and compassion with inmates, guards and prison authorities.

After the mandatory security checks, we are let in through reception to a small room within the cell block area. Slowly, a small group of mostly Russian and Arab men shuffle into the meeting room. Nawal, who speaks Arabic, Hebrew and English, has memorized a few Russian worship songs and is leading us with the Russian version of "This is the Day that the Lord has



made," Anis is handing out Bibles and Christian literature.

Anis' van is loaded up with books in Arabic, Russian, Hebrew, even Chinese! House of Light tries to provide literature for inmates from every ethnic background (House of Light stores literature in 12 languages). Anis told me, "When I started visiting the prisons there was another fellow who used to pack around a pile of books. I used to ask him, 'Why do you only bring books, why don't you bring some sweets for the prisoners?'" He answered me, 'Anis, this is the sweetest thing I can bring them, the

Word of God.' Now I say the same thing!"

This is not a happy place and these men are far from the most attractive audience, but Anis and Nawal and their volunteer team serve them with loving tenderness and respect. Anis and his teammate, Pastor Emad, give a couple of short words of encouragement from the Bible, taking turns interpreting for each other from Arabic into Hebrew and then it is time to pray. We huddle together arm in arm and begin to pray; one young man breaks down in tears and Anis gently ushers him into the hall to sort out some of his painful circumstances.

Nawal used to bake Arabic specialties for the prisoners but according to new regulations only merchandise sold at the prison canteen can be given out to the men. Each one gets a bag loaded with goodies and Anis promises he will be back. Then we are off in the van to the next prison down the road.

This jail is just as imposing as the last, a sprawling network of walls, towers and wire. It sits just across from ancient Megid-

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do, the scene of the Book of Revelation's climatic battle at the end of the age. Again, we go through the security checks and into the main population center. We are led into a meeting room and are soon joined by a half dozen men divided equally between Arabs and Russians. This time Nawal is interpreting into Hebrew for the Russian prisoners and again Anis and Emad bring hopeful words from the scriptures.

Anis encourages the men to accept this gift of God's love and timidly each man raises his hand to receive the eternal life Yeshua has promised them. We pray together and again the team passes out the goody bags. One young man tells Anis that he is from Netanya and Anis asks him if he attended a congregation there. The young man protests that he did not know there was a congregation of believers in Netanya and Anis assures him there is. The young man's mother still lives in the city and he gives her phone number to Anis to contact her. Anis assures him he



Anis and Nawal

will do so and will put her in touch with the Messianic pastor there.

Later Anis tells me how important it is to not just to connect with prisoners but also with their families. "In the beginning we were only looking for the prisoners but the Lord showed us to also look for their wives and families, they are also suffering. As we gain the trust of the prisoners they give us permission to contact their families. We help them with physical and



Pastor Emad with Anis and Nawal

spiritual support and connect them to local congregations."

House of Light reaches even further out, beyond prisoners and their families. They seek to build up families in a variety of ministry endeavors. Nawal teaches a discipleship course for single mothers and every morning offers counseling to women in need. In the afternoons the Barhoum's run youth and children's programs.

Every six weeks they run a special youth program, "King's Kids" that brings together Messianic Jewish and Arab Christian young people. Together they assemble drama, music and dance programs to express their faith and unity in Messiah. I could sense Anis' passion as he shared with me about his heart to build bridges between the Messianic and Arab Christian believers. "It is not an easy thing to do, but slowly we are building trust be-



Nawal and Anis loading up with literature for the inmates

tween us. We believe we have unity in the Lord and He will help us."

So the Lord keeps opening doors and Anis, Nawal and their team keep walking through them. Anis: "Our biggest need is for workers, we have more opportunities than we can manage." Anis nodded towards Pastor Emad and continued, "I first met Emad twenty five years ago when I saw him, a young man preaching to patients in the Nazareth hospital. We have built a strong friendship over the years and he is the kind of man I can trust. We want to bring Pastor Ehmed on full time but we do not yet have the funds to do so."



Emad, Mary, Ruth, Anis and Nawal

When we were with the inmates, one of the songs we sang was the direct Hebrew translation of John 3:16, "Kee coh ahav Elohim et haOlam...For God so loved the world..." As we repeated these familiar lines I was struck by the power of these words. Here in a dark place we were declaring the light; here at the edge of the future great judgment we were remembering that "God did not send His son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved." John 3:17

Anis, Nawal and the House of Light team are shining in many dark places with the light of the Gospel and the love of God, healing broken hearts, proclaiming liberty to captives and opening the prison to those who are bound. ✠

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Our Vision:

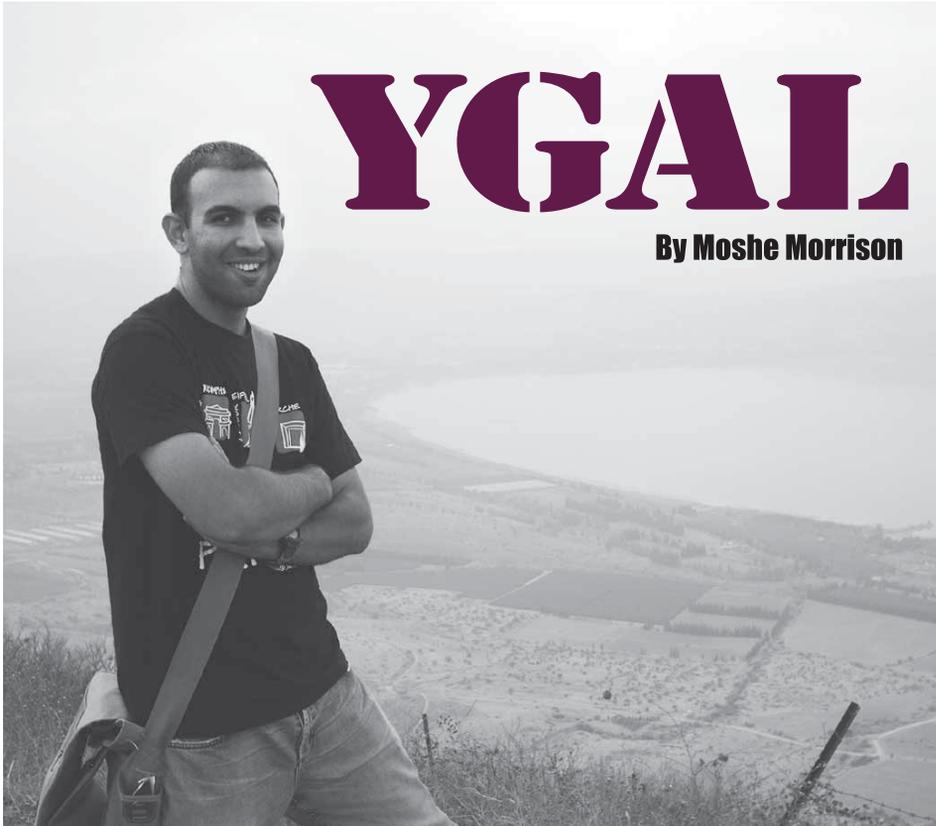
Tents of Mercy - to participate in today's historic exodus by assisting Israel's returning exiles.

No spectators in the Kingdom - to be a worshiping, sharing community based in homes, equipping each one for service.

Come back Yeshua - to welcome Yeshua home to Israel, by restoring the Jewish roots of New Covenant faith.

YGAL

By Moshe Morrison



long time immigrants and those born here often resented the newcomers - a surefire recipe for fights among young people.

Ygal moved up to middle school. He initially had a couple of fights in self defense, but he felt that the anger had gone out of him and he saw an opportunity to change his attitude. He decided to prove himself not with his fists but with his brain. He set out to work really hard and get good grades. Ygal's efforts paid off and he became one of the best students. He still wasn't praying at this point, but others definitely were.

Mom and Grandma's prayers were answered at the "Souled-Out" youth camp of 1999. A lot of our young people attended the camp and it was an event that had a dramatic impact on many lives. The worship experience with so many young people was different than anything Ygal had known before. While he made no decision at the camp itself, what he experienced gave him a lot to think about. Within a few weeks the memory of all he had experienced began to impact him. He started searching for a purpose in his life.

Around this time, Ygal's mother decided to leave Tents of Mercy. She was still a believer, but the group that she decided to connect with was aberrant. She had all kinds of strange ideas as to what she was going to do and what Ygal was going to do as well.

My 15-year old daughter, Netanya was on her way home from school and was waiting for a bus outside the central station. It was cold and she had neglected to take a coat with her that morning. As she stood there shivering, a young Israeli soldier came and gave her his warm coat to wear until the bus came. Who was this gallant knight in shining armor (actually military khaki) come to rescue the damsel in distress? It was Ygal, the subject of this testimony, another one of Yeshua's young warriors from Tents of Mercy.

Ygal is 23 years old and has been at Tents of Mercy since we began in 1996. He was born in Ukraine, and moved to Israel with his mother and her parents in 1991, when he was about 6 years old. Though Jewish, none of the family was religious or traditional in any way.

Not long after they came here, Ygal's grandmother was invited to a gathering of believers and was the first one in the family to receive Yeshua. She brought along Ygal's mother who also became a believer. Ygal was only 7, not yet ready to come to faith, but he attended services with them. They went to several different congregations until Tents of Mercy opened its doors.

Up until he was 14, Ygal went along with things but really did not have a genuine faith. He was part of our first official Bar Mitzvah class together with Andrey (our youth leader), Dima (our young adult leader) and my son Rami. It was strange for him. He had only ever been to one Bar Mitzvah and that was my son Judah's the year before. Because he still did not have a personal relationship with God, Ygal's Bar Mitzvah did not have deep spiritual meaning for him. However, he saw it as an important stage in his development.

Ygal's Bar Mitzvah came at a time when there were some major changes taking place in his life. In elementary school, Ygal had been a very angry and violent boy. He fought frequently with schoolmates. His mother and grandmother were often called to the school to meet with administrators regarding his conduct. These were the early years of the mass exodus from the crumbling Soviet empire. Israelis, both



Ygal with Tents of Mercy friends

When his mother chose this way, Ygal was faced with having to make a decision about his own life: Would he follow the leading of God for himself or follow his mother into a cult. Ygal chose to stay. Though it was difficult for his mother, in

time she accepted Ygal's choice because she was at least happy that he wanted to follow the Lord. Though she never returned to Tents of Mercy, after awhile she did leave the other group, finally seeing its serious errors. But for Ygal this was the crisis point where he fully put his trust in Yeshua – for salvation and to find his destiny in Him.

Over the next three years Ygal got himself up every Shabbat morning and walked to Tents of Mercy. The youth group was undergoing construction, and there were a number of different people involved in the building process who all contributed to its identity. Ygal was growing with the group. Ygal recalled one message in those days that powerfully affected him. It was a call to thirst after the glory of the Lord. The speaker challenged Ygal that if he truly thirsted after God then his life would change dramatically. Ygal realized God was calling him to live for Yeshua rather than for himself. And God blessed him with success.

When Ygal finished high school, rather than go the customary route directly into the Israel Defense Force, he chose the option of going to college first to study electronics. After his one and a half years of study he would begin his military commitment. The trade off was that Ygal would have a longer term of service to compensate for the time deferred.

The time of studying was okay, but what was really significant was that Ygal was building relationships in the youth group and growing in his walk with the Lord. He was helping to lead the worship, helping friends to come into a relationship with the Lord and to overcome struggles in their lives. After Ygal completed his education he joined the Air Force. There he took special courses that trained him to work with the electronic systems of F-16 fighter planes. While we can't talk about exactly what he does we can modestly boast that he is one of the best technicians in his field. (Glory to the Lord.) In another four months his time in the military will be finished.

God has spoken to Ygal about what he needs to accomplish after his army service. One thing he believes he needs to do is travel to the USA to meet his father - whom he has not seen for 17 years. Ygal continues serving the youth of the congregation, not just in handing out warm coats in cold bus stations but in keeping the members of the young adult group connected.

He has some inspiration and inclination towards film-making that will impact people with spiritual realities. He also knows that he will continue helping people to come closer to the Lord — counseling and encouraging anyone the Lord brings, but especially young people.



Ygal sharing at a men's retreat

When asked if there was anything specific he would like to say to you reading this article, Ygal requested continued intense prayer for our young people. He confidently asserted that a revival is stirring among Israeli youth. Ygal: "We need the strength and courage to resist any schemes of the devil to stop God's plans and His grace to fulfill our part in the mighty work of God." God has taken this young fighter and made him a warrior of love in the Kingdom of God. ✡

Blow a shofar in Zion...for the day of the Lord is at hand. Joel 2:1

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