



# Oasis

A Publication of Tents of Mercy Congregation (Ohalei Rachamim) - Volume 9, Issue 2



## A Father's Heart for a Soldier Son

*Here are two letters from a father in our congregation to his combat soldier son who fought in the Gaza offensive. To help you enter in to the all too familiar experience of Israeli parents with children serving in the IDF we asked permission to print this correspondence in our Oasis magazine. As he was completing his first letter, his son called for the first time in many days to let his family know he was OK and was coming out of Gaza for a brief rest. He then penned the second letter and the whole family drove down to a base in southern Israel to embrace their soldier son.*

My dear son,

I wish I could get this letter through to you right now. You've already been in action for ten days. Only God and your fellow soldiers know what you've been through. But the main thing I want you to know is that I am proud of you - unspeakably proud. You said all along that you wanted to be a fighter, that you chose an infantry combat unit in order to defend the country. You've been pretty matter of fact about it, especially after the initial novelty of hard training. Lately you seemed bored and wanting a chance to use what you've been learning; well, I guess you got that chance.

I just saw a picture on my screen saver of you with your nephew, lying on a couch together during our family vacation. What a joy to see you! What a reminder of the well of affection that is ready to flow out of me in your direction. What a true man you are. I love it that you are like that; so fun-loving with small children, even though you are also a warrior.

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So, how does it feel to be in battle? What have you been doing, exactly? I think often of the danger you must be in...and I pray. But then I go back to daily tasks until I remember again. That feels weird because you don't have the luxury of forgetting. You're living it.

I keep reading the papers and watching the news. But I don't see or hear you, so it's not very satisfying. The good part about that is that the damage to Hamas seems substantial (very unfortunately along with the civilians they so wickedly use as their shield), while our casualties (though each and every loss is a tragedy) have been minimal for such an operation. I might be a sincere believer, but entrusting you to God at a time like this is the acid test of faith.

Are you feeling, cold, wet, tired, scared and dirty? Or, motivated, courageous, adrenalized, alert, and merged with your companions in the crucible of war? Maybe it's a kaleidoscope of all that and more. In contrast, I feel numb at times. At other times I'm fired up to pray, to "storm heaven" for your sake, for the entire IDF and for Israel.

One thing I'm glad of is that (international opinion to the contrary), this is a just and necessary war. Our government showed an unnatural level of restraint during the three plus years since we yanked all of our citizens out of northern Gaza. In that time Hamas utilized Israel's gift of new real estate for one purpose alone: to launch rocket attacks on our cities - to the tune of over 6,000 rockets and mortars. So, your presence is a righteous response to an evil that knows no other deterrent. Thank you. Thank you, son, on behalf of all the citizens of Israel, and all those in this world who love justice.

You are not a hard-hearted or hateful person, far from it. My prayer is that this experience will not rob you of that deep and caring heart. Though you must be tough, resolute and even ready to kill - when this is over, you will have the rest of life to raise a family and to bring aid to those in need. In the life-time battle for good in this world, you will need a heart without too many scars. May God keep you from cynicism, disillusionment or disinterest. May your splendid gifts and potential have plenty of years to develop, to flourish, to bless, to build.

Love, Pop

Dear Son,

Last night, after 11 days of action, 11 days of not hearing from you or knowing exactly how you were, you called. We were overjoyed. Your mom whooped and hollered. I cried. Your sister smiled. We couldn't get over it. It was actually you! The relief, the thankfulness, the happiness, the waves of love - it was amazing. And you sounded just like yourself. That must sound stupid to you, but you have to understand something. . .

Spending these days trying to imagine your situation, your experience, we couldn't know (other than by faith) how you would come through it. To hear your perfectly normal, mannish, boyish, everything-is-fine-and-I'm-doing-well voice - Wow! And we had just come home from a dynamic prayer meeting, declaring God's word over you, the rest of the IDF, the government and all of Gaza - overwhelming.

We crowded around the cell phone just to listen...to hear every word. You're safe. Even now, the next morning, I'm trying to absorb it. Now, of course, we need to press in...to keep praying. You'll likely have to go back in during the next few days. We are not unmindful of the continued sensitivity of the situation. It is so important to remain dependent on the Lord, not to indulge in triumphalism or overconfidence.

Have you been praying? I really hope so. I'm eager to know how this has been for you on the inside. What does it feel like to be part of an army, with tanks and radios - sweeping through streets and buildings, looking for terrorists whose energies are focused on destroying or kidnapping you? This is what has motivated us to pray at all times throughout these days.

I wish you well, precious man. I'm proud of you. I said it already, but I need to keep saying it. You have to know what a fine thing you have done - choosing combat duty, devoting these years to serving Israel, serving Adonai in the IDF uniform. I know that much of it has been boring, tedious, seemingly senseless, aggravating. But all of the preparation - the guard duty, training on weapons, rehearsing scenarios over and over - It was all worthwhile when you actually had to enter battle. I don't want to over-spiritualize, but I hear the still small voice saying, "Do you hear what you just told your son? This is the very nature of spiritual warfare too. The daily exercises of praise, prayer, Scriptures, helping people - all these are to ready you for the battles to come."

May this taste of war provide you with skills relevant to your future. When your full time commitment is completed, you've said you want to travel some, to earn money abroad and then return to Israel for education, to establish a family and to work at something meaningful. May the Most High truly bless you and craft your destiny. I'll be praying then, too. Because your life is a gift to us and, I believe, to Am Yisrael (the people of Israel)...I'll be praying; I'll be backing you. You see, when you were born, you opened our eyes and our hearts to the wonder of God's renewal, to the exquisite joys of being a father and a mother. We were ecstatic about your arrival. We still have albums full of pictures. You've come a long way, baby. Look at you now: A man, an Israeli, a soldier, a Messianic Jew, a real mensch. I love you my son.

Tenderly,  
Abba

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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.

# Portrait of the Artist

By Marty Shoub

Ephraim Kalish is sitting in my living room drinking tea and holding court on his favorite subject – aesthetics through the lens of scripture. Ephraim taught architecture in the former Soviet Union and he carries a professorial demeanor. Even his shaggy mane of hair and full beard bespeaks a man of letters holding forth at the academy. Every comment is neatly divided into points 1, 2, 3; sub-points a, b, c, d. As interviewer I have to gently steer him back on track from expounding in minutia on a host of subjects on which Ephraim could easily lecture for hours. This is a man who thinks deeply.

## From Kazan to Haifa

Ephraim and his wife, Ivetta, emigrated from the former Soviet Union to Haifa in 1996. Both had graduated from the same architecture academy in Kazan, central Russia. Ephraim continued on as a lecturer at the academy. Ephraim's mother and father are Jewish but this meant little more than a designation on his I.D. card. Ephraim explained, "My father was and is a communist, we were Jews but raised in a completely secular way. My parents did not want to talk about their Jewish heritage." Only after coming to faith in the Jewish Messiah did Ephraim come to appreciate his Jewish heritage and identity. Soon after coming to faith Ephraim began researching his Jewish roots. As he studied the scriptures he saw clearly that Israel is the place for the Jewish people. As the Holy Spirit continued to lead Ephraim towards his Jewish roots he had an open vision. He saw a map of Israel outlining a coastline with a distinct bay. Ephraim was unsure of Israel's topography but checking an atlas confirmed he had indeed seen the coast of Israel, more specifically he had seen Mt Carmel and Haifa Bay. Ephraim and Ivetta were sure God was leading them to live in Haifa.

## Probing Questions

Since early childhood Ephraim had been involved in some sort of artistic endeavor. He studied music in the conservatory and painting and sculpture. As an architect he had focused on design and graphics. Life as an artist often poses difficulties, but for a new immigrant in Israel's competitive scene it is especially hard. Buoyed by their sense of calling, Ephraim and Ivetta struggled through their first years in Israel. Ephraim was forced to ask some deep questions of himself and of his God. He had always been an artist of one sort or another and

was at a crossroads of identity and purpose. Ephraim: “As a young believer I was zealous for God and was even willing to give up art for His sake. I wanted to know what God thought about art, not just as an intellectual exercise – it was a practical issue. I didn’t know what else I could do. How else would I live?” Ephraim began a serious study of what the Bible says about art and artists. From Ephraim’s experience in religious circles, both Jewish and Christian, he saw how religious institutions had denigrated the role of artists in society. But his study of scripture produced a different conclusion. As with every good and perfect gift, art was God’s idea in the first place.

## A Divine Calling

In Israel, Ephraim’s teaching gift and his insights into the biblical perspective on art butted up against the difficulties he had experienced and had seen other artist friends suffer. Through this meeting of circumstances and knowledge Ephraim received his calling to educate, encourage and promote art and artists in Israel: “All these difficulties helped me understand what other artists go through in Israel. Many professional artists and musicians end up as street cleaners. I could feel what others faced who pass through difficulties. I have always been involved in artistic work but my sense is my main calling is to help other artists.”

So Ephraim and Ivetta began inviting artists to their home on Jewish feast days to explore what the scriptures say about art and to encourage artists to link their creative ability to the supreme creator. Ephraim would lead in discussions and encourage artists to take on special projects related to the biblical feast days. For example, Ephraim and Ivetta invited three musicians to collaborate on a composition centered on Rosh Hashanah. Each artist would compose a segment based on the three modes of blowing of the shofar as prescribed in the traditional synagogue service.

## Art Midrash

These informal collaborations and discussions evolved into a foundational teaching on biblical art. Ephraim has amassed a 25 part lecture series entitled, “*Art Midrash*.” Art Midrash can be explained by focusing on the two components of the title: Art - creativity from God’s perspective as revealed in scripture; Midrash - the Jewish method of biblical interpretation. Combining the two focuses the Jewish system of interpretation on the artistic process. Ephraim stressed that the realm of creativity is not just for artists: “Faith is a process of creativity. The Bible defines faith ‘as the evidence of things not seen.’ Both the artist and the believer are required to make sense of and express what others cannot see.”

Ephraim has conducted his Art Midrash lectures in Haifa, Jerusalem and Nazareth.



Ivetta and Ephraim

His hope is to engage Jewish artists in their biblical heritage; to welcome them into the community of faith instead of pushing them away, to see them find their rightful place within the congregation. Ephraim warned that when the faith community rejects artists they cut off possibilities of worship and honor to God.

## Bezalel Son of Light

Ephraim has distilled his ideas on the creative process into a new film, “*Bezalel, Son of Light*.” Bezalel (*in the shadow of God*), was the craftsman endowed with the Holy Spirit in order to design and build the tabernacle and its

furnishings. The film explores the template for biblical artistry through the genealogy of Bezalel found in Exodus 31:2: “**See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah.**” Through an examination of the meaning of each name in Bezalel’s ancestry the film reveals



Ivetta and Ephraim in their Sukkah

the close association between the work of the artist and the mind of the Creator of all things. Ephraim explores the etymological root of each name and discovers a well of meaning. For example, the Hebrew word for Shadow, צל (Tsel) is rooted in the name Bezalel. Here is a sample from the film’s narration of Ephraim’s “*Art Midrash*” on the name Bezalel:

*The qualities of a shadow will tell us a lot about what an artist’s character should be, and about his essence. Shadows exist only in the light; they do not exist in the darkness. Shadows exist according to the laws of light. They present an image, a projection of a certain object. But it never copies the details of the original; a shadow only reveals a silhouette, a representation of the original object. There is another feature of a shadow: A Shadow cannot exist independently of the object from which it is cast. It is totally dependent on it and devoted to it. As a shadow follows an object, so a man should follow his Creator.*

Interspersed through the film are four musical interpretations of each name in the Bezalel genealogy. A young Israeli composer, Daniel Kruglov wrote and performed each piece. True to Ephraim’s vision the film project not only highlights Ephraim’s deep understanding of art and scripture but serves as a vehicle to encourage a young artist in his craft. This is the heart of Ephraim Kalish; teacher, collaborator, mentor, artist.

You can learn more about Ephraim and Ivetta’s ministry and order a copy of the film, “*Bezalel, Son of Light*” from their website: <http://www.torah-art.net> ☆