Oasis

A Publication of Tents of Mercy Congregation (Ohalei Rachamim) ~ Volume 11, Issue 11

THE DAY GILAD CAME HOME

By Eitan Shishkoff

All Israel watched as Gilad Shalit was freed after 5 years and 4 months. It was a communal experience. We wept for joy. We laughed with relief. We were amazed to see the gaunt young hero emerge from Hamas' captivity. We were touched watching him respond to the bewildering array of challenges immediately confronting him upon his release - from the chutzpah of an Egyptian TV interviewer to the reception by our prime minister. In my nineteen years as an Israeli, I've not witnessed anything like the unifying power of this event, even in the midst of war.

Every parent identified with Aviva and Noam, his mom and dad. They dedicated each of the 1940 days of their son's illegal imprisonment as a kidnapped IDF soldier, to getting him home. They traveled the world appealing to many governments. They marched on foot with tens of thousands of fellow Israelis the 134 miles from their northern kibbutz home to Jerusalem, holding rallies in every city (including ours) to garner support for their boy's freedom. At the end of the march, early in July 2010, they took up residence in a tent facing the prime minister's residence, vowing to stay there until Gilad was brought home. And they succeeded.

It happened with a lot of prayers. It required years of negotiations involving numerous multi-national diplomatic efforts. And it took a difficult decision by Benjamin Netanyahu and his cabinet to re-

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lease 1027 Palestinian prisoners, many of who were serving life sentences for murdering Israelis in cold-blooded terror. But the vast majority of the country supported this risky step out of identification with one family whose child was sent to defend us all and paid for it with nearly five and a half years of his life. Shalit, now 25, was merely 19 when captured.

What does this compelling story of an entire nation uniting behind one young man and his family say to us? It speaks of our inter-connectedness. It shouts that we are not alone, not separate. It says that even though our life seems small and powerless, each member of a community represents the whole and carries the value of the entire people. I am proud of Israel for rescuing Gilad. Sure, it would have been dramatic and glorious to have swooped in Entebbe-style to pluck him out of enemy hands. You can believe that every effort was made to locate Gilad and launch such a rescue. But the other kind of courage, the kind that pays for one innocent life with more than a 1000 terrorists, says something about a society too. It says that there is a bond that surpasses politics, economics and religion. Somehow, it hearkens back to our roots as a covenant people who were told **"One shall put to flight a thousand…"**

Redeemed Lives

Gilad's return begs the question "What is community?" At a recent Shabbat service we heard four testimonies from members of the congregation. That was the entire message for that Shabbat. After hearing these four stories of the hand of God working in a delightful variety of lives, I felt such joy. I thought, "Now this is true community." The testimonies began with a young father, originally from the Caucasus Mountains, whose life was miraculously saved after his head was crushed by a container at work (see *"Mercy Endures Forever,"* OASIS, August 2011). Then we heard how an Ethiopian Israeli, whose wife had prayed for him for years, gave his life to Yeshua after his hand was healed in the middle of the night! Next, the leader of our seniors "Golden Age" ministry shared her contagious joy over receiving permanent residency after a trying 12-year process. She has two sons and eight grandchildren who have been full citizens the entire time. Finally, my son Avi recounted his search for a relationship of his own with God, winding his way through stormy teen-age years in Israeli society and the intensity of Israeli Defense Force combat service.

Community is growing up together, raising kids together (see Leora's article in this issue), experiencing the national, regional, congregational and familial challenges together. Community is forgiving one another and asking forgiveness. It is refusing to give up on each other, even when misunderstood or offended. It is caring for one another (albeit imperfectly), bearing one another's burdens and believing for one another's breakthroughs. It is celebrating the moments of triumph against heavy odds, as we did in welcoming home Gilad Shalit.

One Soldier, One Nation

Not long after Gilad was safely back at Mitzpe Hila, in the upper Galilee, I found myself at a wedding reception. There I spoke with a young Israeli who works in production for the country's most watched television station. She described the multi-monitor, lightning-paced, all-hands-on-deck effort to report each unfolding moment of Shalit's release. With cameras and reporters stationed at every stage of the process one could follow the event from before his appearance with Hamas officials (10:23am) until his arrival at the scenic northern kibbutz he calls home (5:07pm). The highest viewer ratings in Israeli television history were recorded that day.

Beyond the statistics and the intensity of the newsroom, our nation wept for joy to see a young man come home after the nightmare of extended captivity in the hands of hate-filled murderers. On August 18, Gilad was visibly weak, a fragile victim smiling shyly as he was passed from the hands of Hamas, to Egypt, to the Israeli Defense Force, to the Prime Minister and, at last, to his mother and father, sister and brother. He drew the people of Israel together in a sweet quality of oneness so rare for our pressure-filled and usually fractured society. Is it a preview of a future reunion? Gilad's homecoming offers an intriguing comparison with the oneness that will take place when another young Israeli who long ago suffered for his people, the Suffering Servant, returns home to finally receive His well-deserved hero's welcome. ✡

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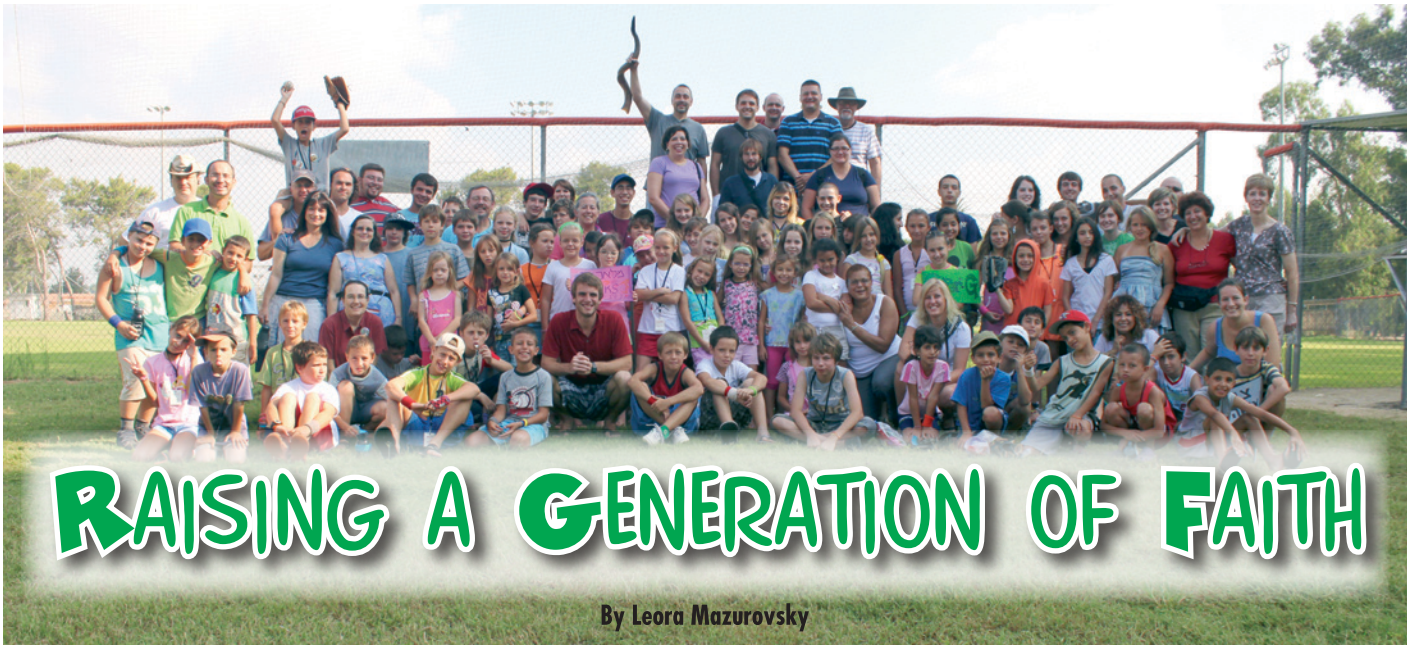
Tents of Mercy אוהלי רחמים

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.



RAISING A GENERATION OF FAITH

By Leora Mazurovsky

Last week during our Shabbat service, a young couple dedicated their infant daughter. In a congregation with over 60 children, a baby dedication is not an unusual event. Yet this little girl is unique because her father, Andrey, was one of Tents of Mercy's first generation of children. During the dedication, he spoke of being given the precious trust of a new soul, to raise in the knowledge and the love of the Lord. I was awed and inspired anew as our elders, an integral part of Andrey's life since he was twelve years old, gathered around with the family to pray over the life of his new baby.

As a fellow parent, I know very well that the spiritual education of our children begins at home, but very soon our children grow and become a part of the larger community of believers. The word for congregation in Hebrew is "kehilah," literally "community." These little people who join us each week as we worship and learn together, make up more than a third of our congregation. The manner in which we involve them in our meetings and the teachings that they receive in the Shabbat classes is an integral part of shaping their lives into maturing believers. The children's program is woven into every element of our congregation, uniting people in an unseen pattern of partnership and caring. Adults and young people teach and get to know children from other families. Kids grow up learning together and being taught by teens not much older than they are and likewise grow up to do the same themselves.

In a multi-cultural, multi-lingual community such as ours, a Shabbat school is something that must be grown and developed over time. Katya Morrison took on this task in 1996, when Tents of Mercy had only just begun. Though she had years of experience in organizing a Shabbat school in the States, working in Israel, in a fledgling immigrant congregation offered new challenges. Creative solutions and flexibility were often called for. If there was no space for the pre-teens to meet, a Ford van became their classroom. On hot summer evenings, the cramped warehouse was sometimes too small to hold all those energetic little souls and so they were taken to the nearby beach for teaching and games. Though our facility has grown in size and there are now too many kids to take to the beach, Katya still enjoys organizing activities that help bring the children together in fun as well as in learning. Some of these are: an annual Purim Carnival, special teaching sessions for the older kids, prize days, holiday crafts and celebrations and the crowning event of the year – a week long summer camp.

As a native English speaker among mainly Russian speakers, Katya forged a close working friendship with Svyeta (an immigrant from Ukraine who also runs the humanitarian aid center and the Pro-Life office) and together they set up classes with Russian as the primary language. Parents in the congregation were asked to give of their time and gradually the new immigrant teachers learned Hebrew along with the children they were teaching. Over the years those same children grew into teenagers and they themselves began to help, so the lesson plans were translated into Hebrew. Now all the classes are taught in Hebrew using several different curriculums. Only the very youngest children still learn in a multi-language classroom.

Katya often laughingly says that because of the constant organizational "drudge work", overseeing Shabbat school is a duty that nobody wants. Though the overall goal of every congregational children's program is to instill in our children a love and understanding of God, there must be an underlying structure that enables the weekly classes to function. Katya is grateful for the gifts that enable her to handle the organizational aspects of the job, but her true dedication is to the children. "I like the kids. I like watching them grow up and fulfill their callings. I enjoy having the opportunity to work with the older kids who have grown up in the Shabbat school and who then return to become helpers. Our 7th graders help for a year and then move on to be teachers. Many of them begin to request the opportunity to teach. Not all of them are good teachers, but many persevere and really do become gifted teachers and counselors."

As the young people move from being students in Shabbat school to helpers and teachers in their own right, they begin attending our teen program. The teen

pastor is the very same Andrey mentioned at the beginning of this article. Over 12 years ago, he was one of the preteens who attended classes in the van parked outside of the rented warehouse where we held our meetings.

Andrey described that time to me. "I became a believer at 14 at a youth camp. [This camp was the predecessor to the one now sponsored by the national Israeli teen ministry Katzir-Harvest.] I was filled with the questions that trouble many young teens, 'Why am I alive? What is my purpose in life?' In this search God met me. When I received the answer, I wanted to share with others like me. That was the beginning of our youth group. As I grew older, my heart was constantly turned to that age group. I was discipled by others and this desire to disciple to young people stayed with me, even after the army. I believe that young people reach a critical juncture around the time of their bar/bat mitzvah. If these young people choose to follow God at this age, it will be the foundation for their life."

Though Andrey did not start out in our nursery class, as a youth leader he is now working with teens who did. Those who came through the Shabbat school have a background of knowledge and understanding that enables them to understand and grow in their faith. Andrey is also enthusiastic about the interaction between the teens, the younger children and the overall congregational community. "They help in the classes and as counselors in the summer camps and are an example to the little ones. It's wonderful to see this year, for perhaps the first time, those who grew up in our Shabbat school are also beginning to serve in the congregation as ushers, media operators, translators, and much more."

Eitan, who dedicates much of his time to teen ministry through Katzir, sees the great potential in these young ones – our first generation of believers to grow into adulthood in the land. "Today's young adults are yesterday's Shabbat school students. This foundation that we are creating for them through love, teaching and fellowship activities is discipling the children so that they can ultimately become the influencers of society for the Kingdom of God!"

"You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Messiah Yeshua." (2 Timothy 3:14-15) ✡

Eitan explaining the Torah to our children

Proud parents dedicating their new baby

Shabbat school class with teen teacher