



Credit: Beresheet (spaceil.com)

Beresheet takes a selfie as it begins its descent to the moon's surface

# ISRAEL SHOOTS FOR THE MOON!

By Shani Sorko-Ram Ferguson

**Y**ariv Bash never quite fit the mold of success. He graduated from a public high school with mediocre grades. But that was largely because he was busy getting a college degree in computer science. In those days, the IDF hadn't yet realized that the best

minds – the kind that should be in a room processing strategic military ideas – aren't easy to identify on paper. So the army sent him to an elite combat unit.

That was quite fine with him. He was an adrenaline junkie anyway. He loved extreme sports

– motorcycles, snowboards – and thought nothing of the risks when he jumped off a cliff with a hovercraft he built himself. “The army,” he said, “helped me understand who I was. It showed me I could push myself past what I thought were my limits.”

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**The day he went back to work he posted on his Facebook page:**

**“First we land on the moon, then we’ll fix my legs.”**

Yariv Bash on Facebook

When he was released from the army, he was invited to work for a governmental branch of Research and Development. One of their annual projects was to come up with an entirely unnecessary invention, simply for the sake of encouraging thinking outside the box. Yariv suggested the idea of making a spaceship out of plastic that could make it to the edge of space. They would take a picture and call it the first Israeli spaceship.

That night he visited a friend and shared his idea. His friend told him about a Google Lunar challenge that was offering 20 million dollars to any private company who could successfully put a spacecraft on the moon by 2012, maneuver it a bit on the surface and send back pictures. It felt like destiny for Yariv and that night he purchased the domain spaceil.com (IL is the official abbreviation for Israel). The next day he wrote on Facebook, “Who wants to go to the moon?” A bunch of people laughed. Two of his friends, Yonatan Damari and Kfir Winetraub wanted in.

The three made a presentation and went to see the chairman of the Israel Space Agency. “You won’t land on the moon by 2012; the spacecraft will need to be larger than what you have drawn here, and it’ll cost more than your proposed eight million dollars – but I’m with you,” responded the chairman after watching it. He would be proven right on all counts and he would be very instrumental in getting SpaceIL off the ground.

Within months, the three would meet several eager investors who would literally help them “shoot for the moon.” The lunar craft called “Beresheet” (Hebrew for Genesis) would end up costing \$100 million, but that would still be by far the cheapest craft ever sent to the moon.

### A setback or two

Due to interest from teams all over the world, the Google Lunar X challenge would be extended several times from the original 2012 deadline. SpaceIL was the only Israeli team to enter and was one of only five teams to make it to the finals and the first to launch their spacecraft. Despite the notable progress by the teams, Google refused to extend the 2018 deadline any further and the \$20 million dollar prize money would go unclaimed. SpaceIL, however, considered this only a side disappointment. They would continue in their mission to the moon.

The bigger blow had already come in the winter of

2016 when Yariv, the ever lover of extreme sports, went on a snowboarding vacation in France with his buddies. Going down a mountain with deep snowfall, he noticed a hidden rock too late to go around it. He attempted to jump over it and landed right on top of it – spine first. The disconnect was so instant, he had to physically feel for his lower body with his one working arm to make sure it was still there.

As Yariv was rushed into emergency surgery, everyone involved in the space project – the investors, his work partners, the project volunteers – held their breath. But all Yariv could think of in his semi-conscious state was, “What have I done to my family?”

When he finally gained consciousness, the doctors said he would never walk again. He felt crushed. When he awoke again, his wife was at his side. “It’ll be okay,” she said, “Lo kara klum.” (Hebrew for, “No big deal, it’s nothing.”)

It would take months of rehabilitation and some explaining to his young kids why he wouldn’t be able to run around the basketball court with them, but Yariv bounced back as passionate as ever.

The day he went back to work he posted on his Facebook page, “First we land on the moon, then we’ll fix my legs.”

### Thinking outside a straight line

If Israelis do anything well, it’s figuring out cheaper ways to do what other countries do with big bucks. We often joke

that a damaged tank in wealthy nations will be treated to a fully-equipped garage and a million dollar budget, while an Israeli tank will have to make do with some paperclips and superglue. It’s a bit of an exaggeration, but Israel’s limited resources and limited living and working space has always pushed creative minds to figure out ways to do things cheaper and smaller.

Before the Beresheet project, all lunar spacecraft had taken a straight shot from earth to the moon. This required the spacecraft to be built a certain way, including huge caverns to hold fuel. The Beresheet took a more round-about approach – actually an elliptical orbit. It would begin by orbiting the earth, each time using just enough fuel to push out into space a little more, and allowing the orbiting power of gravity from the earth and moon to do the rest. Once their elliptical orbit got out far enough, the engineers would catch the gravity of the moon and orbit the moon until they deemed it safe to land. This process took about two months.

### It’s not about us, it’s about them

Somehow ingrained deep in the Jewish mind is that the only thing sweeter than success is being able to bring others along with you in your success. SpaceIL wouldn’t just be a private project focused on making it into the history books as the 7th nation to orbit the moon and the 4th to land on it. This project would be about inspiring a generation to – if I may – dream beyond simply becoming a famous pop

The excitement children were experiencing was evidenced during this past Purim – as the spacecraft was already in orbit as costumes like this with the SpaceIL logo were seen across social media.





star. SpaceIL wanted to recreate the “Apollo Effect.”

When the Apollo 11 landed on the moon in 1969, there was an explosion of interest in STEM careers (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math). Everything from GPS to advanced prosthetic limbs, to the kidney dialysis machine, to the smoke detector would be invented as a direct result of technology developed for Apollo 11. But the biggest winner was the American economy that benefited from the influx of skilled workers and consumers excited to use the newly-available technology. So impactful

was the flood of development and inventions from that time period that the phenomenon was coined the Apollo Effect.

In 2011, SpaceIL was officially formed as a non-profit and the

Credit: Lego Ideas, Elnaz



While on a personal level, the paralysis hasn't been easy for Yariv, it has only offered more inspiration for disabled kids to dream. Even the proposed Beresheet Lego kit includes a wheelchair figure.

## MISSION TIMELINE



Credit: SpaceIL.com

development budget would include educating kids as the project progressed. By the time the shuttle launched, they had reached almost a million children in Israel through national exhibitions and volunteers who would visit local schools. By the time they would attempt their moon-landing two months later, the whole nation would be watching.

### The Crash Landing

Recently, Google announced themselves as the first company to launch a commercially viable drone service. However, if they had Googled it, they would've discovered that Yariv's company Flytrex had already offered this service for two years in Iceland. In fact, some of the technology Flytrex used for its drone system went into the building of the spacecraft. This gave Yariv extensive experience in communicating with a remote flying object.

Flytrex commercial drones, however, don't land remotely. They are designed to lower the purchased package and return home. For SpaceIL, the greatest challenge would be the landing –mostly because there was no way to properly test the spacecraft before it got to the moon. Also, with such a small craft at such a huge distance, there would be no “real time” ability to communicate. Any command could take long minutes to be received by the craft, which meant by the time an urgent command would be received by the lunar craft, it would be irrelevant.

Therefore, for the landing, they decided on a fully-automated program. Using a static set of commands and incredibly limited fuel, Beresheet would land itself on an area of the moon known for its strange magnetic

**“If at first you don't succeed, you try again.”**

PM Benjamin Netanyahu

Credit: SpaceIL.com



field (for the purpose of studying it). When the moment came to exit orbit and begin descent, the main engine turned off for some reason. By the time the signal reached it to turn back on, it was too late. All communication was lost, and everyone knew what that meant.

### Beresheet 2.0

After the disappointing announcement, applause erupted in the main hall where Israel's Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu and dozens of others sat watching everything unfold. “We made it to the moon, just not in the way we'd hoped.” Bibi then got up, looked them straight in the eye and said, “If at first you don't succeed, you try again.”

Less than 24 hours later, SpaceIL stood in front of the cameras and announced their plans to build Beresheet 2.0. They were determined to try again.

Some people said the spacecraft would've been better named “Chutzpah” – a word known around the world meaning gall or audacity. That Israel would try to accomplish something that up until this point only the U.S., Russia and China – all world powers – had accomplished, took some nerve. That they could get out of bed the next day determined to try again took incredible grit.

The fact that Israel has decided to shoot for the moon isn't the point. It is just one more example of a people who are used to trying the impossible, because their very existence should be impossible. It is also an example of a blessed people who are happy to share their blessings with the world.

After all, haven't we always been a small people with a big God?

**The LORD set his heart on you and chose you, even though you didn't outnumber all the other people. You were the smallest of all nations. There was almost nothing to you. Deuteronomy 7:7 ■**



Shani and Kobi Ferguson are the daughter and son-in-law of Ari and Shira Sorko-Ram.

Kobi and Shani are transitioning to become directors of Maoz Israel Ministries within a three-year period. They live near Jerusalem with their five children, age 3-14.





## PAY IT FORWARD – THE HARVEST OF KATZIR YOUTH CAMPS

By Eitan Shishkoff

Impassioned, Yosef poured out his heart before the silent teens. His words rushed over the stunned youth like a rapid stream over well-worn rocks. He exhorted them to put aside every distraction and pursue God with all their souls. Yet his tone was without condemnation. He spoke from his own struggle as a young Israeli serving in the army, questioning faith in Yeshua and living in moral compromise.

Now 30, Yosef was a regular in our early camps during his teenage

years. His intensity as he addressed the group erupted from a volcano of concern for today's youth—often living in the bubble of social media. Yosef carries a burden for kids who've grown up in a believing home. I felt his longing to light a fire in their hearts – a burning desire to know the Lord, to walk with Him, and to make Him known.

Time stopped. The kids blinked. What just happened? Yosef came to the end of his message. When he urged them to receive prayer, to be

real in turning it all over to God, they came forward. There was no requirement. No grade being given. Each of them was compelled by the Spirit of the Lord. I couldn't stop looking at them – Israeli teens from 14-18 years old. The counselors, whose own teen years were not so far in the past, wrapped their hearts around those responding. This was the crescendo to a spiritual momentum that grew during our three day Passover camp this spring, 2019. What a scene!

Years ago a movie came out called

“Pay It Forward.” In it a boy created a school project to change his town. The concept was doing something good for three people, who in turn, would do something good for three more people. I remembered this phrase while thinking about Yosef's message. Fifteen years ago he had experiences with God and his life was changed in a Katzir camp. Now he is “paying it forward” by sharing his experience and by opening the words of God for the next generation. The fruit of these youth events is multiplying before our eyes.

But this effort is not just for those of us who live in Israel and speak Hebrew. We need the help and participation of brothers and sisters around the world, who understand the drama of Israel's rebirth. Our physical restoration as a nation only sets the stage for spiritual restoration. The ancient prophets were united in emphasizing this end-time restoration/revival once the Jewish nation would be replanted in our land. They pointed to the calling of youth in this final outpouring preceding the coming of the Lord. And Isaiah expressly anticipated the prominent role of God-lovers from all nations in Israel's last days' return to Messiah.

This August we will again gather with young people from some 40 congregations throughout Israel. For a solid week there will be youth-led worship, challenging messages from God's word, small group discussion and prayer with trained counselors, together with service projects to give something back to the needy in our society. Won't you join us in equipping Israel's Messianic youth for the harvest (katzir) spoken of by the Hebrew prophets and by Yeshua Himself? **“The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest (Adon haKatzir) to send out laborers into his harvest.”**

*Eitan Shishkoff is the Founding Director of Katzir and Founder of Mercy Network of Congregations*

## KATZIR SAVED MY LIFE!

My name is Chaim. My name means life, but I was headed for death. I was raised as a pastor's son in a rough town near Tel Aviv. Drinking, fighting and clubbing were a big part of my life as a teenager. I was looking to fill the gap in my heart – a hole that wanted to be filled by something or some one who would accept me.

Then came the worst night of my life: I drank five different types of vodka. In that drunken state I fought with a friend and fractured my foot as I kicked a couch. But it was what happened next that changed my life forever. My best friend convinced me to come to Katzir (Harvest) youth camp. Hung over the first day, I didn't even care what was happening.

The second day was the same – until the evening meeting. I remember not listening to the message and not singing a word during worship. But then something happened! As I was standing and the service was about to end, I suddenly felt a strange



sensation. It was like love had found me and surrounded me. I had never felt such a complete love—I was in total peace.

I immediately knew it was God calling me to come to his love. At the same moment, my best friend had exactly the same experience, and he was on the other side of the room. Our eyes caught each other and we both knew 100% what was going on and what we needed to do.

So we walked to the front and gave our lives to Yeshua. We prayed, turning from our past and walked into His arms. Nothing has been the same since! Katzir truly saved my life!

*(Note: Chaim is now one of the camp directors of Katzir, investing in the lives of today's Israeli teens, paying it forward.)*



## I WAS FULL OF HATRED!

I attended my first camp when I was 17, in 2006. I was a teenager who was hungry to know God, but came from a troubled home. God used Katzir camp to help me go deeper with him and really strengthen my walk as a young believer.



The following year I was asked to serve as a small group leader at the camp. I accepted, but I was wounded in my spirit. I was 18, and my dad had walked out on our family.

He was an alcoholic and would lash out constantly at my mom and me. Actually, I was bitter, and filled with hatred

towards him. I was hungry for God, but my hatred was hurting my view of God and my walk with Him.

During an evening session at the camp, I had a powerful encounter with God. That night He came and set me free from hatred, and helped me start a journey of forgiveness. It was so powerful—it is as fresh for me today as it was then. I'm not sure where I would be today if not for the journey that began that day in my heart. I was able to receive God's heart for my father, and that changed everything.

Today I serve on the leadership team for the camps. I am forever grateful for the opportunities to touch a generation. As a leader in Katzir for many years, I learned valuable skills, and a passion to work with youth. I have seen firsthand the opportunity we have to influence teenagers and young adult leaders who come to serve, but actually leave even more impacted, as I myself experienced.

I have seen so many teens come to the camp away from God and leave in love with him!

*(Note: In a Katzir camp a young man heard Joel's story of forgiving his father. The circumstances were nearly identical. That teen prayed with Joel, was delivered from bitterness, and returned to his family as an instrument of love.)*

Yosef, a Youth Leader for Katzir.



AN ANCIENT PEOPLE RECLAIM THEIR ANCIENT HERITAGE

## THE GOLAN HEIGHTS

By Shira Sorko-Ram

When I first moved to Israel in October 1967, I visited a family living in a kibbutz at the foot of the Golan Heights. The father told me how he and his son were walking just outside their house when suddenly Syrian soldiers began shooting down at them from the slopes of the Golan Heights.

They raced for their lives and reached the safety of their home. But, he said, for 19 years, since Israel's Independence, they never knew when or where the next bullets would reach their kibbutz. Until the Six Day War changed everything.

In June 1967, a horde of several

hundred Syrian tanks came rolling down the Golan Heights. The Syrians had not allowed its civilian population to live on the Heights facing Galilee so there would not be any civilian impediments to Syria's military goal to destroy Israel.

Those rugged bluffs and precipices, spanning 40 miles, reaching an altitude of 9,232 feet (2,814 meters) were dedicated to creating an impenetrable network of fortifications, trenches and concrete bunkers, sitting behind dense mine fields.

However, a few years earlier, Eli Cohen, an Israeli spy, had become the Chief Adviser to Syria's Minis-

ter of Defense. Feigning sympathy for the soldiers sitting in the sun, Cohen instructed the Syrians to plant trees by their bunkers so they would have some shade.

Moreover, Cohen learned of a secret plan by Syria to create three successive lines of bunkers and mortars; the Israel Defense Forces would normally have expected to encounter only a single line.

Eli Cohen was caught and publicly hanged in Damascus two years before the Six Day War, but the trees were still there, identifying the exact location of each bunker! Because of Cohen's strategic orders to the Syrian



soldiers years before, the Israelis were able to accurately knock out almost all of the bunkers, and capture the Heights of the Golan by the next day.

The intelligence Eli Cohen gathered is considered an important factor in Israel's miraculous two-day capture of the Heights. He is a national hero in Israel.

### 3500 YEARS EARLIER

The Golan Heights' connection to Israel goes back more than 3500 years! It was actually Moses and the Israelites who conquered this high plateau (then called Bashan), when they killed King Og, a giant whose bed was 13 ½ feet long. Moses gave Bashan to the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joseph's descendants<sup>1</sup> - an area of nearly 700 sq. miles (1800 sq. kilometers).

Joshua<sup>2</sup> also mentions they took possession of sixty cities, later described as large cities with walls and bronze-barred gates.<sup>3</sup> Of those, the Levites, who led worship of the God of Israel, were given thirteen cities in Bashan.<sup>4</sup>

Hundreds of years later when Ezra and Nehemiah gathered a remnant of Israelites in Jerusalem, Ezra stood on a raised platform and read them the Book of the Law. Then the Levites led these returned exiles in praise to God, thanking Him for the lands God had given to Abraham's descendants saying:<sup>5</sup>

**“You also gave them [the children of Israel] kingdoms and peoples, And allotted them as a boundary. They took possession of...the land of Og the king of Bashan.”**

But Israel's history in Golan doesn't end there.



Eli Cohen, Israeli spy whose intelligence greatly helped Israel to scale in two days the 'impenetrable fortifications' on the slopes of the Golan Heights.

During the times of the Maccabees and even Yeshua's lifetime, Jews lived and worked on the Golan Plateau. After the destruction of the Second Temple, the Jewish people were again exiled. Yet there was still a remnant who continued to live in the Golan until the 7th century.

The synagogue in Katzrin, at the foot of the Golan Heights – a wonderful historic place to visit – was built in the 6th Century, until conquering Muslims turned it into a mosque. In fact, another 25 synagogues in the area have been un-

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**Moses apportioned Bashan (the Golan Heights) to the half-tribe of Manasseh, Joseph's descendants.**

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earthed. Those were used until the 7th century Muslim conquest.

Muslim rule severed the more than 1,600 years of continuous Jewish residence and forced religious conversions on Jews who lived in the area. Yet there is some evidence of Jewish life in the Golan even after the Muslim conquest.

### A REMNANT RETURNS TO THE GOLAN

At the end of the 19th century, the Zionist movement awakened from its centuries of slumber. Slowly but surely, a Jewish remnant began to dream about the resurrection of a Jewish state. The Golan Heights was clearly considered part of their historical heritage.

Starting in 1883, close to the time Eliezer Ben Yehuda, father of the modern Hebrew language, and a few pioneers moved to the Holy Land, Jewish communities were again birthed in the Golan. Soon after, Baron de Rothschild purchased and lawfully transacted 150 square kilometers of the Golan plateau!

Even during and after World War I, long before modern Israel was established, the Zionist Movement was issuing public demands that a Jewish State must be established including the Golan Heights, Mount Hermon and even some of Lebanon that was part of Israel's Biblical heritage.

Many of Israel's founding fathers were active in encouraging and helping an expanding Jewish population move to the Heights. Again, at the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference, the Zionist Movement forcefully demanded that the future Jewish State would include the Golan Heights and what is known as southern Lebanon and western Syria.

### THE U.S. AGREED – THEN BOWED OUT!

At that conference, the United States recognized these borders demanded by the Zionist Movement! The U.S. stressed that the Jewish State must have control over its water source on Mount Hermon.

In the end, the United States' proposal was not even officially debated because the U.S. withdrew from the discussions! Britain and France divided up the Holy Land, leaving France with the Golan. Yet the Zionists continued to promote proposals for the Biblical borders of a Jewish State. The Jews even paid taxes to the French Mandate for the land Rothschild had purchased.

Though the Versailles Peace Accords excluded the territories of the Golan from the scope of British control, nevertheless, Jewish organizations continued attempting to buy lands in the Golan.

Some fifteen years later, one buyer, Yehoshua Hankin, purchased about 300 square kilometers of land in the Golan, northeast of the Sea of Galilee. However, the project failed as soon as the local Arab leadership discovered the Zionist Movement was behind the purchase.

Believe it or not, Zionist organizations kept trying until 1946 when the French Mandate ended and Syria was granted the status of an independent nation. Despite the validity of Jewish proprietary rights to the land and the fact they had been lawfully and legally obtained, Syria rushed to expropriate the ownership over these lands and nationalized them, claiming them as “sacred lands.”

The Jewish community leaders

then tried to defend their ownership through litigation in a court in Syria, but to no avail.

### DAVID BEN GURION DEMANDED THE LAND

Amazingly, the Jewish people still didn't give up! Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, did not change his view concerning these territories that were torn from the Land of Israel nor his aspiration to return and restore the historic Jewish communities in them.

In a speech in 1947, Ben Gurion said, “We demand that the Jewish community shall encompass the western part of the Land of Israel... the Hauran [western Syria], the

Bashan and the Golan up to south of Damascus.”

To this day, the Jewish National Fund owns the proprietary rights for many plots of land in the Golan and even the Hauran area bordering Damascus – lands that were purchased with Jewish money for settlement purposes.

But it took an invasion into Israel by Syria for this ancient heritage, given by God to Abraham, Moses, King David and their descendants, to return some of the “mountains of Israel” to their original owners. ■

*Part II of the Golan Heights, next month.*

<sup>1</sup> Joshua 22:7; <sup>2</sup> Joshua 13:30; <sup>3</sup> I Kings 4:13;

<sup>4</sup> I Chronicles 6:62; <sup>5</sup> Nehemiah 9:22



The Golan Heights borders Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Its height of over 9,000 feet has been a superb buffer zone between Galilee and Syria. In fact, until Syria's Civil War, Israel's border with Syria has been the quietest of all its borders.



Katzir leads Israeli teenagers through the beautiful  
Golan Heights plateau during their last spring camp.

Their opportunity to grow closer to God.  
Our opportunity to help them.

