

### **Everything started wonderfully.**

We had free time, the entire group exited the bus in Mea Shearim and we started off on a walk through this ultra-orthodox neighborhood of Jerusalem. After a short time, a car stopped beside us and the driver motioned for me to come to him. He asked me what the meaning of the writing on my T-shirt was. It was from the book of Ruth (1:16) "**Amech Ami, Elohaich Elohai.**"

Because it was written in Hebrew I told him that he must be able to read it. He kindly agreed but simply wanted to know if I also knew what was written there. I assured him that I was aware of what it meant and that I love Israel, God's chosen people, with all my heart. He thought that was great and drove on.

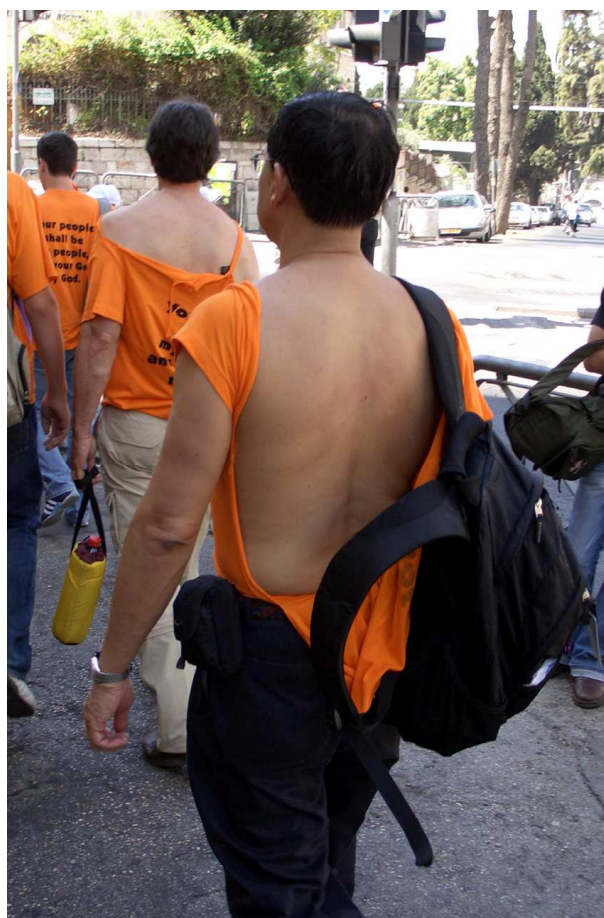
We went for about an hour through the district and simply looked around, prayed, and blessed the people whom we came across. We did not address

anyone. As our free time came to a close we started to make our way back. From a side street, a young orthodox Jew spoke to us. His unfriendly manner and corresponding hand motions made it clear to us that it was important to him that we leave here. We wanted to get back to the bus.

After we had turned two corners, more and more young religious Jews suddenly approached us from the main street. They made it very clear to us that they wanted us to get out of there. The crowd grew rapidly. We continued - still not speaking to any one of them - in the direction of the agreed meeting point. The crowd was completely enraged and becoming more aggressive. Along with their shouting, the first objects were thrown. First a glass of water was thrown on my back then an egg flew by me and hit one of my brothers, who was ahead of me, on the back of his head. The attack had started. Then I received beatings from a cane to my legs and my hip. Right after that a big stone from behind hit my head.

Lastly, they started ripping the T-shirt off my back. After crossing a large intersection, two soldiers finally came and brought us safely to the bus.

On the inside, amazingly I was very calm and collected. The peace of God rested completely in me. I had always had such a great love for these people and in our prayer group for Israel we pray every week for them and for all of Israel.



Now this love seemed to be replaced by something new. God replaced this former love with a new and much more intense love. In the bus I could only cry over these aggressive, religiously fanatical people. 2,000 years earlier they went after Jesus' life. Now they wanted to get rid of me and all of us.

In this moment, I remembered the wonderful words of Jesus as He hung on the cross: "***Father, forgive them! They know not what they do.***"

I felt such a great love for the people who had attacked us. They will not feel any guilt for their aggression, I thought, because this is what they are taught and they take their faith very seriously. Furthermore, it was just a small minority that attacked us. Most of the individuals in Mea Shearim were glad about our visit. For me it was the first time I had been persecuted for the sake of the Gospel and I can now grasp a little better the meaning of God's word in Romans 8:28 "**And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.**" The persecution hurt, however, it radically renewed and even strengthened my love for these people. Only through God's power can such a thing happen.

Even as I write these lines I have to be careful not to soak the paper with tears of love and mercy. Thank the Lord for this painful but life-changing experience. May the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob keep changing our hearts and make us aware that these, as the offspring of Abraham, are our "older brother".

May He help us all to recognize Him, Yeshua haMashiach as the Messiah and understand Him better, and to accordingly live out His teaching and follow in His footsteps. Matthias