

FRIENDS OF WADI FOQUIN

Yousef Manasra Memorial Scholarship Fund

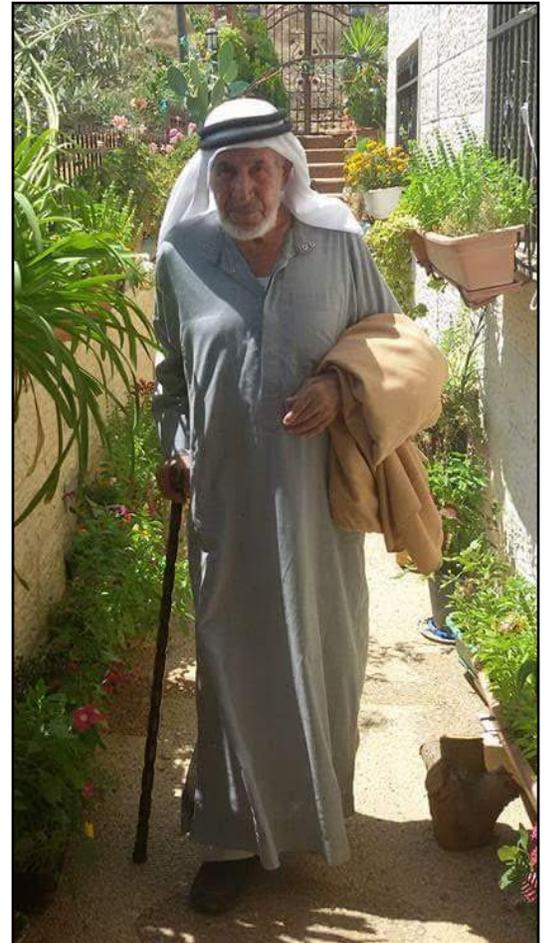
In the early morning of May 12, 2017 doctors announced the death of Yousef Manasra in a Bethlehem hospital. Passing at the age of 94, Manasra had been sick for six months. As he succumbed to his illness, this was the first time in his life his strong body was defeated. But in his passing, his spirit continues to live in the village of Wadi Foquin where the memory of his life is legendary.

In accordance with Islamic tradition for immediate burial Manasra was laid to rest in Wadi Foquin after the mosque held noon prayer time on the Friday following his death. It was appropriate that he was buried in the land that he loved. While leaving the cemetery, an elderly man from the village approached Ata Manasra, one of Yousef's sons. With sadness in his eyes the man hugged Ata, shared his condolences and said, "*You know we are here in this village because of your father, Yousef. Otherwise we all could have been massacred.*" What was the story of Yousef, and why was he so appreciated by everyone?

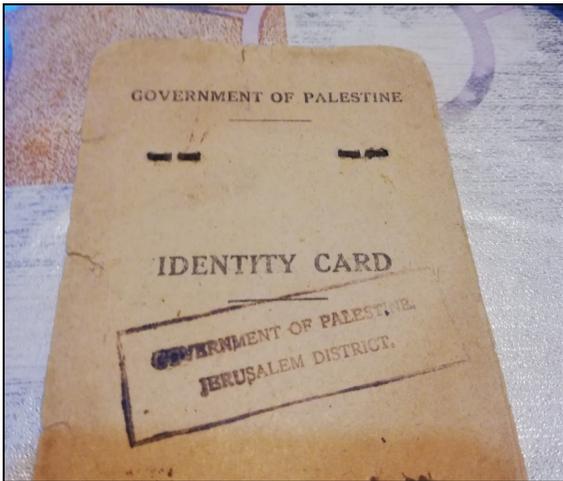
Yousef Manasra was born in the village of Wadi Foquin in 1923. He was chosen by elders to be the "Mukhtar" or head of the village—but he humbly declined this title. As a first born son, Yousef worked on the land taking on major responsibilities at an early age. He witnessed many political changes from World War I to World War II. Yousef and his people enjoyed a secure and lovely life in Wadi Foquin despite difficulties and lack of opportunities for better income. During the British mandate Yousef joined the police for two years. This introduced him to the use of ammunition

After World War II, as Israel was being established, the people of Palestine began to experience challenging problems. Immigrants began to come from all over the world and to take Palestinian lands and farms. People asked why and where they had come from? What was it that these people wanted? The Israelis began killing and murdering Arabs in places such as Deir Yasin and Kufer Kasim. Yousef heard about these killings and began to prepare his people to organize for the protection of the village.

One of the first things he established was the Local Guards. Organized in shifts to cover the 24 hours each day, the Local Guards were created to protect the residents of the village. Israeli gangs began attacking the village from time to time so Yousef trained his people to respond to the attacks. One day in 1955 two Israeli groups of soldiers entered the village from the south and west. The soldiers began shooting toward the houses in the village. The whole village had only one machine gun, while the Israelis were fully armed.



Funeral in Wadi Foquin for Yousef Manasra



Yousef Manasra's ID card issued in 1938. He always kept this to remember his Palestinian identity which authorities tried to destroy

Yousef began to distract the advancing Israeli soldiers by running in different directions. He did not stop all night, and continued his tactics in the darkness with no ammunition - only using his creative imagination to protect his people. Somehow he succeeded in stopping the attack with limited casualties. Only one woman was killed, leaving her child in her arms. Yousef took the child to a safe place while he checked on other people's safety. Following this harrowing event, he was declared a hero by the whole village because they knew that without his leadership they would have been massacred.

A few days later, larger Israeli forces came again to the village and this time began demolishing houses in Wadi Foquin. The soldiers were waiting to kill the people by setting up an ambush, but Yousef found out about their plans, and he guided the people down a different path to avoid the ambush. Through his wisdom, he led the people to safety, without weapons or ammunition --allowing them to survive the attack. They ended up fleeing to the D'heisha Refugee Camp near Bethlehem.

Residents of the village would come back to the demolished village to check on their farms, but many were shot as they returned there. In 1972 Yousef and his younger brother talked to the farmers about coming back to re-populate the village. Space was needed in D'heisha for a new wave of refugees coming from Gaza. So an arrangement was negotiated to allow the residents of Wadi Foquin to return to their village. They returned to rebuild the village from the ground up. No help was offered by any outside organization or country. As the farmers began to rebuild the village, the number of people returning to Wadi Foquin increased. It was not long before their sweat produced the growth of new trees and produce from the land.

His death was a big loss and the village lost its guide, leader, and "mukhtar." The people called him "Mountain" because he was

strong, solid, and immovable as a village leader always providing wise protection to the home land. He never gave up hope even though he lost two of his brothers at an early age, and his father to a tragic death. Even though the village was once demolished, he never gave up hope on returning, and fulfilled that dream. Sadly, less than a third of the village land remains and the remainder has been stolen by the settlements. Yet, even with land being taken he remained hopeful for the future of the village into his later years.

This is why he continued to provide advice and support to the Friends of Wadi Foquin and their campaign to "Save Wadi Foquin." He often looked forward to meeting visiting groups when they came to visit the village. In 2014, upon greeting that year's pilgrimage group, Yousef ceremoniously took off his "abaya" or cloak, and gave it to Rev. Michael Yoshii. This was an important sign that he trusted the Friends of Wadi Foquin to always look out for the interests of his beloved village. The village of Wadi Foquin and the Friends of Wadi Foquin will never forget this faithful leader, father, and mountain of a man.

On the 10th Anniversary of the Friends of Wadi Foquin we proudly announce the establishment of the **Yousef Manasra Memorial Scholarship Fund**. These funds will provide scholarship support for those wishing to participate in our pilgrimages as well as support for those coming to visit us from Wadi Foquin. **Donations to the fund can be made out to BMU-Friends of Wadi Foquin with "YMMSF" in the memo line.**



Yousef gives his abaya (cloak) to Rev. Michael Yoshii on visit to Wadi Foquin