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Israel - The Hizbollah Captain Who Converted to Judaism

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Israel - Although every ger tzedek comes with his incredible and inspiring story, Avi Sinai's story is surely one of the most exceptional. Living today in the Galil, Avi Sinai in his past was a member of Hizbollah for years who had even undergone special terrorist training in Iran.

"Israelis think they can 'solve' the conflict with Hizbollah, but they're mistaken. If you want to better understand the mentality of groups like Hizbollah or Hamas, think of Hitler who had planned to control the world with his thousand years Reich. Along the way, the Germans understood that they had to destroy the Jews. That's how it is with radical Islam today," says Avi.

'You only have to hear what speakers of Islam are saying and not stuff up your ears. The Hamas spokesman said, 'We'll conquer Rome, and afterwards, all of Europe. Once we finish with Europe, we'll conquer the two Americas. We won't forgo East Europe either. Of course, we have to destroy the Jews.'

"It's amazing how similar their talk is to the Germans before the Holocaust. But you shouldn't be surprised. Every Pesach night you say, 'In every generation they stand against us to destroy us.' Once it was Hitler, today it's radical Islam.

"You have to be naive to believe that a conflict over the Sheba Farm is what is motivating Hizbollah's hatred. What didn't you do so Hamas would have no reason to battle you in the south? With your own hands, you destroyed flourishing towns. You tore apart Israeli society. You thought Hamas wouldn't have a reason to fight or shoot at you. Did it stop -- or did it only get worse?"

Avi believes that most Muslims admire Jews as a special people, the "people of the book." However, their brothers who are driven with hate towards Israel are the ones in power, and the Jews are in great danger.

In his youth in south Lebanon, Avi once attended a lecture by an Arabic sheikh who quoted verses from the Koran calling for Israel's destruction. When he came home, he met his uncle, who noticed how stirred up he was. "Bring me a few old Korans," his uncle commanded him, "I don't care who printed them, as long as they are old."

Avi gave him the Korans. He was furious when he discovered that the verses which the sheikh had quoted didn't even exist in old Korans. His uncle told him, "He's making up verses."

Avi's brother had been burned to death by a leading Hizbollah commander. He decided to join Hizbollah to revenge his brother's death and find ways to thwart their efforts against Israel "I knew that the greatest revenge I could take would be within Hizbollah ranks themselves."

He spend a long time training in terror techniques. "Experts from other terrorist groups from all over the world came to teach us how to use weapons, but also to learn from us how to create suicide bombers," Avi says. "They needed some of those for their battles."

Suicide bombers do not come from the ranks of the terrorists.

"Sometimes, we found people who had lost all desire for life and were willing to kill themselves from the better-to-do Lebanese society. But the vast majority of the suicide bombers came from the refugee camps -- people who had lost all joy in life, who were depressed,

who hated themselves and therefore hated others too.

"To encourage these people to become suicide bombers, Hizbollah offered incentives, such as offering to support their families after they killed themselves. In this way, the person who had been viewed as the "nebuch" and the "family shame" now became the hero who reinstated their honor and ensured their livelihood for the rest of their lives. The money to pay them was collected from donations all over the world."

Avi's uncle was a clever man who understood the double game Avi was playing. He once called Avi over and said he wanted to tell him a story. 'Once I saw a trapeze walker going on a thin rope stretched between two tall buildings. He went from one building to another, while hundreds of people stared below to see if he would stumble and fall. He knew that a comfortable sum awaited him if he succeeded in reaching the end. Five minutes of work and he would earn what usually takes a month. It all depended on him focusing on what he was doing and keeping his balance, and not thinking about the reward or anything else. All it would have taken is one second to fall. Just one mistake is all it takes. Remember this well."

Avi put all his efforts in keeping up his disguise and fulfilling his role in the Hizbollah. He kept getting promoted until he was appointed over a region and had 60 Hezbollah terrorists under his command.

Hizbollah would attack the Israelis and kill soldiers. Then they would take pictures of the dead soldiers and distribute it to the international media to further humiliate the Israelis and weaken their resolve. "I don't know why the Israelis themselves publish such pictures," says Avi. "It serves their enemies' goals."

Once, his Hizbollah camp was preparing a booby-trapped truck for a suicide bomber to explode into an envoy of IDF cars. Avi feverishly thought how he could thwart the scheme. During the night before the explosion, he connected the car's electricity to the explosion's electric clock. When the suicide bomber came the next day and ignited the car, the explosives instantly blew up.

The terrorists in the camp were shocked. They were sure the Israelis had done it, but saw no signs of an infiltration. Avi was safe because the wires he had connected had blown up together with the truck without leaving tracks. "I was saved, and several Israeli soldiers were saved with me. A similar fate, a blood pact was formed between me and people who I never saw and who didn't even know I existed."

Then Hizbollah planned another booby-trapped vehicle for the Israelis early in the morning. Avi's fellow terrorists were already grinning to imagine the Israelis' shock and pain at the loss of Israeli lives, Avi was feverishly thinking how he could thwart it.

This time, they planned to send an ambulance filled with dozens of kilograms of explosives and nails, as if it was an ambulance bringing a seriously ill person for treatment. Hizbollah knew that the Israelis would let it through. The driver was instructed that if the Israelis tried to stop it at the border point, he should blow up the ambulance with them.

Avi couldn't set up the wires again, or blow it up in the camp, because that would give him away and endanger his family. Only shortly before the ambulance left the camp, did an idea occur to him. He went to the driver and sent him off with words of encouragement. The driver didn't notice that Avi had written on the dust covering the front window "tofes" (in Hebrew "mechonit tofes" is a car-bomb).

When the Israelis saw the ambulance coming, they spotted the word on the window and a soldier immediately threw a grenade at the vehicle. It blew up on the spot, only causing light injuries to the soldiers manning the border post.

The Hizbollah camp was furious. The terrorists raged that it was probably the UN soldiers who had given them away. Avi was among the most vocal accusers.

When Mossad agents interrogated the soldiers in the hospital, one revealed that the word 'tofes' had alerted him to the danger. Once the

Mossad realized that they had a friend in the Hizbollah camp, they resolved to discover who he was.

A short time later, a new terrorist called Mahmud joined the Hizbollah camp in South Lebanon. Avi, who was aware that there might be collaborators with the Israelis within the camp, nevertheless was impressed with Mahmud's dedication and abilities and didn't imagine he could be an agent. It turned out that Mahmud had been sent by the Israelis to discover who had alerted them with the word 'tofes.'

"Until today, I don't know how Mahmud discovered me, but it didn't take him too long," says Avi. "Once he discovered who was the last person who had stood next to the ambulance before it left, it was obvious to him. He asked me to write the name and telephone number of one of the soldiers in our camp. Now that I think it over, I think he wanted to compare my handwriting with the example that he received from his operators in Israel. In the end, he decided I was the one who had written 'tofes' and he approached me with a tiny telephone pen, and asked me to speak with one of his commanders in the Mossad." Avi became a Mossad agent.

Once, Mahmud asked Avi to go to the Syrian camp in Baalbek, which Avi was familiar with. The Mossad knew that they were getting a specially sophisticated radar with missile capacity. He was to exchange a chip in the computer. But first, he had to learn how to do it. The solution came from an unexpected direction: his commanders decided to send him for a series of religious seminars by Islamic imams in Teheran. The Mossad utilized the opportunity to send him a special teacher, a strictly religious Muslim who believed he had to help the Jewish people. This man taught him how to change a chip.

Avi entered the Syrian camp in a simple but ingenious way: When he saw a gas tanker entering the camp, he placed a nail on the ground. The container suffered a puncture, and the upset driver got out to check what had happened. Avi approached him to help him change the tire, and then went to the back of the tanker, entering the camp together with the tanker.

After waiting in a secret place, he managed to enter the bunker where he figured out the radar was. After managing to fool the guards into letting him enter, he quickly changed the chip.

Unexpectedly, the computer requested that he write his name and the appropriate password. Warning beeps began to go off. The camp's soldiers began searching for an intruder, and they surrounded the area, encircling the bunker while checking every inch of the ground.

"I wasn't afraid because of my dream," Avi recalls. "When I was young, I used to dream that I was traipsing above mountains and hills, looking at people, and continuing on until I reached a place full of light and joy. When I reached the light, I felt completely calm, and then heard a voice blessing me, "Don't be afraid. You're protected."

Now, in deep trouble, Avi prayed to G-d. He had always prayed, but this time he felt specially close. He prayed, "I'm giving up my life for the Jewish people. They're your children. Please protect me, and protect my children. Please get me out of here!" The Syrian soldiers were a meter away from him, but somehow didn't see him. Then, suddenly, the candle which Avi had lit next to the diesel tanks, ignited the pieces of wood he had soaked in oil. Thick smoke and flames of fire began to billow from the large gas container. Everyone left the bunker area, and shouts and orders filled the air. Fear fell upon the soldiers and chaos reigned.

"In this commotion, apparently someone thought that for the sake of the soldiers' security, they had to shut the electricity in the camp. Or maybe it shut automatically. I don't know. I only saw that complete dark had descended on the camp, besides the street lights. I felt it was again heavenly providence saving me while the soldiers searched the area. I approached the fence closest to me, cut through with simple wire scissors, and headed home to my wife and children."

Miracles continued to follow Avi during his operations with Hizbollah. But the biggest miracle of all was his escape from them, after they discovered his secret identity.

He was in a group of high-ranking Hizbollah leaders who had just returned from a meeting with the Vatican at the request of the Pope. (At the meeting, the Pope had encouraged their operations against Israel.)

Nasrallah was discussing with the group what they had seen in Europe. Then one of Nasrallah's closest captains approached him, apparently with information important enough to disturb the meeting. "I didn't see the paper he showed Nasrallah, but from his face, I could see something serious had happened.

"The meeting finished, and I randomly walked near Nasrallah's close captains who had surrounded the captain who had just spoken with him. I dallied near them and heard them talking about an Israel captive that had been taken and was in the Syrian camp in Baalbek"

Avi quickly informed Mahmud, and he passed the info over. Within a short time, an elite Israeli commando made a foray against the camp and rescued the Israeli captive. The alacrity with which they did it, however, put Avi in great danger, because they figured out the Israelis must have received the information from him.

Avi had to flee immediately. He first had to tell his wife and children to abandon their homes, but how? He fled the Hizbollah camp through the nearby wadi, and came to the local grocery store where he bought candies for the children. Then he called home. A strange voice answered the telephone. It was one of the Hizbollah men, telling him to return to the camp immediately.

According to the principle that "the safest place is the most dangerous place", Avi returned to the camp and hid there, hoping to hear news where his family was being held, if Hezbollah had taken hold of them. He lived off the candies for the next 2 weeks. He found out that the prison in camp was empty, from which he understood that his family was not being held by Hezbollah.

Now he wanted to escape the camp. He left the camp as he had before, and tried to hitch a ride to the Israeli border. Many cars passed by without stopping, until one finally slowed down. The driver had identified him! Avi ran into the field, but Hizbollah soldiers rushed after him.

"I knew that I better not get caught by the simple terrorists, because they would beat me up or even shoot me without thinking twice. I had to be caught by the most senior commander. I climbed up a tree, not to hide, but to better identify the soldiers looking for me and choose which one to catch me," Avi says.

He saw the camp commander himself, and called him to come. The soldiers looked up and saw him, but feared to approach because he might carry weapons or even an explosives belt. But Avi had no interest in exploding himself with them; he wanted to live.

"Get down, with your hands lifted high!" the commander ordered him.

Avi was arrested and taken to the camp. He was confronted by his former terrorist colleagues, who looked at him with undisguised animosity. One of them, Mahmud, gave him a ringing slap, and told him, "You wanted to reach your family? They got away to Israel, but we'll find them and hang them, one by one!" Avi was thrilled to hear they had escaped.

He was given the death sentence, but knew that tortures awaited him first. He knew he would stand up to them, and wouldn't break. Another thing he realized at the time -- if he would manage to escape this hell, he would convert and join the Jewish people. He had always felt that the Torah suited him better. He hated the life of thievery and stealing which was a central motif in the lives of the Arabs.

On the day his death sentence was to be carried out, five terrorists were lined up with their rifles and given the order to shoot.

Despite the terrorists' pulling the triggers, the rifles didn't respond. The commander gave the order to shoot again. This time also, the rifles didn't shoot. The commander was consumed by fury and the terrorists were dumbfounded. "Shoot at the sky!" the command ordered. The five directed their rifles upward, and all five rifles shot. "Now shoot him!" he ordered. The 5 rifles wouldn't budge.

The death sentence was delayed until the next day. Shock spread throughout the camp at the bizarre developments. That night, under the protection of the dark, one soldier snuck into the prison and freed Avi from his chains. It was a soldier whom Avi had once done a favor

for in the past, and now wanted to pay him back. "I don't want to identify him. Today, he is a senior member of Hizbollah," Avi says.

With the assistance of a known drug smuggler, Avi crossed the border into Israel. After his happy reunion with his family, they all decided to convert to Judaism together. Knowing that Judaism does not welcome gerim, Avi nonetheless approached Rav Shmuel Eliahu, the rav of Tsefas, to begin the process.

Rav Eliahu spoke softly and warmly to the family when they entered. To his astonishment, Avi recognized the voice. He suddenly realized -- it was the voice he had heard in his dream. The voice that had promised him that he would be protected.

"I told the rav that I wanted to be a Jew," said Avi. "I told him that I had been moving to Judaism my entire life. Everything I had heard in my childhood, everything I had learned in my work, all the good and bad that I had seen in my life -- had brought me to ask him to accept me to the Jewish people. I want to be part of this people and part of their future."

Rav Eliahu rejected his request, as halacha requires, and sent him to a yeshiva to learn. "Try it out," he told Avi, "and afterwards, you'll decide."

Avi wasn't broken. He began to study Judaism intensively in a local yeshiva, and his wife began to learn the halachos she had to keep. "We felt we had been given special powers to learn as much as we did. It was a gift from heaven," Avi recalled. After several months, they were ready to proceed with the giyur and their deepest wish was fulfilled.

Avi recorded in his diary after that momentous event, "We converted. We're thrilled. We're part of this nation about which it is written, 'And all families of the earth will be blessed in you and your seed.'" We're not standing at the side, but we're part of them. We're partners with this people in bringing blessing to the world."

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